## Variations on Belief

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**Variations on Belief**

by [moonstalker24](http://archiveofourown.org/users/moonstalker24)

### Summary

Spin, spin, spin; the world spins on. It doesn’t care about decay, or velocity or whether the trees are green or not. It doesn’t care about fire or the sun. The world just, is. This is what makes it cruel. It is what makes survival difficult.

Change is a difficult thing. It is not solid. It is amorphous and ever-changing and hard to grasp onto. It sneaks through the shadows behind us without our knowledge. Most often, change is unpredictable. Only rarely does it happen apurpose. Even then, change doesn’t fit our molds, it creates its own.

### Notes

So, FYI, this is a Work in Progress. Meaning it's still being written, it's been slow going and fighting with another piece for my attention. I have been wanting to write a TW/SOA crossover for a long time and have tried in fits and starts. This piece is the only one that's made it past 3k words.
I have no idea where this is going. I have no plot and am just writing for the sake of writing. So I hope that this meander through writing is to your liking.

It is currently over 20k, and Unbetaed.

I will be posting this a chapter at a time on a hopefully weekly basis.

**Disclaimer:** The Color of Magic is Octarine, which is from Terry Pratchett's Discworld. I don't own the concept, I am just borrowing it because the headcanon that magic is Octarine has encroached into everything I do when magic is involved.
Fire is hot.
The sun is bright.
Trees are green.
Unless they are dead.
Dead trees are brown.
The ground is unforgiving if impacted at the correct velocity.
Not as unforgiving as steel; a close second.
Burning humanoid flesh smells like pork barbeque.
Decay rots more than just organic matter.
Everything is ashes in the end.
Spin, spin, spin; the world spins on. It doesn’t care about decay, or velocity or whether the trees are green or not. It doesn’t care about fire or the sun. The world just, is. This is what makes it cruel. It is what makes survival difficult.
Oh, and ice. Ice burns too.
Everything burns.
His heart is pounding. He can hear it. Thud. Thud. Thudthudthudthud.
Shhhhh, heart. I can’t hear anything over your pounding.
He is alive, for all that he burned. Flesh stretched taught over grilled muscle. Bones stretched and brittle after baking. He is blackened with tar; flakes of charcoal that drift downward, forgetful of where they came from. All they know is freedom on the breeze.
Crickets chirping. Somewhere close. Near, but also far away. The air smells of petrichor and ozone. He was not struck by lightning. It will rain soon. Cicadas buzz away in the trees, mindful only of their song.
He has burned; but he lives.

Everything is pain. Unbearable, yet he must bear it. There is no one else. No one.

Alone.

Alone is all we are in the end.

Solitary. Confined to single heartbeats and breaths and moments.

*_Thud. Thudthudthud._*

Death is final. Absolute. It is not a group adventure. Each much walk its path alone. Stand on the moonlit roads of the shadow realm and follow the great shadow beyond the material and into the unknown. What is past the shadows? What awaits the lonely traveler?

He could sweep the curtain back, take the steps beyond.

If only he could _move._

What is that sound?


Oh. Oh, yes. That’s him. He’s breathing. Chest constricted by the tightness of burned flesh and muscle and bone. He isn’t bleeding, even for all the copper tang on the air. It sits heavy in his lungs, the taste of iron.

_Thud. Thud._

He has been abandoned. Of course he has. He has never been one that others remain with. Before. Before the burning he could never understand _why_ people left him. Why he was expendable and others were not. He could never understand _why_. After the burning he understood more. It was never about him.

He wasn’t one of hers, so he was a good shield. Flesh and muscle and bone bred to protect the pack.

The pack she stole from him, made her own and then ostracized him from.

He was a threat to her. A threat to all of it, because he could have been stronger than all of them if they had chosen to love him rather than revile him.

So he became what they wanted him to be.

Monsters run with shadows. They hunger and they hunt and they feast on pain.

He was a monster once.

But then he burned a second time and there was nothing. Nothing at all. He walked the moonpaths and watched the living and became the thing in the shadows that made people wary even if they couldn’t see him.

Then there was a blood moon.

Then there was a girl.
Then he was better.

_Thudthud. Thudthudthud._

Heartbeats. Count them. They are easier and more numerous than breaths. Breath can be stolen. Count heartbeats, they are more reliable.

He was better than before the second burning. He let go of his hate and his anger. In its place came acceptance. To all he was monster, bogeyman; always at fault and yet never truly responsible. A figure, ignored until needed, to show others ‘See. See what happens when you seek revenge? See what you become.’

It is amusing. Until it is not.

Then it becomes exhausting.

He has always been a survivor.

Forgiveness is a cruel curse. Right up there with ‘may you live in interesting times.’ It curdles the blood slowly, so slowly that you don’t even know you’ve been poisoned. He has never sought forgiveness from anyone undeserving. Forgiveness leads to caring, which leads to pain and betrayal. Forgiveness is a curse.

Ha. He is cursed. Cursed from birth to always be looked upon as somehow less.

He isn’t less; he’s more.


Crunching. Feet on grass and brittle autumn leaves. Footsteps sound like heartbeats if you listen long enough. Thud thud. Thud thud. Right left. Right left.

_Scratch, scrape, swish._

Weft cotton fibers scraping together.

_Squeak, shift, right left._

Rubber soles. Not small, not large.

_Flutter. Flutterflutterflutter._

Hummingbird’s wings. Beautiful creatures. Full of contradictions and energy. Movement and beauty and grace wrapped up in deceptive size. Flutter, flutter, flutter. Fastest heartbeat in the world. He knows the sound a hummingbird’s wings make when trapped inside the chest.

He is tired. Weary. Sad.

Pain is like a well into the abyss. It is called hurt and sad and angry and melancholy and many other things. It is unbearable, yet all must bear it. It is blank minds, screaming silently and tears. Pain is burning. Burning, burning, burning.

Has he ever stopped burning?

He doesn’t know anymore.
Crickets. Where did the crickets go? They were singing a moment ago.

Soft. Feather touches. Hard enough to evoke sensation; yet light enough not to hurt.

All of him hurts.

Why did he do this? None of those brats was worth this.

… Well, none save one.

The one with a hummingbird in his chest and the moonpaths in his eyes.


*

Stiles goes back for Peter. Scott doesn’t understand why; and they fight about it. Peter is a monster. All of this is Peter’s fault. If only he had never bitten Scott, then none of this would have happened. Stiles believes all of this would have happened anyway; just not in the same way.

He doesn’t believe in coincidence.

So he goes back for Peter.

Because Peter saved him. Peter, who has pyrophobia, stepped between Stiles and fire without a second thought. And he burned up for it. Stiles is alive because Peter burned, and Stiles isn’t going to let his body rot away in the woods. No matter what Scott or anyone else says.

The trees around the clearing are green with new growth. The tree in the clearing, a black walnut tree, is decidedly not green with new growth. It’s branches shelter the ground now with spindley fingers ever reaching and black from flame. Turned to charcoal and ash.

Under the tree is a large stone, scorched from the fire. The air smells of ozone and petrichor. It will rain soon. He needs to move fast.

Peter lays on the ground surrounded by burned grass. He is black and red all over. Burned all over. Somehow he is still alive. Stiles can see his chest rising and falling. It takes a long time to rise. Stiles steps toward him, takes a knee and runs his fingers gently through what is left of Peter’s hair.

Then he wishes.

Deaton had called him a Spark at one time. Told him if he just believed he could make things happen.

Stiles doesn’t believe in faeries – at least, not the nice kind that make children fly. The only kind he believes are real are the fae kind. The trickster kind and the monster kind. The kind with razors for teeth and evil intentions.

He’s learned not to have high expectations when it comes to things like magic and the supernatural.

But Stiles saw the mountain ash circle he made just by believing he could. He held out against the Nogitsune by believing that he could. He’s fought and held his own against Berserkers because he believed he could.

The power of belief is truly powerful.
So Stiles sets his hands on Peter’s chest directly over his heart and he *believes.*

Crickets begin to play their orchestra as silence envelops the clearing. Magic sparks in the air like embers stirred from a campfire. Red and purple and orangey-yellow-greenish. *Beings* peep through the trees as unadulterated possibility spontaneously pops into existence. Otherworldly beings who live in the woods on other planes. Beings that live on this plane.

Curiosity ignited, caution used, observance of true magic begins.

Stiles’ hands never waver. His eyes remain on the burned form in front of him. His joints ache, his knees most of all.

Magical embers settle gently on Peter and Stiles, then slowly wink out.

Peter’s flesh begins to knit itself together. Slowly, inexorably, steadily.

* The burning fades.

Thudflutterthud.

He opens his eyes just a fraction. Just enough to see. Pale hands, arms clad in blue flannel. The upturned nose and constellation of moles across the jaw.

Stiles.

Eyes the color of sunlight through bourbon meet his gaze. The younger man doesn’t look away.

He hasn’t been abandoned.

Each heartbeat says *‘not alone.’*

He feels the lessening of his pain. The flesh knitting, the burns fading. Muscles reform, knit together. Fingers twitch. He lifts them to Stiles’ thigh. Holds on with a little too much strength. He never looks away from those eyes, even as magic settles in dark hair like twinkle lights before winking out of existence.

He is captivated. Every atom of his being focused on the Spark willing him back into existence. Believing in a Peter whole and healthy. Invisible strings hook into the wolf and the spark. He can feel the bond settling into place, solid like the earth, but forgiving like and fluttering like hummingbirds’ wings.

Everything changes.

And nothing changes.

They are tied tighter and tighter together.

Peter latches onto the threads linking them together and braids them into a strong cord. Stiles feeds it magic, *believing* strength and power into it until it glows white-gold like the sun.

The wounds in his soul begin to heal over from the excess power.

He is not alone. Not forgotten. Not unwanted.
He is tied. Bound. Chained.

Willingly. All willingly.

He will never be alone again. He will not walk the moonpaths forever. Stiles will be there with him.

In a clearing in the Beacon Hills Preserve, two souls knit so thoroughly together that every being watching feels blessed by the event. They watch two hearts and souls entwine until Thud/Flutter/thud becomes a synchronized tattoo against two ribcages.

The wolf changes, grows, becomes powerful. A being unlike any that has walked this plane in over a thousand years.

The spark changes. Grows from a spark to a fire to a blaze. Controlled but shining like a lighthouse beacon on a moonless night.

The beings, fae and faerie and other shift and speculate. Lesser ones swear fealty. Evil things that lurk in the woods flee from the light, as far and as fast as they can go.

The black walnut tree sprouts new growth and buds all across its surface as it drinks in the life pouring from the Spark. Its spirit is awakened, a tiny dryad all green and black blinks open sunlight eyes full of wonder. The young being begins a dance to bless those under her branches.

The consequences of this moment will reach farther than either participant can fathom.

There are always consequences.

* 

In a different clearing, the Nemeton awakes. It drinks in the power it can feel. The festering wound in its roots heals and the stump grows into a great oak once more. The only sign that it had ever been cut down is a faint ring of lighter bark around its base.

It is an ancient tree. It knows the land. It knows the creatures that walk through its forest. It knows its enemies and its protectors.

It knows who woke it, who healed it.

It knows why.
Forward

Chapter Summary

Stiles believes in the power of belief. In how, by watching a thing changes the nature of a thing. In being informed in order to be armed properly. He believes in puzzles and in strategy and in curly fries.

He believes in his Dad.

He believes in Peter.

He believes in himself.

Chapter Notes

Second chapter, and I even managed to post it a week after the first, as I committed to.
Yay!

Mentions of SOA in this chapter, though we don't really see anything until chap 3.

Two:

Change is a difficult thing. It is not solid. It is amorphous and ever-changing and hard to grasp onto. It sneaks through the shadows behind us without our knowledge. Most often, change is unpredictable. Only rarely does it happen apurpose. Even then, change doesn’t fit our molds, it creates its own.

Scott doesn’t know when he and Stiles began to drift and change (Yes, he does, but he won’t admit it was his fault) and become different people. Stiles is still his brother, nothing will ever change that; but he doesn’t think they are best friends anymore.

He feels like this should bother him more than it does.

He feels guilty that he is not bothered by the change.

Stiles is… not what he was two years ago. Neither is Scott (he’s an alpha werewolf now, with responsibilities and a dead girlfriend). Stiles is glaringly different though. Especially since they came back from Mexico.

Dealing with Kate for the final time (hopefully) and coming home felt anticlimactic. Like it isn’t the ending of a long story and they’ve only just begun. Maybe they have. Maybe now they start. Maybe things will settle and Scott will get to have a normal life that run parallel to his not so normal one. All he wants to go to school and worry about whether he should ask Kira out or if his grades are good enough to get him into a good college on a decent scholarship.

He doesn’t want to worry about alphas and hunters. The witch that moved in while they were gone
may have been planning to sacrifice several babies, but she had dealt with one of the biggest
problems Scott had… Or, he’d thought she had.

Peter Hale.

Man just won’t stay dead.

This is where the change is glaringly obvious. Stiles is standing by his jeep in the parking lot of the
school, and Peter is standing next to him and Stiles isn’t trying to get away from the psycho that
ruined Scott’s life. They’re standing with their shoulders pressed together as they converse, too low
for Scott to hear with his werewolf hearing. Not that he’s trying very hard.

“He’s alive,” a voice says, and Scott tilts his head in acknowledgement as Kira and Malia flank him.

“Looks like,” Scott says.

“What’s he doing with Stiles?” Malia demands, eyebrows drawn into a scowl.

Scott shrugs.

They watch as Stiles and Peter separate. Peter tucks his hands into the pockets of his coat and heads
off school grounds and down the street. Stiles heads for the building, fussing with his backpack.
When he looks up and spots them he stops walking. There are fifteen feet between Stiles and Scott,
but Scott suddenly feels like it may as well be a thousand miles.

Stiles blinks, disrupting their stare off before he deliberately turns his back on the three of them and
heads into the school. Malia makes a wounded noise in the back of her throat. Scott can feel a vice
constricting around his heart.

He seen that look on Stiles’ face before. He knows what it means. He just never thought it would
ever be aimed at him.

Stiles doesn’t trust him anymore.

Maybe they aren’t still brothers like he thought they were.

*

Stiles wishes that he was the forgiving sort; but he isn’t.

He wishes that there was a way to reconcile who he is with who he was.

He wishes there was a way to trust Scott. To forgive him for his blatant and blind black and white
view of the world. The naive way that he looks at the world with is honestly nauseating.

He wishes a lot of things. If wishes were fishes and all that.

Stiles doesn’t believe in the power of wishes. He believes in the power of doing. Wishing never
fixed anything. Doing does.

Stiles believes in the power of belief. In how, by watching a thing changes the nature of a thing. In
being informed in order to be armed properly. He believes in puzzles and in strategy and in curly
fries.

He believes in his Dad.
He believes in Peter.

He believes in himself.

He doesn’t believe in Scott. Not anymore.

Too many people have died because Scott was unwilling to do what was necessary to protect them. Scott is honestly a horrible Alpha.

It’s not Scott’s fault. Not really. He’s always believed in the good in people. In giving the benefit of the doubt. He believes in second chances and in third chances. Scott is, generally, a very good person. It makes him a horrible werewolf and a bad Alpha.

Stiles is practical. If it tries to harm him or anyone he cares about, it dies. He doesn’t care why or what. Sure, second chances are great and all, but the justice system still punishes guilty parties for the things they do. If you’re going to be horrible, you have to be prepared to deal with the consequences.

Stiles should know. He’s an expert.

After all, all the shit they’ve been dealing with for the last two years are consequences all piling up around them.

He’s sick and tired of dealing with the fallout.

Time to get ahead of the beast.

Walking away from Scott, Malia and Kira isn’t easy; but it is necessary. He knows what he is. He knows what Peter is. He knows what they can do separately and apart. Scott McCall is not a threat. He doesn’t even really register on the scale as anything more than ‘used to be best friend’ and ‘annoyance if provoked’.

He’s got enough to do without opening that can of worms.

He’s got to get to the office to talk about early graduation. Then he’s got to talk to his Dad about leaving Beacon Hills. He and Peter can’t stay here; not anymore. They’re not welcome. Peter for being Peter, and Stiles for being on Peter’s side. Besides, Peter won’t consent to asking to join Scott’s pack; not anymore.

They’re too powerful to contain, and too headstrong to follow orders from an untrustworthy source.

It’s time to begin life anew. Away from the pain that lingers in Beacon Hills.

Stiles pushes Scott from his mind as he steps into the front office of Beacon Hills High School. He’s seventeen going on eighty. It’s time to take control of his fate; become the master of his ship.

Sheriff John Stilinski knows his kid. He knows his quirks, his habits, his idiosyncrasies. He knows what Stiles looks like when he’s lying and when he’s telling the truth. He knows what he looks like when he’s happy and when he’s pretending to be okay. He knows the difference between when his son is pissed off because of werewolf shenanigans and when it is because of anything else.

Point is, John knows his kid.

And now he knows Peter Hale, too.
He doesn’t like it when his seventeen-year-old son brings home a man who is thirty-something with a look in his eyes that states that this man is his and to hell with anyone else. John loves his kid, so he sits and listens and he lets the pair explain themselves. Explain what happened in the woods, how Peter died again only not, and how Stiles believed him back to life.

John has always known that his kid has magic in his soul; he’d just never meant literally.

Now he’s got a soulmate. Or as close to one as you can get.

Stiles and Peter are tied together. Mentally, spiritually and every way except physically. Stiles is Peter’s pack; his sole reason for existence with sanity. Peter is Stiles’ (Alpha) anchor; his link to remembering that there is more in the world than the sparks of power flooding through his system like an electrical current.

“Sheriff?”

John jolts, looking up at his office door at Jordan Parrish. The younger man has a concerned look on his face. “What is it, deputy?” John asks, shaking off his reverie.

That had been three nights ago.

It feels like years.

“You wanted to see me, sir?” Jordan asks.

“Right,” John straightens and gestures the young man into his office. “Close the door, Parrish.”

Jordan does as ordered and then he sits down across from the Sheriff and they lapse into a vaguely awkward silence. It is apparent that Jordan wants to ask if he’s in trouble, but doesn’t dare actually voice it.

“I’ve been offered a post down south,” John eventually begins. (He’s been offered the post three times, actually, but only said yes the once.) “I’ve decided to take it.”

Jordan blinks in surprise. This was not what he was expecting. “I don’t understand, sir,” he says tentatively.

“I’m getting my son out of this hellhole, Jordan,” John says, feeling older than he actually is. The deputy blinks in surprise, but nods in understanding after having a moment to think it over. John continues, “The last couple of months have made it very clear to me that if we stay in Beacon Hills Stiles is going to get himself killed.”

“Yes, sir,” Jordan agrees. He’s seen first-hand what Stiles is willing to do for his friends.

“We talked and we agreed to go,” John states, then waits until Jordan nods before he continues, “I spoke with the governor at length this morning about who is going to replace me. I recommended you take over as interim Sheriff until next year’s election.”

Jordan sits up a little straighter, his shoulders squaring up, “Sir?”

“He agreed with me. If you want the job it’s yours, but you’ll have to campaign to keep it,” John explains.

“Yes, sir.”

“You’ll do fine,” John states, because he knows that Jordan Parrish can handle anything Beacon
Hills can throw at him. Especially since he’s also part of the supernatural community here.

“Thank you, sir,” Jordan says, then hesitates for a moment. “When do you leave?”

“End of the month. Long enough to transfer things into your hands and finish getting the house sold.”

John stands and Jordan takes it as his cue to rise. The Sheriff claps the man on the shoulder as he escorts him out of his office. He calls for his secretary and retreating into the depths of his office, leaving Jordan to stand in the hallway like a numpty, stunned.

Janice gives him an encouraging smile and a gentle pat on the arm as she passes him. She already knows.

For a moment flames lick along Jordan’s hand before he clenches it into a fist and they fade. A sense of determination fills him. It is a familiar feeling; one that carried him through two tours in the middle east. He can do this.

He can.
First Impressions

Chapter Summary

Peter hums an agreeing noise and he smiles at them. It looks… wrong. It’s a polite, congenial smile, and it’s more disturbing than the sinister gaze with too many teeth. Juice swallows hard enough for his back teeth to click together.

“If you’ll excuse me, I’m expected,” Peter says, voice even more terrifying with how polite it is.

“Right,” Juice says faintly.

They stand there gawping stupidly as Peter mounts his bike and pulls away with a roar of the engine. They watch him vanish down the street before they look at each other.

“I think I peed myself a little,” Half-Sack admits after nearly a minute of awkward, stunned silence.

Chapter Notes

Cussing because SOA, and if you somehow manage to write SOA without cussing, you’re doing it wrong.

Still don’t really know where things are going. It’s growing organically as it were. In the words of NANOWRIMO I’m totally pantstering this.

Disclaimer: Octarine as the color of magic belongs to Terry Pratchett and the Discworld. I own nothing SOA or TW.

Three:

They leave town just as the sun is beginning to rise. A pale gray-blue outlining the tops of the trees. It’s October and winter is closing in on Northern California like an old friend returning from a long vacation. The drive is long, six to seven hours depending on traffic on their way through Oakland. The movers are driving the truck ahead of them, and Stiles is driving the jeep. Peter sold his sensible car and bought a motorcycle.

It fits him very well, and makes Stiles want to do things to him when he sees him on it.

But they agreed, nothing untoward until Stiles’ birthday in April.

It is hard to keep their hands to themselves, but they manage. Neither of them wants to risk pushing the Sheriff too far. Or, it should be Chief now, or it will be, once John joins them in two weeks.
John Stilinski, Chief of Police of Charming, California.

It’s actually a demotion from Sheriff of Beacon County, but John doesn’t seem to mind.

Stiles still thinks it’s funny that the town they’re moving to is named Charming. He looked up the stats for it. It isn’t actually charming. Sure, the amount of drug and other petty crime is actually rather small for a town that size, but it makes up for it with a gang of actual facts criminal bikers.

The Sons of Anarchy.

Stiles thinks it’s hilarious. Peter is thinking about joining up.

John thinks they’re both idiots and disclaimed that if Peter joins the stupid biker gang he has to be prepared to be arrested by his father-in-law (none of them are kidding themselves. John knows where this whole thing is going) on a regular basis. Stiles promised to give Peter all the shit for it. They all know human prison can’t hold Peter Hale.

They don’t think a place for supernatural creatures could hold him either; not the way he is now.

Stiles glances in the rearview mirror once as he turns onto the highway, but only to make sure that Peter’s single headlight is still behind him.

He didn’t say goodbye to anyone but his Dad. He does not feel guilty about it in the slightest.

He settles into his seat as the truck in front of him gets up to speed. Seven hours and he’ll be starting a new life in a new town. He knows that they’re going to cause a ruckus among the supernatural if there’s a presence in Charming, but he’s honestly looking forward to it. His eyes are wide open, and the road is humming along with the stereo, and he doesn’t fight the smile the stretches across his face.

Peter feels the weight that’s been dragging at him since he woke up from his coma two years ago get dragged off his shoulders by the wind as he roars down the highway following a blue Jeep Wrangler. The engine of the Harley Davidson Road King he purchased growls in time with the beating of his heart, and the cold October air is better than a shot of caffeine to wake him up.

He feels free for the first time in years. Maybe ever.

The wolf in his soul is howling into the wind like a happy dog as the vibration of the machine under him shakes loose the last of the grit.

This is going to be good.

* * *

“What the fuck do you mean you’ve been relieved of your command?”

Wayne Unser winces, but rolls his eyes. He’s known Clay Morrow long enough to not give a shit about making the man mad. Also, he’s dying so ask him how many fucks he gives. “The mayor called me into his office this morning. He’s speeding up my retirement and bringing in a new Chief.”

“Wait,” Jax interrupts, eyebrows knit together as he puzzles through what Wayne is telling them. “Hale’s being passed over for Chief?” Wayne nods and Jax lets out a long, low whistle. “He must be pissed,” he says gleefully.

“No shit,” Wayne says with a huff. “Apparently the Mayor doesn’t want the new Chief to have feelings about the club at all, for or against. He just wants the job to get done, so he talked to the
governor who recommended the Sheriff from Beacon County. They offered him the job and he took it.”

“What do we know about this Sheriff?” Clay demands.

Juice clears his throat, glancing up from his laptop screen, “John – I can’t pronounce the middle name – Stilinski. He’s run unopposed in Beacon County in the last two elections. Uh, he was in the marines before he joined the sheriff’s department, made rank of Sergeant. He’s got a couple of medals and a purple heart.

Wife died eight years ago. One kid, a boy named… Nope, I can’t pronounce that either. Poor kid. He’s seventeen and has a 4.1 grade point average.”


“Scuttlebutt is Stilinski’s solid, but there’s rumors coming out of Beacon County. The crime rate in Beacon Hills skyrocketed two years ago, but stabilized last year. A few missing persons and a few unusual unresolved cases that people talk about.” Wayne takes a moment to take a drag off the blunt in his hand to settle his nerves. Reading the reports on Beacon Hills had made his blood curdle. “The Sheriff’s Department was massacred a little less than two years ago. Six deputies murdered in the station house. Three months later another deputy was sacrificed by a death cult and the Sheriff almost became a victim himself.”

“Holy shit,” Jax says.

Wayne nods, “You’re telling me. They sent the FBI to investigate, but nothing ever came of it. The Sheriff and all his guys were clean, they were just having a shit year. Things evened out and all that shit got shut down pretty quick by the Sheriff’s Department.

Everything I’ve heard about the man is that he’s an intelligent, no bullshit man. I don’t think he’s ever taken a bribe, and I don’t see him being willing to; but I also don’t see him giving a crap what you guys do so long as you keep it out of Charming.”

Clay twirled his cigar between his fingers, thinking. He didn’t like change, but he also knew that the world he lived in was the kind that changed at a moment’s notice. You either rolled with it and adapted or got left behind and ended up shot in a dark alley. “So we won’t have the PD on our side anymore. When’s this happen?”

“End of the month,” Wayne says.

“At least we won’t have Hale breathing down our necks. He’ll be too busy being pissed off about being passed over and trying to get the new guy to be on his side,” Jax states. Tig sniggers at the comment. He loves it when Hale gets dragged down off his high horse.

“True,” Clay says. “Okay, let’s button everything up. No loose ends, nothing to draw the eye of a new Chief looking for anything that may incriminate the Sons if he comes looking.”

“You got it boss,” Tig says, slapping the table, his rings making a clattering sound against the redwood surface.

The men around the table take that as their cue to dismiss themselves. Clay and Wayne remain seated as the Sons file out of Church until they’re the only ones left in the room.

“This isn’t going to be fun, is it?” Clay asks, looking to the man that’s had his back for nearly forty years.
Wayne snorts, “I think the winds of change are blowing, and it’s gonna be a doozy.”

Clay takes a drag off his cigar, then chews a little on the end. “I thought you’d say that.”

*

Peter turns left onto Main Street when they get into Charming. Stiles continues down Recker Avenue, following the moving van. Stiles’ job is two-fold: meet the realtor at the house to get the keys, and supervise the movers as they unload. Peter’s job is provisions. Just enough to get them through the next day or so, but something. So he heads down Main looking for a grocery store or market of some kind.

He notices the looks he gets as he roars down the street. A lone motorcycle isn’t unusual, but he’s not wearing a kutte with a reaper on the back, so it gets him a few double takes. There are two bikes parked outside of the first market that he finds. Peter backs the road king into line next to them and dismounts after slinging his helmet onto one of the handle bars (he may have a scary fast healing factor, but Stiles had insisted anyway, and he had obliged). He rolls his shoulders, stretches his neck to either side with a series of satisfying pops and heads into the store.

A lot of people stare at him as he grabs a tiny hand-basket and meanders toward the deli and bakery section, his heavy boots sounding loud in the aisles. He’ll get things for sandwiches, and maybe something for dessert.

*

Juice spots him first. He and Half-Sack are stocking up on a few things when the guy strolls past him. He’s average in height, maybe just shy of six foot. He’s got a muscular frame, broad shoulders and a jaw that could cut glass, even with a couple days of scruff across it. He’s wearing a dark brown motorcycle jacket and heavy boots and something about the uncaring way he strides through the market (like all you see him should bow down in worship) tells Juice he’s dangerous.

Like really, really dangerous.

They watch him from afar as he collects some groceries (sandwich fixings, cake, a couple other staples) and checks out. They have a silent fight halfway down the chip aisle about maybe following or approaching him to find out who he is. They get so distracted that they lose track of him, so they check out and head for their bikes.

The guy is tucking his groceries into the saddlebags of a beautiful navy blue road king when they get outside. Juice almost trips over his feet at the sight, but manages to recover.

“Nice ride, man,” he says, only slightly higher pitched than usual. He awkwardly clears his throat as the man looks up at him with arresting blue eyes. Juice hasn’t seen eyes like that outside of Jax and Tig, and damn.

“Thank you,” he says with a smirk. He tilts his head toward the two Harleys parked next to him, “Yours?”

Juice beams, and Half-Sack starts nodding like a bobble-head doll, “Yeah!”

The man peruses the bikes, gives an approving nod, “Nice.”

“I’m Juice!” Juice blurts.

“I’m Kip!” Half-Sack chirps a half second later, then the tips of his ears go bright red.
The man raises an eyebrow, and an expression of vague amusement crosses his face. He gamely shakes the hand Juice thrust out at him anyway. “Peter Hale,” he introduces.

Juice’s eyebrows scrunch up at the name, “Any relation to David or Jacob Hale?”

The smirk on Peter’s face gets a sharp sinister sort of edge, “Cousins, once upon a time.”

“Seriously?” Juice demands. “You don’t look like a tight-ass.”

Peter chuckles, “I’m the black sheep of the family.”

“No shit,” Half-Sack mutters, then reddens even further when he realizes that Peter heard him.

“Sooo,” Juice drawls, tucking his hands in his back pockets and rocking back and forth on his heels a couple of time, “are you just visiting?”

“No.” Peter’s voice flattens out a little bit, making him seem very menacing suddenly. “My future father-in-law is taking over as Chief of Police, so I’m afraid I’m here to stay. The family will just have to learn to deal with it.”

Juice lets his brain blue screen in shock for just a moment, before quickly rebooting as he takes in this new information. This man (scary as hell, he’s willing to admit) is related to both the Deputy Mayor and the Deputy Chief of Police and is seriously involved with the new Chief, Stilinski.

“I thought he only had one kid?” Juice wonders out loud.

“He does,” Peter says, his smile turning shark-like and his gaze sharpening. Juice suddenly feels like he’s drawn the attention of a predator and his fight-or-flight response tries to kick in.

“But he’s seventeen,” Juice says, and regrets it instantly because wow, what a way to dig himself into deeper shit.

“Hence the future part,” Peter says flatly.

It’s Juice’s turn to nod like a bobble-head figure. Half-Sack has gone completely silent in the face of a predator and is trying to make himself look smaller, and therefore like less of a target. “Right,” Juice says, “I guess if the Chief’s cool with it.”

Peter hums an agreeing noise and he smiles at them. It looks… wrong. It’s a polite, congenial smile, and it’s more disturbing than the sinister gaze with too many teeth. Juice swallows hard enough for his back teeth to click together.

“If you’ll excuse me, I’m expected,” Peter says, voice even more terrifying with how polite it is.

“Right,” Juice says faintly.

They stand there gawping stupidly as Peter mounts his bike and pulls away with a roar of the engine. They watch him vanish down the street before they look at each other.

“I think I peed myself a little,” Half-Sack admits after nearly a minute of awkward, stunned silence.

“I don’t blame you,” Juice says, then clears his throat again. “We better tell Clay about that guy.”

Half-Sack nods in agreement and the pair turns to head back to the clubhouse. They both get the feeling that life in Charming is about to get far more interesting.
Peter finds Stiles wandering in small circles around the edge of their property when he gets to the house. The afternoon sun washes out the sparks in the air, but the octarine of intricate magic circles leave an imprint in Peter’s eyes before they fade. The air around Stiles smells heavily of ozone, and the greenery inside the property-line is overgrowing at an accelerated pace.

He spots a few garden gnomes watching from the blackberry bush by the garden shed and a trio of flower-faeries examining the abrupt change to the rose bed in full view of all and sundry. Peter ignores the protectees Stiles has claimed while protecting their home and trails after the Spark with a sort of single-minded want singing through him.

He always wants Stiles.

He will always want Stiles.

Stiles turns glowing whiskey eyes on Peter as he finishes his perimeter and smiles wildly (like he had when he was possessed by the Nogitsune, only without the black shadows attached). He’s high on the power inside him, and when he reaches out to Peter, the wolf goes to him willingly.

Stiles could be wielding a knife with which to slit his throat, and Peter would still come to him willingly.

Always.

Peter’s eyes flare up, Alpha red in response to Stiles’ power, and he bares his teeth as he enfolds the Spark into his arms. He drags his nose up Stiles’ neck to the place where it meets the space behind his ear and licks him to taste the power leaking out of him. Stiles sighs and tucks his hands up under Peter’s shirt to drag his short fingernails down his back.

“Mine,” Peter rumbles.

“Mmm,” Stiles replies, then smiles at Peter with a wicked edge. “Ditto.”

Peter snorts at the language as it destroys the mood and brings about their usual levity. Peter has been Stiles’ since the boy brought him back from the brink of death just by believing him healed. It’s only been a few weeks, but Peter is inextricably bound to Stiles and he’s accepted it. Just as Stiles has possessively latched on and decided that Peter is his and death to anyone who says different.

It’s an acceptable relationship for Peter, who has always, always craved power and recognition.

Peter has begun to orbit Stiles like the younger man is the sun, drinking in his power to make himself stronger. Peter is an Alpha again because Stiles believed he’d make a good Alpha. He’s more than your average werewolf because Stiles had wanted him to be everything Peter had the potential to be.

It’s heady, being the focus of all that intensity.

He’s not sure if it’s love, but he thinks this is as close as he’s ever gotten to the feeling.

* 

There is a river that flows through Charming unseen.

It is a strong current, telluric in nature, that runs in a slow curve across most of California. One edge of it touches the Beacon Hills Preserve, another cuts through a section of Los Angeles. It eddies and
flows, growing wider where humans congregate and narrowing in places where only nature can influence it.

It isn’t sentient; not really. It’s aware in a way that most rivers aren’t. It sparks with octarine magic and sizzles with the force of lightning bolts. The awareness that runs through it isn’t intelligent. It is the kind of awareness that other rivers have. It knows its path. It knows where it is going to and where it is coming from. It knows when it is blocked and it knows when a new source adds to it.

A new source of magic that feeds it from Beacon Hills and then again in Charming.

A pure source. Energy at its finest gradient.

The current drinks from this source greedily. Strengthening the flow of the river.

The river isn’t sentient; but every now and then something that is will reach deep into its depths and share its knowledge.

Roots that reach deep into the earth, deep enough to touch a current, drink of the river’s strength and in exchange it share the knowledge it has of the pure source. The Nemeton, newly reborn, shares its knowledge of a Spark and his Alpha to the river, and it draws strength in return.

The thing about rivers is that they flow. Always moving. Calm on the surface, but roiling beneath.

The river current, telluric in nature, carries its new knowledge across the world, sharing it where it meets with other rivers.

There is a new source of energy in the world. Strong and Pure.
Sons of Charming

Chapter Summary

“Let me make this perfectly clear to all three of you,” John begins, meeting the gaze of both Hales and then Morrow. “It’s my first day on the job. Meaning I have a lot of work to do to familiarize myself with this department and with Charming. I do not have time for agendas, hurt feelings, wounded pride, or arrogant certainty.

I do not take bribes, no matter the source – “ here his eyes flick from Jacob to Clay “ – and I do not allow my men to belittle me, this department or the people they work with.”

He stops talking to allow them to catch up with him, “Now, we can all choose to move forward in a relationship of neutral respect, or you can continue to push me, in which case you won’t like what happens.”

Chapter Notes

Oh, look, another update. That makes four in a row.

I've been going to Starbucks lately every Saturday to write. Apparently there is something about sitting in a public place that makes me concentrate more on the task at hand rather than get sidetracked by other things. Also, it's faintly embarrassing to play Minecraft in public... so that's helping to keep me on track.

Also, the whole thing makes my introvert self cringe, so writing soundtracks are a godsend. I don't know what I'd do without the one I created for this fic. Just saying.

Disclaimer: The concept of Octarine as the color of magic belongs to Terry Pratchett and the Discworld. I own nothing Teen Wolf or Sons of Anarchy.

Four:

Stiles is very glad that he decided to arrange for an early diploma. He’d had the credits he’d needed due to taking a couple of online college courses last year. It makes moving to Charming a little easier to tolerate. He can only imagine what starting at a new school half way through his senior year would be like. Worse than the movies make it out to be, knowing his luck.

He unpacks the house instead, making sure that everything is in place for when Dad gets in. John’s got enough on his plate, what with taking over a whole new department, without having to worry about the house too.

He makes Peter help him.
Neither of them talk about how Peter’s room in the house is only really a token display at separation until April.

They don’t really talk about them at all. They don’t seem to need to.

They are them. Together, always. It doesn’t really matter in what capacity they are together.

But Stiles knows himself; and he knows Peter.

Their soulbond is not platonic. Like, at all.

So it’s a token of separation, for John more than anything else.

John had been the one to lay out the rules for them. Stiles is seventeen, Peter will be thirty-three in December, they are not to get up to any funny business until after Stiles is eighteen. After that they can be as coupley as they want. Until then, they have to show restraint.

Separate bedroom, hands kept mostly to themselves. The works.

The new rules that dictate their lives didn’t stop Peter from buying Stiles a ring as soon as he had the opportunity. John hadn’t really minded. The plain silver band with three tiny moonstones set into it serves as a token of how seriously both of them are taking what is happening between them.

During their first week in Charming, Stiles sets up the house and Peter gets the lay of their new territory. The protection power exuding from their three acres is a beacon to anything and everything in the area that there is a new, powerful player in town. So Peter walks the territory, finds out that there are no other wolves in Charming, and claims the territory.

The back garden becomes flush with tiny magical being and a family of wild rabbits who are a bit more intelligent than most due to the magic they’re now living in.

Peter, once upon a time, was a lawyer. A good one. He’s not sure he still wants to be one; it’s been what feels like a lifetime. He’s a different man. So he walks the territory and becomes familiar with the few supernatural creatures that live in town while he waffles about what he wants to do with his time (they don’t need the money. He’s moved around the Hale family trust. He didn’t touch Derek or Cora’s shares, but that leaves him everything else to use).

Stiles doesn’t have that kind of indecision to deal with. He’s taking the rest of the year and the summer to get a true handle on his new powers, and then he’s for college. He’s already got his acceptance to UC Berkley, which is just outside of Oakland, making his commute about an hour when the time comes. He’s looking forward to it.

All in all, the pair gets settled into Charming over the course of the week they spend waiting for John to arrive.

And then the new Police Chief arrives, and everything just sort of, begins.

* 

He runs.

From end to end; corner to corner. He runs.

The thumpthud of huge paws on spring-soft ground.

The scent of new growth and decaying leaves.
The earth is dewy wet.

The wind sings his arrival through the branches of the trees.

This is *his* now. His territory. His land. He will lay his claim and no one will ever be strong enough to take it from him. He will make sure of it. Cut any who tries off at the knees before they gain any traction.

And those that try to sneak up on him?

Well. They have to get past Stiles, don’t they?

Large ears twitch and move, taking in the sounds of his city and his forest. His. Ruby eyes watch and learn, matching sounds and scents to sights.

He is the Alpha. This is his to protect.

*

John is a pretty easy-going guy. Sure, being blindsided with his son’s new magic powers and the knowledge that his kid is soul bound to a murderer (because Peter’s killed people, and there’s no way around that, no matter the circumstances.) sucked ass, but he’d had time to acclimate. To ruminate in the knowledge and learn to accept it.

Being able to threaten Peter with a shotgun filled with wolfsbane rounds had done wonders to make him feel better about the whole situation.

He’d figured he’d have time to adjust to Charming before being confronted by uppity politicians. John is a man that needs time to absorb and process. This… is not that.

He doesn’t like Deputy Chief Hale. His name notwithstanding (though, that’s points against him), he’s a dick. He’s got a chip on his shoulder and the belief that he’s a better cop than most. With Wayne Unser as his example, sure, John can see how that assumption came into being, but still. To think that of all cops is just arrogant and stupid.

So that meeting had been pleasant.

Then he’d met with Unser, who is an okay guy even if he was technically a corrupt cop. He at least knows his department and does his job well even with the moon-sized blind spot he’s got where it comes to the Sons of Anarchy. John gets it, he’s caught himself developing one where it comes to certain types of supernatural things.

Sometimes you can’t make the monster look human enough to close the case, much less prosecute in a court of law.

He digresses.

David Hale and Wayne Unser are nothing compared to Jacob Hale.

The twit.

The expression on John’s face as he sits back in what is now his chair behind what is now his desk can only be construed as stormy. It’s a look that every one of his deputies in Beacon Hills had learned to mean that their boss was quickly coming to the end of his patience and the shit was going to hit the fan and they’d all better run for the hills.
The people of the Charming Police Department haven’t learned this yet. They haven’t had a chance. After all, he’s only been the Chief for about six hours.

Jacob Hale doesn’t care. He came in here with a single-minded determination to sell his agenda to the new Police Chief and get the man on his side before the Sons could sink their claws into him.

The cops in the building are watching with morbid interest through the open office door.

Wayne Unser is intelligent enough to keep his mouth shut and just watch, hoping to keep out of the crossfire.

“I wonder, Mr. Hale,” John says, voice deceptively mild and laced with irony, “what it is about me that makes you think that I care about your political agenda?”

Hale stops, surprised, “Chief Stilinski, I would hope that you of all people would understand – “

John raises a hand, cutting Jacob off mid-sentence. “I’d like to know why it is that you think you know me from a hole in the ground, Deputy Mayor.”

There is a drawn out silence as Jacob stares at John like he can’t believe this is happening. John is a decorated police officer with a storied career. He’d been recommended for the position of Chief by the Governor.

“Am I interrupting something?”

John turns his gaze to the doorway. Very tall, square jaw, iron gray hair, leather kutte. Clay Morrow, Sons of Anarchy President. He’s watching Jacob like a shark that’s scented blood in the water as the Deputy Mayor sputters.

John has had to explain his kid to Bobby Finstock. He had to defend a paper on male circumcision to an economics teacher whose only reply was to spontaneously admit that he likes to be called ‘cupcake’. After that humiliation, John Stilinski can handle anything.

“Not at all Mr. Morrow,” John says drolly. “Mr. Hale was just leaving.”

Jacob sputters again, this time at John. He remains in place as Clay steps into the room and makes himself comfortable in the only empty chair in the room. He lights up a cigar, but John lets it go because he is very done with the posturing.

“Hale!” he barks out the office door, and David Hale appears as if by magic.

“Yes, sir?” he asks, face blank and voice a bit sullen.

John rises. He isn’t a tall man, but he’s far from short, and he circles his desk to prop himself on the edge with his arms crossed, his service pistol on full display as he arranges his face in his best I-am-disappointed-in-you expression. The one that always works on Stiles.

“Let me make this perfectly clear to all three of you,” John begins, meeting the gaze of both Hales and then Morrow. “It’s my first day on the job. Meaning I have a lot of work to do to familiarize myself with this department and with Charming. I do not have time for agendas, hurt feelings, wounded pride, or arrogant certainty.

I do not take bribes, no matter the source – “ here his eyes flick from Jacob to Clay “ – and I do not allow my men to belittle me, this department or the people they work with.”
He stops talking to allow them to catch up with him, “Now, we can all choose to move forward in a relationship of neutral respect, or you can continue to push me, in which case you won’t like what happens.”

David, who had straightened to attention during John’s speech nods once, “Understood, sir.”

Not as stupid as he looks, then. Good. John meets his gaze and tips his head to the door. David takes it as the dismissal it is and books it out of the tension in the room. John keeps his gaze on Clay and Jacob, eyes flinty. He’s had to be a capable man in order to raise Stiles on his own and still take all the crap they’ve dealt with the last two years in his stride.

These men are not intimidating.

“Do we have an understanding?”

Clay Morrow puffs on his cigar for a moment, clearly taking John’s measure before he grins and says magnanimously, “Works for me, Chief.”

Jacob sniffs disdainfully in Clay’s direction and girds himself to continue his argument before a voice from the door stops him in his tracks.

“Why Jacob, are you about to say something you’re going to end up regretting?”

John doesn’t move, having seen Peter approach the door. He’s got a bag in his hand. A healthy lunch from his interfering son.

Jacob Hale on the other hand, jumps a mile in the air and spins around to stare at his cousin with wide eyes. “Peter! You’re… looking well.”

Peter smiles congenially, “Yes. It’s amazing what not being in a coma does for one’s health, don’t you think?”

Jacob blinks, frowning.

Clay Morrow looks absolutely fascinated and entertained to be catching Jacob Hale flat-footed.

Peter strolls into the room and sets the bag in his hand on John’s desk, completely ignoring the tension in the room to speak, “I convinced him not to pack it into a lunchbox.”

John huffs with resigned amusement, “Please tell me that’s not a salad?”

“It’s not a salad.”

“Liar.”

Peter smiles, the small genuine one that John is starting to be able to recognize, “Well, it’s not only a salad. There’s fruit salad, too.”

“Joy,” John deadpans.

Peter turns to Jacob, facial expression still mild, “Why are you still here? I think the Chief dismissed you, Jacob.”

Jacob sputters, but collects his briefcase and clutches it with white knuckles, “I hope you know the sort of person Peter is, Chief Stilinski.”
John smiles, an expression that is so much like Stiles that there’s no mistaking that the two are related. “Oh, believe me, Deputy Mayor Hale, I know exactly what sort my son-in-law is, thank you.”

Jacob pales and flees the room.

John waits until he’s out of earshot before he says, “Drama queen.”

Peter chuckles, “True. But it was satisfying.”

“Relations?” John asks, rounding his desk to sit down and rifle through his lunch.

“Theyir father is my mother’s brother,” Peter remarks with a frown. “We lost contact after Mom passed, but they were notified after the fire.”

“And they did nothing?” John asks.

“Not a thing.”

They didn’t even offer help to Derek and Laura afterward, but Peter doesn’t say that. He doesn’t need to. Adrian Hale was born human. It happens sometimes, a human being born to two wolves. Adrian had left as soon as he could, to be normal. Boring more like. He and his had stopped being even remotely courteous after Peter’s mother passed.

The Charming Hales like to pretend that the Beacon Hills Hales don’t exist.

Peter’s going to enjoy stomping all over their little fantasy.

“Makes me like him less,” John says, and gives up when he finds nothing but healthy nutrition in his lunch. “You could have at least snuck me a pudding cup or something.”

“What are you, five?” Peter retorts, then he hucks John a candy bar. “Brush your teeth before you come home.” He turns baleful eyes on Unser and Morrow, “You saw nothing.”

Unser raises his hands in deferment and amusement.

Morrow snorts and rises, “Saw what? Chief, Unser.” He gives both men a nod in farewell, and Peter a very curious look, but takes himself off with a long stride and a bit of swagger.

“Well,” Peter says, “my work here is done. John, I’ll see you later.”

John nods and Peter heads out into the office. The Chief and the former Chief watch as David Hale appears and Peter and he collide in a stiff conversation.

“That looks fun,” Unser remarks.

“Family never is,” John replies.

“True,” Unser says with a now. “Now, where were we?”

John smiles, glad to be reminded of the mundane tasks that need to be completed, “Shift schedules and rotations.”

* 

Ley-lines, unlike their telluric cousins, are composed entirely of magic. This makes them more aware
than the natural currents that run through the world. They are direct lines that intersect on natural and man-made landmarks and are composed entirely of magic.

Ley-lines interact and influence the world in a far more direct way than telluric currents.

They know things. Where they intersect. Where they run to and from. How the world around them interacts. They know the months of the year by the phases of the moon and how it and the stars affect how strong they are.

They know when they are used to power things.

They know when it is pure or it is corrupt.

Backlash into the lines. A tiny bit of that power returning into them. It changes the flow. Corrupted power returning to a ley-line or ley-crossing is nebulous and brackish, changing the flow to a darker leaning until time and the flow of magic can cleanse it. Uncorrupted power is the opposite. A burst of bright, pure octarine that increases the flow, aiding to cleanse the lines and leaning lines and crossings to lighter, more natural ways.

Ley-Lines know when a new landmark is created. The divergence of lines to the new crossing creates new paths through undiscovered territory. New Crossings create a backlash through the lines.

Naturally, there are lines and crossings that are undiscovered by man. Some that make no sense to a sentient being. For Faerie, for the supernatural, these crossings make all the sense in the world.

After all, humans aren’t the only beings that create monuments.

Sometimes magic does it too.

*

Stiles practically falls out of Roscoe when he gets it into the lot at Teller-Morrow Automotive. There’s a boatload of motorcycles out front and a tow truck backing a minivan into one of the garage bays. He could have taken the jeep to a garage closer to the house, but to be perfectly honest, he’s really curious about the Sons.

Besides, it’s not like any of them could hurt them without getting hurt themselves.

It takes him a moment to orient himself with the layout of the place. There’s the garage, and the clubhouse with what looks like an office attached. He decides to start in the office, and heads in that direction, somehow managing to keep a low profile despite his not-so-graceful exit from the jeep.

There’s a tall lady with the sharpest cheekbones Stiles has ever seen in the office behind the desk. She looks the part of a biker’s woman from her knee high boots to the platinum streaked and perfectly styled auburn hair. Stiles waits his turn patiently while she deals with a grumpy looking guy in an ill-fitting suit.

Once suit-guy has left, the woman turns a penetrating look on Stiles himself. It’s the kind of gimlet stare that Lydia has perfected though sheer force of will. Stiles gets the feeling that this woman comes by it naturally.

“Can I help you?” she asks (more like demands).

“Yes, please,” Stiles gives her his best disarming smile. Nothing to see here, move along. “My jeep needs an oil change.”
She raises an eyebrow at him, “Model?”

“Jeep CJ-5.”

“Year?”

“Nineteen Eighty.”

“Name?”

“Stilinski.”

She looks up at him at that. Stiles takes it to mean that she’s heard the name before. She raises a single eyebrow at him, so he helpfully spells it for her. They go over mileage and what kind of oil Stiles prefers, and then he hands over the keys when she holds her hand out. She tells him it will probably be a couple of hours before the work is done. Stiles takes it for the dismissal it is.

Stiles fires off a text to Peter to tell him where he is and why as he heads for the two picnic tables just outside the clubhouse doors to wait for his car. He’s got a perfect opportunity to observe a few of the Sons in their natural habitat. He’s not going to pass that up. He parks himself on a section of bench in the shade and opens up Candy Crush on his phone to while away some of the time.

It doesn’t take all that long for the woman from the office to let the Sons know that the new Chief’s kid is on the lot. She’s subtle about it, but Stiles is watching for it, so he recognizes the moment when a few of the men on the lot go out of their way to get a look at him.

He’ll let them approach him if they want, but he’s not out to seek out a meeting or confrontation. He’s just curious.

His phone chimes. Peter’s coming to get him.

Oh, good. This will go well.
Howl

Chapter Summary

Eventually, Juice speaks, “You believe in monsters, Jax?”

The way he says it makes Jax turn his eyes on him. Juice is looking up at the stars with a
look on his face like he’s seeing more than just specks of light up there. “Depends on
what kind of monster you’re talking about,” Jax replies carefully.

Chapter Notes

Chapter 5, and still going strong. Once again, this has not been beta'd, so there's the
potential for errors.

Disclaimer: Octarine as the color of magic belongs to Terry Pratchett and the
Discworld. I own nothing TW or SOA.

Five:

“You can’t know a man till you eat at his table

You can’t understand a lie without the truth

You can’t lock me up then tell me about freedom

You can’t have me if I can’t have you…”

- Can’t Take It With You, Drew Holcomb and the Neighbors

One of the most interesting things about the change in management in Charming is the fact that
there’s another Hale in town. If Clay and Juice’s first impressions are anything to go by, Peter Hale is
nothing like his cousins. It makes the Sons like him on that merit alone. The fact that Stilinski
considers him to be family? Even better. It gives the Sons some wiggle room, especially if they can
get Peter on their side.

It is Clay’s idea to recruit him to the Sons. What better way to get an in on one of the oldest and most
powerful families in town than to have one of their own as a Son? It’s more than they’ve ever had
before, even if the two branches of the family don’t really talk.

The kid might be an in with the Chief. If he’s practically married to Hale at seventeen, then Hale has
influence on the kid. If the parent is okay with the relationship his son is in, that means the son has
sway with the father.

Clay can almost hear all the pieces clicking into place.
When Gemma comes into the clubhouse to inform them that the Stilinski kid just rolled onto the lot for an oil change, Clay takes it as an opportunity presenting itself. He heads out into the November sun, pausing to allow his eyes to adjust to the change in lightning. The kid is easy to spot. He’s lounged on top of one of the picnic tables just outside the clubhouse door playing on his phone.

He’s all limbs and pale skin. He seems to fill out his clothes in a decent way. He’s not a shrimpy kid, he’s lean muscle. Clay has been able to tell the difference for many years.

Jax approaches from the garage, so Clay decides to remain unnoticed in the doorway and observe. He wants to get a measure of this kid. Best not to get on the Chief’s bad side by harassing him.

“Hey, you Stiles?” Jax asks as he walks up.

The kid looks around at him, blinking and then grins, “Yep, that’s me!”

“Jax Teller,” Jax offers his hand to shake, which the kid gamely does. “Car’s gonna be a while, you might want to go get some lunch or something.”

Stiles shrugs one shoulder, “I figured with how busy you look and all. I already called for a ride.”

Jax nods, “Any other work you’d like us to do while we’ve got her in the bay?”

“He,” Stiles corrects, and then elaborates when Jax’s face goes confused. “Jeep’s a boy. Roscoe.”

“Got it.”

“I would not say no to new windshield wiper blades, dude,” Stiles barrels on. “Other than that, just the oil change.”

“We can do that. We can text you when your car is ready,” Jax offers.

“Sounds great!” Stiles says with another manic grin.

The roar of motorcycles fills the air. Several bikes pull into the lot. Tig and Happy, followed by Hale on a dark blue road king. Hale rolls the bike to around to point it toward the exit and stops next to the table. Stiles pops to his feet with a more genuine smile aimed at Hale, who smirks back.

“Hey, thanks,” Stiles says, walking over and taking the helmet that Peter hands him.

“Of course,” Peter replies. He looks around at the various people watching their display as Stiles struggles to make the straps under his chin clip together. The man meets Clay’s gaze after taking in the half-dozen Sons watching and offers a single nod and a smile with too much teeth.

Clay nods back as Stiles mounts the bike behind Peter and basically plasters himself to Peter’s back.

Then Stiles’ gaze follows Peter’s, and Clay finds himself pinned in place by that whiskey gaze. He feels suddenly exposed, and he doesn’t like it. The feeling goes away as soon as Stiles turns his face to look at Jax.

“Thanks again, Jax,” Stiles says.

“Any time,” Jax replies, because Stiles is a paying customer. His shoulders are a little stiff now, unlike before when it was just him and Stiles talking.

Peter revs the engine on his bike, and the pair glides off the lot and around the corner.
“The fuck was that?” Jax asks as Clay comes to stand next to him, bewildered.

“I don’t know,” Clay says, eyes narrowed in thought, “but we’re going to find out.”

Jax nods and goes to speak, but Gemma starts yelling at them to get back to work, so he closes his mouth with a shake of his head. They exchange a significant look before Jax takes himself back to the garage.

It’s not often that Jax and Clay agree on anything. Clay may be Jax’s step-father, but the boy was old enough to resent what he probably thought was his mother replacing his dad. They don’t argue the familial connection, but they do butt heads. A lot. They’ve been doing it a lot more over club stuff since Opie went inside, and it escalated when Jax found out Wendy was pregnant.

Clay is going to be a grandpa in three months, but hell if he knows how to make his kid see it that way.

Because Jax is his kid, blood or not. He just needs Jax to realize that his father’s ghost is just that, a goddamn ghost, and that he’s got another father wanting him to succeed and be happy.

Clay shakes his head, clearing it of the heavy thoughts that settled in. His eyes flick to the street where Peter Hale’s bike was just a minute before. Those two are trouble, he just can’t figure out what kind. It’s going to make life interesting, that’s for sure.

He makes sure to knock on the wood of the doorjamb as he passes, just in case.

* 

There are woods on the north edge of Charming, California. Called Chigger by most. Once upon a time they had a different name. The Wahewa called them the *Place of Wanderers* long before the Spanish came through and renamed it *La Carretera de la Perdió*, the Road of the Lost. Some unintelligent miner during the California Gold Rush renamed it *Chigger* after the abundance of mites he found there.

That may have had something to do with his poor hygiene though.

Of course, the stupid name is the one that stuck in the end.

Stiles thinks the name is stupid the moment he finds out what the woods are called. Chigger Woods are like the Beacon Hills preserve. Layered heavily with old power and knowledge. A sanctuary for creatures that live in the In-Between. From what he can feel standing on the edge of the tree line, there are two rivers that intersect somewhere in these woods.

One is a ley line; a metaphorical line of supernatural importance that has real impact on the world in certain ways.

The other is a telluric current; a natural current of electric energy that moves beneath the surface of the earth or the sea. Influenced by nature and humanity.

It’s not a Nemeton, but a Crossing is a place of power. The difference here being that the Crossing hasn’t become self-aware and intelligent over the course of centuries. It’s a place where two rivers meet, not an ancient tree grown over a magical wellspring.

Still, there’s a lot here.

“I think we are the embodiment of that Chinese curse,” Stiles muses.
“We certainly do live in interesting times,” Peter remarks. He’s watching the woods with keen eyes that glow Alpha red. His eyes give him away as something other. It is not the red, it is the sparks of electric blue that shine from them.

“Did you claim the woods?”

“Up to the point where they cross onto the reservation. There’s a pack of coyotes up that way.”

“Any shamans?”

“Possibly, but not one that walks the woods past the borders.”

“Where’s the Crossing?”

“Six miles west.”

That puts the crossing solidly in Stilinski-Hale territory. Stiles can live with that. It’s easier to decide and act than it is to run something past a committee so steeped in tradition that working with a couple of white outsiders would be seen as betrayal of the tribe. Stiles doesn’t really care what the Wahewa get up to. They obviously protect their borders, and so long as they don’t try to tell Stiles and Peter how to protect their territory, Stiles doesn’t see why they can’t be friends.

“They left a welcoming sign,” Peter says as he paces Stiles. Stiles walks into the treeline until he finds a clearing and crouches to dig his hands into the loamy soil beneath a layer of crinkly autumn leaves. It wasn’t a real sign, but the supernatural version of rolling out the welcome mat.

The Wahewa know they’re here, and are fine with remaining neutral while the new power in the area settles into place.

“So we’ll be watched until they decide we’re not a threat?” Stiles asks, voice going a bit echoy at the end as he connects to the earth beneath his hands.

Peter casually begins to strip out of his clothes, “Yes.”

The woods darken as the sun finishes setting. Stiles begins to glow faintly as fireflies glitter across grass. Peter crouches to turn on the small LED lantern they brought with them, and then shifts with a crunching of bone. He shakes out his fur as he settles into his wolf shape.

Peter never could achieve the full wolf shift that Talia had been able to. It was why he’d been passed over for the position of Alpha when he was a child (not to mention the near fifteen years between himself and his older sister). Now, with Stiles’ help, Peter is more than Talia ever had the hope of being. He’s horse sized, easily dwarfing the crouching form of the Spark he’s guarding. His fur is pitch black save for a silvered pattern across his right side. It’s not solid, just a glitter of silvered-gray at the tip of each hair.

The pattern follows the pattern of burns that Peter sustained in the fire.

The scars may not show on his human form any more, but that does not mean they aren’t there.

Peter sits back on his haunches as Stiles’ glow intensifies. He tips his head back and howls his claim of the territory into the wind at the same moment that Stiles finishes claiming the place magically. Something snaps into position inside him.

Yes.
He is part of an Alpha Pair. He has a pack and he has a territory.

His.

He turns his gaze to the glowing boy before him, who smiles back with elation and feral glee.

They turn as one to face the night and anyone who might challenge their claim.

Nothing can stop them when they are together.

And they are always together.

*

“The fuck was that?” Tig demands, spooked.

“Sounds like a wolf,” Bobby says with a smirk.

“No fuckin’ way that was wolf,” Tig fires back.

“You never know,” Bobby starts, “it could be.”

“No, he’s right,” Juice pipes in, “there haven’t been wolves in California in over seventy years.”

“Sounded like a wolf to me,” Piney throws.

“Fuck you,” Tig retorts. “It wasn’t a wolf.”

Jax keeps himself out of the argument as he looks toward the direction the howl came from. It had definitely sounded like a wolf. It had also been loud and close. Almost like it was in town, but also not. It had definitely come from the direction of Chigger Woods. It had made the hair on the back of Jax’s neck raise with the eeriness of it.

Juice meets Jax’s eyes when he looks around. There’s something in his expression, a light in his eyes maybe, that makes Jax get up and follow him out into the lot. Juice steps out of the pool of light by the door and toward the bikes. Jax follows until they’re standing in the cold November air side by side; each with a lit cigarette in hand.

Jax can be patient when he needs to be. He feels like this is a time to exercise that little-used skill.

Eventually, Juice speaks, “You believe in monsters, Jax?”

The way he says it makes Jax turn his eyes on him. Juice is looking up at the stars with a look on his face like he’s seeing more than just specks of light up there. “Depends on what kind of monster you’re talking about,” Jax replies carefully.

Juice huffs a little laugh, the corners of his eyes crinkling with it for a split second. His breath is a mixture of smoke and steam. “Real monsters. Like in the movies. Vampires, faeries… Werewolves.”

There’s an inflection there when Juice says the word ‘werewolves’, like there are more words trying to spill out behind it. Juice is holding them back. He turns his gaze to Jax, and suddenly the blond feels pinned in place. Juice has dark eyes, but in that moment they appeared like the night sky. Black from edge to edge and scattered with distant, dying lights.

Jax swallows, but holds Juice’s gaze for a long time. Juice’s features are sharper, and there is a point to his ears that weren’t there before. His canines are pointed when Juice opens his mouth to take a
drag off his cigarette. The tattoos on his head have changed too. They look deeper, but also like they spiral off Juice’s head somehow.

But he finds Juice under all of it. The goofy, square-jawed misfit who joined the Sons because he wanted a family.

“I believe you, Juice,” Jax tells him.

Juice turns back to the sky and he looks like he always does, “I’m young for my kind. About twenty-six in human years.” Jax waits him out. “My kind… we don’t really have a place in the world. We’re born by circumstance, not by genetics. My mother was a Summer Court fae, the daughter of a lesser noble. My father was human.”

Juice shakes his head, clearing what Jax can only assume is an unpleasant memory, “Mother was banished. It’s against the law to bear a half-human child; but mama didn’t care. She came to the human world and she had me.”

“So you’re half-faery?” Jax asks, and he believes it because Juice just showed him his true face.

“Yes, and no,” Juice flicks the butt of his cigarette and puts it out with the toe of his boot. “I’m what’s called a ‘Tweener’. I was born in-between two worlds. Half Fae, half human. Born on the spring equinox between spring and summer, at a time between night and day.”

“What’s that mean?”

“Means fae are scared of me because I can tap into the shadows,” Juice says. “I can see between things and move between things. I’m an outcast among my mother’s people, and I’ve never made a very good human. Too much magic in me.”

Jax follows his instincts. They’ve never steered him wrong before, and Juice is a giant goof; not a scary monster. He claps him on the back and leaves his hand there, “Seems like moving between could be useful, brother.”

Juice relaxes when Jax emphasizes the word ‘brother’. They’re okay.

“So, why are you telling me this now?” Jax asks, steering them toward the somewhat safer topic of the howling they heard versus Juice’s life before he became a Son.

“That was a wolf, just not a regular one. That was an Alpha howl.”

“The fuck is that?”

“Alpha werewolves, when they move into a new territory, howl for the whole territory to hear. It’s a claim over the land and a challenge to anyone who might not like the idea of a Pack moving in.” Juice scrunches his face in thought, “Charming hasn’t ever been claimed by a wolf before that I know of. There’s a pack of coyotes on the Res, but their territory stops there.”

“So an Alpha werewolf just claimed Charming?” Jax asks, trying to make sense of what Juice is telling him. “What’s that mean in the long run?”

Juice shrugs, “If they’re a good Alpha that knows what they’re doing, nothing. It won’t affect the human world at all. If there’s conflict with the claim, or they’re a bad Alpha, Charming’s missing persons statistics are about to skyrocket.”

Juice nods, “The pack there was killed almost a decade ago. Then about two years ago a feral Alpha moved into the territory.”

“You think the new Alpha is the Sheriff?” Jax asks.

Juice shakes his head, “No. I’d bet my life it’s Peter Hale.”

“What makes you say that?”

“The pack that got decimated? Hales.” Juice turns to face Jax earnestly. “I looked him up. He was in a coma for the better part of six years, trauma sustained from being trapped in a burning house. Then, right when the crime stats in Beacon Hills increase, he wakes up. He goes missing for six months, during which time things seem to settle. Then he comes back and things skyrocket again.”

“You think he’s a bad Alpha?” Jax demands. If they’ve got a threat hanging around, they need to know it.

“I don’t know. The escalation always seems to end shortly after he shows up, but it starts around the same time, too. I can’t tell if he’s starting it, or ending it.”

“What do you know about the new Chief and his kid?”

“Chief’s as human as they get as far as I can tell. The kid I’m not so sure about. He’s been a person of interest in too many cases that I can tell are supernatural to be completely normal. Regular humans very rarely have the wherewithal to run with wolves, much less all the other shit that comes with being part of that whole world.”

“Clay wants to recruit Hale,” Jax says.

Juice shakes his head, “I don’t know if that’s a good idea, man.”

Jax isn’t sure either. “Safe to say that Charming’s newest sons come as a package deal.”

Juice nods, “If nothing else, they’re in Hale’s pack.”

“We can’t tell Clay,” Jax muses, putting out his cigarette and then tucking his hands into his sweatshirt. “But we should definitely bring in Chibs. He believes in faeries.”

Juice nods, “He’s Scottish and spent time in Ireland, of course he does.”

Jax chuckles, still thinking. “Opie will need to know. He’s only been out a couple months and he doesn’t need the surprise.”

“I don’t want to be an object for proof,” Juice complains.

“Suck it up, brother,” Jax says with a grin, clapping Juice on the shoulder for a second time. “If this gets out past us, you’ll be doing it a lot.”

Juice groans. After a moment of silence, “I think Happy already knows. He spends too much time on the road to not have seen some shit, you know?”

Jax nods. It makes sense. Happy’s his own brand of weird. He also treats Juice like he’s more capable than everyone thinks he is. “I would be surprised if we had a single Nomad that doesn’t know.

That’s true, but Happy’s only been a Nomad for a couple of months. He’s also an Unholy One,
which means he traveled more than the average Son even while he was with the Tacoma Charter.

“So, Chibs, Opie and Happy,” Jax says with a nod. “With the knowledge that we might have to tell everyone else if things get out of hand.”

“I really hope they don’t, brother,” Juice says.

Jax can’t help but agree with that assessment.

A couple of hours later a second howl drifts through Charming. Now that he knows what it is, what it means, it makes Jax shiver and check all the locks in the house. That one had sounded like victory.

*

Stiles wakes up when his bladder protests his need to pee. He then spends ten minutes extricating himself from the octopus embrace of Peter Hale. He manages it, and relieves himself before trundling downstairs to the kitchen. John is making himself a thermos of coffee to take with him to the station, and has the local news radio on low.

Stiles can smell butter and fried eggs, but says nothing as he makes his own morning cup of wakefulness.

“How’d last night go?” John asks as Stiles steals a piece of his gluten free toast to scrape a layer of butter across.

Stiles takes a minute to chew on his first bite and heave himself up onto the stool next to John before he speaks, “Just the one challenge.”

“Anything I need to be concerned about?”

“I don’t think so. It was a Wendigo and came at us from deeper in the woods, not out of Charming.”

“So no missing persons?” John asks again.

Stiles shrugs, “Not a new one.”

John will take what he can get. “You boys stay out of trouble,” he says as he loads his plate into the dishwasher.

“No promises.”

“And stay away from the Sons, Stiles,” John says, stabbing a finger in his son’s direction.

“Can’t do that. Peter made himself too interesting.”


Stiles raises his hands in defense, “Not my fault.”

“He’s your wolf,” John deadpans, “that makes it your fault.”

Stiles snickers. John rolls his eyes.

“Have a good day,” Stiles calls as John heads for the door. His only response if for the Chief to close the door extra hard. Stiles lingers over his cup of coffee, only rising to make breakfast when he hears the shower turn on.
Spiral

Chapter Summary

“Well, we have a little bit of everything,” Cali explains, gesturing around herself. “And if we don’t have it, I can get it.”

“That’s a good slogan,” Stiles replies as he examines the minerals and gems in the glass case in front of him as he pets her cat into a purring puddle of fur.

Cali laughs, “Sure, but our slogan is actually ‘we’re not liable for your mishaps’.”

Chapter Notes

Alvarez wanted in on this whole thing. Which is cool with me, I've always kinda liked the character. Again, unbeta'd, so errors are my own.

Most conversation in Spanish is italicized english, because Spanish is a beautiful language and I don't want to butcher it by reaching beyond my limited knowledge of it. I'm passable enough to ask for directions, introduce myself and get a basic gist of a conversation, nowhere near fluent. So, yeah.

Picture for the familiar was found via google image search.

Disclaimer: Octarine as the color of magic belongs to Terry Pratchett and the Discworld. I own nothing TW or SOA.

Six:

“We got to talk, jefe.”

Marcus Alvarez looks up from his book. He’s an intelligent man who reads to broaden his mind in the little bit of down-time he has. He may be the head of a criminal organization, but he hadn’t gotten there by brute strength. No, Alvarez is a strategist. He plays a long-game. A smart-game.

Oscar Uresk looks pale and drawn around the eyes. This is enough to tell an intelligent man who knows about the world that something is wrong.

“Have a seat,” he tells the beta wolf, “and tell me what’s got you so worried.”

Oscar sits. For a few minutes he says nothing, just nervously begins to peel the label off of his bottle of beer. Marcus takes the time to finish his current paragraph and mark his place before setting the book down. He accepts a new beer from a passing prospect and sits back to wait it out while Oscar gets his thoughts in order.
“There was a Howl last night,” Oscar says eventually.

Marcus can hear the emphasis on the word ‘howl’. The meaning does not escape him. He was half-raised by his abuela who knew her stuff. Not to mention his mama was a powerful bruja in her own right. He knows the difference between a howl and a Howl.

“Okay.”

Oscar pulls a swallow from his beer. He always gets this way when Pack life and MC life cross. The Pera-Santos Pack is allied with the Mayans. Oscar is the go-between. He is loyal to the MC, but his life is with the Pack. Marcus doesn’t refute this. He knows where Oscar’s loyalty lies.

After all, there are members of the Pack in other Charters across the state.

They’re all Mayans as far as Marcus is concerned.

“It was an Alpha Howl,” Oscar continues, finally looking up to meet Marcus’ eyes. The man’s eyes are beta-gold and there’s extra hair along the sides of his face. The man is holding off a shift. He’s not worried, he’s scared.

Marcus goes from relaxed to tense in the amount of time it takes to set his beer down. His change of posture changes the atmosphere of the clubhouse; garnering the attention of the hermanos in the room. A few hangers on and girls are ushered out as the conversation continues.

“It came out of Charming.” Oscar continues, ignoring the activity.

Marcus ignores it too, “So Morrow’s got a pack in his backyard. Man’s an ignorant whitey with no sense for real danger, what’s it to us?”

The charter VP and Treasurer pull up chairs to the table. As Sergeant at Arms, anything that has Oscar concerned is the Club’s concern. The beer bottle in the beta’s hand shatters as his grip tightens too much. Glass tinkles to the tabletop and floor in the suddenly silent room.

When Oscar speaks, he does it in Spanish to be understood clearly. “It wasn’t just a claim on the territory in Charming. It was more. I’ve never been more scared in my life. Whoever it is, they’re powerful. Powerful enough to force my Alpha into an involuntary shift in response.”

“Jaime shifted?” Marcus demands. A stone settles into the pit of his stomach.

Oscar nods, “Whoever this new Alpha is, they could take the entire region. Power like that… power like that changes places. Alpha says that power like that could bring all the packs in California under the same Alpha. An Alpha of Alphas. Like the old days.”

Marcus has heard stories. Anyone who grew up in old Mexico has. The people are close to their roots. Proud of their history. None are going to forget something like the old stories. Stories about Alphas who could shift fully into wolves. Wolves the size of horses. Alphas that could call on other alphas.

Alpha Jaime Pera-Santos’ great-great-great-great-grandfather was rumored to be the last Alpha of Alphas in the Western Hemisphere. Killed in the war with the Spanish when they came to the Americas. Creatures like that, from the old stories, are largely considered extinct by most.

But that was just an unconfirmed rumor, one that Jaime didn’t endorse. According to him, his abuelo had been able to shift into a full-wolf, but he wasn’t an Alpha of Alphas.
“How?” someone asks what the entire club is thinking.

Oscar shakes his head and shrugs, “Don’t know. But change is coming, and we need to get ahead of it.”

Marcus Alvarez is a strategist. Survival of the club and their way of life is paramount. He knows what he has to do, and if it starts a war with the Sons of Anarchy, so be it.

“Call Santo Pedro, I want Vicente here yesterday. Every Nomad in the territory is to come in. We’re riding to Charming to make peace with the Alpha.”

*

Caliana’s is a magic shop. To the majority of Charming’s residents, it is the obligatory new age, hippy-dippy shop that sells dream catchers, crystals and wind chimes. To a few (those that are more than human) it’s a true magic shop. Alchemy supplies, spell components, books and enchantments.

Caliana is a the fourth of her name to own the shop, which is the oldest shop in Charming.

No one knows that, of course. The Family has given it several face-lifts over the years.

The wards on the place are etched into the bottoms of the floorboards, and the concealment charms are cleverly paint into the golden filigree on the windows. They make anything truly magical look mundane, and some even conceal truly magical components and items from mundane eyes.

Caliana herself is a short woman who manages to rise to a height of five-foot-two in heels. She has blue eyes and her hair is a pastel bubble-gum pink. The residents of Charming wonder about who her hairdresser is, none of them aware that her hair color is perfectly natural.

She is, after all, one-quarter faerie on her mother’s side.

The shop does most of its business in mail-order. It has a reputation for carrying exotic components from Faerie and other hard-to-get-to places. Everything is sourced humanely and naturally and comes from cousins on her mother’s side that she’s made business arrangements with.

It’s nice to have cousins that can travel like that and don’t mind spending time collecting things for her in exchange for human oddities and other items. One of her cousins has a taste for paperback mystery novels, another collects polished stone figurines of animals.

When the Spark steps into the shop for the first time, Caliana feels like she’s been struck over the head. He doesn’t radiate power any more than she does, but she can sense the other on him. He fairly oozes the fact that the territory belongs to him from his pores. She can see the soul-bond (strong and thick) attached to his aura as it leads off into the distance.

She instantly recognizes one half of the Alpha Pair that moved into Charming a few weeks ago.

“Welcome to Caliana’s!” she greets him with a smile. He smiles back, all mischief and wit. She instantly likes him. “I’m Caliana, but you can call me Cali. How can I help you today?”

He shakes her offered hand and octarine sparks erupt from the brief connection, making him grin. “Stiles Stilinski. I’m just checking things out, we just moved here.”

“I know,” Cali replies, unable to stop herself from smiling in return. “I’d heard rumors that there was a new Chief, and then the Howl the other night.”
Stiles shrugs, only partially apologetically. He isn’t sorry about the Howl itself, just that it disrupted a lot of people’s dinners.

Blake hops up onto the counter next to Cali and mews plaintively at Stiles, who immediately caves and pets the black cat, cooing over how handsome he is. The fact that her familiar likes him is a good sign.

“Well, we have a little bit of everything,” Cali explains, gesturing around herself. “And if we don’t have it, I can get it.”

“That’s a good slogan,” Stiles replies as he examines the minerals and gems in the glass case in front of him as he pets her cat into a purring puddle of fur.

Cali laughs, “Sure, but our slogan is actually ‘we’re not liable for your mishaps’.”

Stiles cackles and scoops up Blake, who snuggles into him. “You have anything on these guys?” he asks curiously.

Cali smiles and reaches out the scratch around the voidcat’s ears. Stars and space dust are showing in his coat as he lets his glamour go. His eyes are half-lidded like tiny solar eclipses. “I do. Are you looking to summon your own familiar?”

“I’m thinking about it. I have Peter, but it’s not the same thing.”

Peter, Cali assumes, is Stiles’ Soulmate. “Channeling and a familiar-bond are definitely different things.”

Stiles nods. He’s young, but he understands the fundamental difference between using a creature as a channel and a familiar as a channel. He also seems aware of the risks.

“Well, I’ve got a couple of volumes on familiars. Are you looking for the basics or something more advanced?”

Stiles follows her over to the bookshelves, Blake still purring away in his arms. “Advanced, definitely. I did some research online back when I found out about all of this.”

Cali nods, “Find a lot of weird stuff?”

Stiles smiles ruefully, “A lot of it was informative, but a lot of it was also Dungeons and Dragons and Harry Potter related.”

“So, reliable but fictionalized,” Cali concludes. She locates a slim volume and trades it for Blake. Stiles immediately begins to flip through it. “This is a good one. It’s not all-inclusive, but it goes into detail about preparing to call for a familiar, the ritual itself as well as in-depth care instructions based on type.”

“Great!” Stiles follows Cali back to the counter.

As he leaves the shop, Blake perches next to her, the galaxy swirling through his fur, and mews up at her. She smiles, “I like him too.”

Blake meows, and his glamour slots into places, making him look like a plain black cat again.

“I know. Everything is going to change now.”

*
There is a house in Charming. There isn’t anything special about it. It’s a single story construction with blue clapboard siding on a three-acre lot. Sure, the garden is one of the prettiest in town, but other than that, it’s actually a little on the small side. Three bedrooms, two bathrooms and a two car garage.

Nothing special.

Except.

Except for the wards.

Circles upon circles of protective magics woven from belief itself. Runic magic working in harmony with Faerie magic working in harmony with Native magic. Enochian magic mixing with Eastern magic mixing with Tribal magic.

The strongest wards in the world rivaled only by the ones on the Vatican in Rome.

The creatures that live on those three acres repay that protection by taking care of the land and the house that sits upon it. The gnomes take care of the garden alongside the family of rabbits that live under the willow tree. The garden is always in bloom, always producing some of the best fruits and vegetables in the county.

The flower-faeries that live in the rose bushes take care of the other plants and weave little bits of faerie magic into mundane items that lie around the house. Little things like car keys so that they will return to their owners if lost.

The house-brownies (called borrowers by most) take care of the house. They fix things that get broken, keep the place clean and organized. They locate things like lost socks and chase away sentient dust bunnies.

In return, the Spark and the Alpha give their protectees first choice from the garden. They bring home new seeds and shiny baubles as thank-yous for the aid they are given. They garner loyalty from the creatures that live their lives on this land.

The Elder brings home a beautiful house for the Brownies that lives in the third bedroom. A home within a home. He brings the rabbits prime nesting materials. He brings the gnomes tools to aid them in their work. The faeries ribbons and swatches of bright, gauzy fabric.

The land wakes up around all the activity. The willow tree grows and forms a dryad who plays with the fish in the pond below her branches. The fish become more than fish, like the rabbits are more than rabbits. The land becomes. An awareness that knows who it belongs to and who belongs to it. It ties itself into the wards.

The wakening echoes into the ether. The Ley-Lines sing with the magic as bright, pure octarine flows into them as a new Crossing is created beneath the house. A single point on a map that won’t be discovered for some time until the ley-lines are remapped by someone with power.

*  

“Sir, the Mayor is on line two.”

“Thank you, Patty,” John says, and drops a carrot stick back into the ziploc baggie on his desk. He hit the speaker button and the required line. “Mayor Jennings, how can the Police Department help you today?”
Albert Jennings is getting on in years, and has announced that he won’t be running for re-election next year. It’s creating a power-vacuum that Jacob Hale is eager to fill. John isn’t looking forward to the campaign next year. He, at least, doesn’t have to run one himself. The joy in being an appointed officer instead of an elected one.

“John,” Jennings is a good man, but he’s old and tired of holding back ambition like Hale’s and that of other people. It shows. “I’ve just gotten word that an investment firm is looking into settling in Charming. I was hoping you’d look into them for me.”

“Sure,” John says, grabbing for a pen. “Shoot.”

“They’re called the League of American Nationalists.”

*

She sits in a patch of sun, curled up and purring when she hears it.

A heart-call that thrums through her.

Thudflutterthud.

Heartbeats. Two of them that beat together, entwined.

She knows the sound deep inside herself. It makes her heart skip a beat as it vibrates through her. She suddenly feels awake in a way that she never has before. She feels called.

She rises from her spot on the branch of a tree she has called home for many years. Violet scales winking in the sun like jewels as she stretches. Glittering, gossamer wings not unlike a butterfly’s stretch out around her and she takes to the air.

She is powerful.

She knows.

Like calls to like.

Somewhere out there in the world, her person, her magic one lives their life entwined with another. She is needed. She is wanted. As she flies, she blinks out of existence. The only evidence of her passing is the faintness of a joyful giggle.
Mayans

Chapter Summary

“Well, this looks like a bag full of fun,” a voice says from the doorway.

Stilinski relaxes in his chair as the young man from the street steps into the room and closes the door behind him. He grins widely around the room as if he is unaware of the tension about to boil over. He weaves through the Mayans to perch himself on the corner of the Chief’s desk.

Marcus feels it when the boy gestures and a barrier erects itself between the Mayans and the Sons. He is one of the few watching close enough to see the flare of magic in his eyes. The boy meets Marcus’ gaze and winks.

Marcus can’t help but laugh. He turns to Morrow, “You don’t know, do you? What you have, how things are changing.”

Chapter Notes

Posting this chapter a day early otherwise ya'll won't get one this week. I am headed to a Rabbit Show tomorrow and am getting up at an ungodly hour to drive 4 hours and spend the day. So I just won't have time.

In this chapter: The wheels, they are a turnin’.

Disclaimer: Octarine as the color of magic belongs to Terry Pratchett and the Discworld. I own nothing TW or SOA.

Seven:

The Mayans MC is made up of men who are either immigrants from Mexico or are first or second generation Mexican-Americans. This makes them more prone to superstition than most. They’re far closer to their heritage than most white Americans are. They’re proud of this fact and hold no shame in being caught performing some age-old ritual to banish evil spirits or bring luck to a run.

A few of them are a little less human than their brothers.

Marcus Alvarez was raised by a bruja mother and grandmother. He’s closer to the old ways than most. He’s led humans and non-humans alike. His Sergeant at Arms is nahual, a man-wolf. There’s a brujo in the Santo Pedro charter.

Marcus might not have much talent for the arcane outside of good luck charms, but he knows the signs.
Just like he knows that Juice Ortiz is some kind of Fae, even if he can’t pin what kind.

Morrow is blind to it all, which is one of the reasons Marcus thinks he’s a moron.

Every Mayan worth his salt can recognize a being that is more than his skin shows him to be. So when they park their bikes in a long line on Charming’s Main Street, they all recognize the other in the young man that stops next to Oscar’s bike. Oscar tenses, eyes flaring up beta-gold as they stare at the young man.

“Oscar,” Marcus punctuates, warning in his tone. They’re in the Sons territory to deliver a message, not start something with a local.

The young man blinks at Oscar, then grins and winks at him before looking around at Marcus. Marcus manages to keep his curses to the inside of his head, but it’s close. This kid is brujo to the extent of being a beacon of power. He reminds Marcus of his abuela just before she passed away. In the end, she’d been so close to the magic it had consumed her body when she died in a flash of octarine fire.

The Sons roar up the street to park across the way from the Mayans. It’s high noon at the OK corral and Marcus doesn’t like turning his back on the witch, but needs must, and Oscar has never let him down.

Jax Teller meets him in the middle of the street, standing at Clay Morrow’s shoulder like a good VP. Marcus likes Teller more than Morrow. Jax has his little Fae at his shoulder and he recognizes Oscar as other and clocks the witch’s location before even laying his gaze on Marcus. Smart. He’ll go far.

“Why are you here, Alvarez,” Morrow demands. “We had an agreement. You stay out of Charming, we stay out of your territory in Oakland.”

Marcus offers a half-shrug to Morrow, “Well, after the other night, how could I not come by? It isn’t every day power changes hands, is it ese?”

Jax straightens up and he meets Marcus’ gaze head on as several police cars stop in the middle of the street to divide the tense standoff. Out of one of the SUVs comes a middle-aged man with a warrior’s look about him. He strides over to the group in the middle of the street with a blank face and a shotgun tucked under his arm.

“There a problem here, gentlemen?” he asks. His nametag reads Stilinski and he’s wearing the stripes of the Chief of Police. No Unser, how interesting.

“I don’t got a problem, Chief,” Morrow says with a smile. He goes about a show of lighting up a cigar and easing back away from the Mayans.

“No problems, Chief,” Marcus says in agreement. “I just wanted to introduce myself to the new alpha is all.”

The Chief heaves a sigh, “Shit.”

Interesting, He understood the underlying meaning in Marcus’ statement.

“You couldn’t be more subtle about it?” Stilinski demands.

Marcus shrugs, “Where I come from, it is best to not hide when it comes to things like this.”

Stilinski’s eyes flick from the Sons to the Mayans, From Jax’s weary gaze and Juice’s tense frame to
Clay’s ill-hidden curiosity. Then they scan the lines of bikes, skipping over most of the men, but landing on the Santo Pedro brujo and Oscar at Marcus’ shoulder.

“You want to hash this out here?” Stilinski asks.

“Middle of the day in public,” Marcus replies. “Sí, it is neutral as it gets unless we all want exposure.”

“What the fuck are you talking about?” Clay demands, finally losing patience.

“Clay,” Jax starts, but he gets cut off by the President. Which is another reason to dislike him. A president that does not listen to his men is a president that will eventually be killed by them. Clay Morrow is living on borrowed time if the expression on Jax Teller’s face is anything to go by. The boy hides it quickly though.

“I think we’d better take this inside,” Stilinski says after a look toward the Mayan side of the standoff. “Both of you send your guys home. You can come to the station. Neutral ground and no prying ears.”

“Acceptable,” Marcus intones. He gives the order for his men to move out, naming the ones to stay. Oscar and the brujo, Vicente, will stay with Marcus, along with his VP and another enforcer.

Clay is tense and angry at being ordered around, but sends the Sons on their way. Tig, Jax and Juice remain, along with the Scotsman.

They get a police escort to the station. Stilinski sends most of his men on patrol. One, Hale, refuses to leave and gets shut out of the Chief’s office with a door to the face. It is a tense room, Mayans on one side, Sons on the other while the Chief sits behind his desk, loaded shotgun in easy reach.

“The challenge was set three nights ago, Mr. Alvarez,” Stilinski says. “You’re a bit late to be trying to stake a claim.”

Marcus waves his hand dismissively, “I have no need to claim territory. I am human, but I understand the way these things work. I have many in my club who travel through the area. I wish to know if the Alpha is amenable to travel within his borders.”

“The fuck are you talking about?” Morrow demands, deciding he’s had enough. “What Alpha?”

“Clay,” Jax snaps finally, putting himself between the angry Son and Alvarez. “Don’t.”

Behind Clay, Juice’s eyes have gone pitch black as he readies himself to act. Vicente cusses lowly in Spanish, tensing. Chibs looks like he’s going to have a heart attack, and Oscar has an expression on his face that tells Marcus that he is growling too low for human ears to hear.

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things are changing.”

Morrow looks nearly apoplectic with rage. Jax looks resigned, but the blond steps forward to take the lead, “Things are still settling around here, Alvarez. You could have waited.”

“No, I couldn’t,” Marcus retorts, not unkindly. “You know that.”

Jax heaves a sigh and glances askance at Juice, who shrugs. They may be more informed than Morrow, but this has caught them flat-footed and unsure how to proceed. They can only ignore Clay and Tig for so long before one of them takes exception to it.

Marcus turns back to the Chief and the young man, “I apologize for the disruption, but needs must.”

Stilinski looks like he can feel a headache coming on. The young man keeps that smile on his face, it helps disguise the calculating gaze. “I get it, man. We’re new here and you want to know if we’re going to disrupt the status quo.”

Marcus nods.

The door opens again, and a man slips into the room. He looks at home among the near dozen bikers in the room with his dark jeans and leather coat. There is something wild about him, though. Something that makes Oscar take a step away from him instinctually before he stops himself. The man places himself in front of the desk, arms crossed casually and eyes calculating as he takes in Marcus and his men.

Marcus can see it when he recognizes what Vicente is, and his eyes flare Alpha red when they land on Oscar.

Distantly, Marcus is aware of Morrow cussing up a storm and demanding answers, but he’s too busy trying not to look away from the Alpha wolf that’s pinning him with his eyes. This is a powerful wolf, and not just because he’s Alpha. Marcus has met Alphas before. They haven’t felt like this. He recognizes the wolf, but there is something other about him too.

Something that tells Marcus that being on this man’s bad side would not be a smart thing.

“Enough.” It is said quietly, but it cuts through the room like a heated blade.

Marcus steps back. Clay goes quiet.

The young man at the Alpha’s shoulder is not a witch. He’s a Spark. Marcus feels like a fool. The wolf holds out a hand, “Peter Hale.”

“Marcus Alvarez,” Marcus replies, and shakes it because to do otherwise might get him killed.

Peter tilts his head toward the Spark at his side, “My mate, Stiles.”

Marcus gives the Spark a respectful nod.

Peter continues, gesturing to the Chief of Police now standing instead of sitting, “My Pack Enforcer and Elder.”

The Chief nods once at the introduction, Marcus nods respectfully. The Chief is either an exceptional human, or he’s very good at hiding the fact that he isn’t human.

“I ask permission for my people to travel peacefully through your territory, Alpha Hale,” Marcus
requests respectfully. “While we have no intention of bringing trouble to your doorstep, but nature of who we are, I cannot promise it won’t happen.”

“I don’t mix in human affairs,” Peter says. His eyes have softened back to their human blue. “Not much, anyway. So long as you and yours don’t bring me trouble on purpose, then they can pass through.”

Marcus nods, “Thank you.”

Peter’s eyes go red again as he turns his head to look at Oscar, who can’t help but let his eyes go gold in response. “Are you going to be trouble for me?” Peter asks in a deceptively genial tone.

Oscar stiffens and shakes his head, “No Alpha.”

“Good.” Peter says, and looks away toward the Sons.

It’s a dismissal if Marcus has ever seen one. He takes it as one and ushers his men out of the little office and out of the building. His job is done. So long as they’re careful they won’t have to deal with Peter Hale or his Spark ever again.

He hopes they manage to stay on the man’s good side. If he has one.

As he mounts his bike to ride out of charming, Marcus Alvarez feels a small amount of pity for Clay Morrow. It leaves quickly, replaced with a small amount of vindictive glee.

The King of Charming is going to be unseated and a new reign will begin.

Marcus is looking forward to it.

*  

Clay doesn’t like being yanked around. He likes it even less when it seems like he’s the only person in the room that doesn’t get the joke. Tig is pissed, but seems to have caught on at some point, but Tig has seen some shit.

So has Clay, but Clay served in Vietnam and the shit he saw and did over there is a different flavor from what Tig saw during his time in the Marines. They’re the same, but they’re different. Clay came out of it swearing he would never answer to anyone but himself ever again, Tig came out with a couple of screws loose and an outlook that can only be described as whimsical.

Clay takes a good look around the room and then parks himself in the same chair he’d sat in just a couple of days ago when he’d come here to introduce himself to the new Police Chief. He’s not a stupid man. A stupid man couldn’t stand at the head of a successful criminal enterprise for forty years. A stupid man wouldn’t be able to see the writing on the wall.

His hands won’t let him ride forever. If he can’t ride, he doesn’t get a vote. If he doesn’t get a vote, he can’t be president.

Jax isn’t ready to be president. Not with his old man’s ghost whispering in his ear.

He’ll make a good president if he can sort himself out. If he can’t the club will shatter and they’ll all end up dead.

“Alright,” Clay says in a voice that sounds calmer than he actually is. “Explain.”

Juice giggles nervously. Chibs shushes him, keeping himself between Juice and Tig like Tig might
attack the little spaz. He might. He’s got a wild look in his eyes that usually heralds violence on his part. Chibs starts talking softly in Gaelic at Juice, who actually seems to understand to some extent.

Chief Stilinski settles back into his chair and digs through his desk. He unearths a packet of hostess brand brownies and fights with his son over them with a series of gestures and expressions. He appears to win, because he rips open the package and takes a bite with a gloating, victorious look.

Stiles heaves a sigh and turns back to face the Sons.

“What are you?” Jax asks. Not who, what. This does not escape Clay’s notice.

“I’m a Spark,” Stiles tells him, making Juice and Chibs stare. He grins at the two of them. “I’m magic.”

Juice raises his hand like he’s five years old and waiting for the teacher to call on him, “I’m a Tweener.”

Peter Hale’s interest is caught by this expression. He looks Juice over and smiles in a very unsettling way. His mouth has too many fangs in it for Clay's comfort. “Fascinating,” Peter says.

“Oi!” Chibs butts in, “None ‘o tha’, yea?”

Peter sends the Scot an exceptionally benign smiles. It makes the man’s hackles rise.

Stiles smacks at Peter’s shoulder, “Stop it. We’re not keeping him, he’s not a pet.”

“No,” Jax says, “he’s a Son.”

For Jax, this means that Juice is one of theirs, end of story. Anyone who wants him has to go through the rest of them. This is the way of the Sons. Clay agrees with him.

“What the fuck’s a tweener?” Tig demands, eyes still fixed on Juice.

“My dad was human,” Juice explains. “My mom’s a faerie.”

“Like a tiny sparkly thing with wings?” Tig demands.

“No,” Juice says. “Like a tricksy, curse casting, baby stealing Fae.”

“What, so she stole you?”

“I’m not a changeling, Tig. I’m a Tweener. A half-breed that doesn’t belong in either world.”

Suddenly, Juice’s eagerness to prove himself to his Brothers makes much more sense to Clay. It doesn’t make him any less of an annoying, hyperactive little spaz, but it makes it more tolerable. The Sons have given Juice something he’s always wanted but never had. A family. Juice’s loyalty belongs to the Sons, unquestioningly.

“How do you know about all this shit?” Clay demands of Chibs.

“I spent a decade in Northern Ireland, aye?” Chibs retorts, and it’s all the explanation Clay really needs. The sheer amount of faery stories that still comes out of Ireland is amazing.

“And you?” he barks at Jax.

“Juice told me after the howling,” Jax explains with a shrug.
Okay, Clay can deal with that. Jax takes time to digest things, and then he takes even more time to
decide how to best go about things in a way that won’t hurt the club. He can live with that. He turns
to look at Stiles and Peter, who are watching the conversation like it’s a fucking tennis match. “What
about you three. What’s your deal?”

Peter’s shoulders square up as his spine straightens, “I was born a werewolf. I am now the Alpha of
Charming.”

Stiles grins, “I’m a Spark. I’m basically a wizard.”

Behind Stiles, Stilinski snorts. He and Stiles exchange a look that makes it very clear that there’s a
familial connection there. “I’m his father,” Stilinski says flatly, like that’s enough. It probably is.

A silence settles over the room then as each person takes in the abrupt change that the arrival of the
Mayans has brought to Charming and her inhabitants.

“We could use a man like you,” Clay eventually says into the silence, eyes on Peter. He’s been
making plans for recruitment due to his relation to the Charming Hales, the werewolf thing adds a
second layer of appear.

Peter looks contemplative for a moment, then raises an eyebrow at Stiles, who shrugs with a grin.
The Chief snorts when the look is turned on him, “I was already prepared to arrest you on occasion.”

Peter grins, “Naturally.” He turns his gaze to the Sons, looking each of them over. Clay isn’t sure
what he’s looking for, but eventually the man says, “I’ll think about it.”

And that seems to be the end of it, because Chief Stilinski takes the opportunity afforded to kick
them out of his station house before yelling for Deputy Chief Hale to get his ass in the office. Which
he does after sneering at Peter on the way past.

Peter just smiles at him, delighted to have pissed him off.
Twila

Chapter Notes

Chapter 8. Still working on transitioning things and setting up plot and characters. Amazingly enough, I've started to develop a plan for this whole thing, and it only took me 40k words. This is going to be an epic meander through the story like Proposing to Strangers or Worn Out Shoes was. I'm not sorry.

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Eight:

She delights in mischief. Creates magic from nothing to be tricksy and joyous. She feels such humor flicker across her scales and the tips of her wings as she flutters through the circles. She hops from one to the next, flickers in and out of this Plane to play hopscotch with the wards around the Crossing.

Her person is powerful.

A Spark.

Pure belief made human.

She titters in joy and flickers into the open window where she finds them. Thudflutterthud all curled up together; their edges blending like only their skin holds them back. It does, but only just.

She chirrups and disembarks from the windowsill to curl up on a pillow in a stray sunbeam that has made its way into the room. She’s not much more than a small cat in size. All jewel-bright scales and glittery downy-soft feathers, all curling hither and thither. She goes gold at the tips of her wings.

She paws at the pillow, kneading the stuffing into an ideal shape to nest in. Then she turns a little circle, her tail flicking, and settles down in her prime spot.

When she looks back up, she is met with bright ruby eyes, indulgent in their gaze and sleepy-content in motion. Then she sees her person’s eyes. Oak tree sap with honey oozing with possible and a window into the moonpaths.

She chirps at him proudly. She arrived so fast and from so far away.

“Oh,” he breathes into the morning air, a little bit of wonder in his face. “Aren’t you gorgeous!”

She preens at the compliment and buts her head into his palm when he reaches out, a tiny pleased twitter escaping as he strokes down her back. Oh, he’s warm, and he smells like dandelions and magic. A curling thread unfurls inside her and reaches out to her Spark.

It connects and the bond cements. Familiar and Caster bound together.
Then a second touches the Alpha, and she can feel him too, and through him the little Pack they’re building. She chirrups at him, and he rumbles in response, pleased.

His eyes fade to the blue of shiny river rocks and oh, that’s nice.

She has two People.

She’s so pleased with herself. No one else she knows has two people.

Her Stiles scritches the hard to reach places between her wings and she sighs in pleasure, melting into the pillow. She is going to like it here, she can tell. As she settles, her glamour falls into place. The one to hide her from normal humans. Her scales go silvery white, and the patterns of her feathers and scales settle into the fur of her coat.

Her eyes remain gemstone violet for moment before going green with cat-like slits.

“Oh Twila,” Stiles tells her, pulling her pillow close. He knows her name. “You are beautiful.”

* 

David Hale doesn’t like his cousin. It has nothing to do with the fact that he’s a werewolf and everything to do with the fact that the man radiates danger from every pore. He’s seen the case files, been through everything about Peter’s case as he could. The man’s been a person of interest too many times to not have something going that isn’t on the right side of the law.

Oh, sure, his father absolutely hates the wolf side of the family, but David isn’t stupid. He knows it’s because Adrian Hale was born human and spent his formative years absolutely jealous that there were things his siblings could do that he just couldn’t. Jacob had swallowed the rhetoric that the werewolf side of the family is cursed and born to be evil hook, line and sinker.

But then, Jacob has always wanted their father’s approval more than anything else.

Adrian Hale is a great judge and a good husband. He’s an exacting father, with high expectations. David has always felt the pressure to be more than he is just meet his father’s expectations. He’s a good cop; a great one even. Sure he’s got a chip on his shoulder about being passed over in favor of Stilinski, but he’s a good cop.

He’ll make a fantastic Chief of Police one day soon, and after than a great judge.

He just has to endure this.

It makes no sense. Why a decorated officer with a stellar record would risk that for a man like his cousin. Peter has always been off-putting. He absolutely terrified David when they were kids. Now there’s too much of something sinister in him. He doesn’t know what happened after the fire, but from what he’s been able to piece together from the police reports, he’s pretty sure his cousin is a murderer.

So he doesn’t understand how Stilinski can bear to defend the man, much less let him anywhere near his son.

Now it looks like he’s getting into bed with the Sons, and David has had it with men who don’t do their jobs. He’s dealt with it from Unser since he joined the force, and now it looks like Stilinski is headed that direction.

“You know,” a voice says casually, interrupting David’s thoughts and making him jump. He looks
around to find Stiles Stilinski, the Chief’s kid leaning up against his bronco next to him. He’s got a
drink from the same fast food place as David got his lunch from and is chewing on the straw. He
doesn’t look at David, just squints into the sun watching the traffic. “I don’t get the Hales.”

“What,” David says, too confused to make it sound like a question.

“Hales are just so damn intense,” Stiles continues as if David hadn’t said anything. “I mean, look at
your dad, for instance. The human child, so resentful of special wolfy powers he runs away from
home. A little bit of an overreaction, but I get it. He gets a good education, marries the pretty girl,
becomes a county judge and has two successful sons. Cool beans, awesome even. But then he gets a
phone call that says his sister and her family are all dead in a fire and there’s only three survivors and
he does nothing.

Like, he didn’t even send flowers to the hospital or attend the funerals or anything.”

David wants to argue, but he remembers the day his father got the call vividly. Adrian Hale had done
everything short of a victory dance. It had made him look twice at the kind of man his father was.

“Then there’s Jacob, mister I’m-the-deputy-mayor-so-do-what-I-say who won’t listen to what he’s
being told and pushes for progress not because it’s the right thing for Charming, but because it will
make him rich and a shoo in for Mayor in the next election. How often do you see him with his
wife?”

Not often enough.

“Then there’s Laura, who ignored her duty as an alpha and it got her killed. Or Derek who is so
emotionally scarred his favorite method of communication is to threaten to rip people’s throats out
with his teeth when they annoy him. His eyebrows have their own personality, but then, it was his
relationship with his teacher that got his whole family burned alive, so I guess he’s allowed to have
issues.”

It takes a lot of willpower to not turn to stare at Stiles. He remembers Laura and Derek, barely. Derek
had been maybe three or four when the two branches of the Hale family had last tried to reconcile.
David hadn’t been much older.

“And Cora, who was so scared of the hunters that killed her family she ran all the way to South
America and keeps running, even after the hunters have been taken care of.”

David doesn’t know who Cora is, but he assumes she’s one of his cousins from the way Stiles is
talking. The teen takes a moment to slurp on his drink, which is made difficult by the mangled straw.

“And Peter?” David prompts.

“Peter’s a creature of circumstance. Always the black sheep, never trusted. Then he watches his
family burn, unable to save them while he burns himself. Then a coma for six years, followed by a
fugue state that makes him accidentally kill his own niece. Then he gets burned again and when he’s
finally on his feet again and maybe moving toward normal, the hunter that slaughtered his world
comes back to town looking to kill us all.

Now, I know you’ve read the case files on Kate Argent, but have you read the ones on Gerard
Argent?”

No, no he hasn’t. David shakes his head.

“I thought not. See, Peter hates the Argents, and the Argents hate the Hales. So yeah, Peter’s killed a
couple of people, but the only one that didn’t deserve it was Laura; but you knew that. You’re a smart guy. Now he’s got someone who believes in him, and who he believes in and we don’t have much of a moral compass because he’s been betrayed too many times and I’ve been possessed by the worst kind of evil out there.

But can you blame him after everything he’s been through? After reading his Eichen House file?”

David has to shake his head here, because that file had been horrifying and he wouldn’t wish that kind of treatment on his worst enemy.

“And then there’s you. Mister High-and-Mighty. Your daddy issues have daddy issues and you’ve got an authority problem so big you’ve got splinters in your eyes. You’re and arrogant douche-canoe and you need to figure out what you’re really fighting here’ ‘cause I don’t think you know.”

Stiles fishes an ice cube out of his cup and crunches down on it when David tries to absorb what Stiles is saying without getting mad and hitting the kid. Stiles pushes himself off the truck and starts down the street toward where David can see his jeep parked. Before he gets too far, he turns around and calls: “Ask Dad to see the Argent files. All of them. Tell him you want to understand.”

David watches him walk away, unable to think of anything to say. He remains in his spot for a few minutes after the jeep has driven away, staring out into the middle-distance as he thinks.

He isn’t quite sure what point Stiles was trying to make, aside from that all Hales appear to be assholes, but maybe he has a point. Maybe he’s been looking at this from the wrong angle. His wounded ego isn’t a great lens to look at the world through; and he’s always hated Jax Teller ever since he got Tara Knowles to look at him twice in high school.

He needs to look at this like he was trained to. As an investigator.

He pushes off the bronco and disposes of his trash before he heads toward the station.

He’s got some case files to look into.

*

Nothing really changes after the idea of the supernatural is revealed to the Sons. Things just seem to keep going. Juice gets sick of being used as evidence. The Sons keep doing what they do. Working in the garage during the day and running guns and protection at night.

The Stilinskis settle into Charming. The shop owners and community-minded citizens of the city find Stiles to be a charming young man, if a little mischievous. John, it turns out, is well-liked by his employees. He’s a good man and an excellent Chief of Police. He remains neutral in the face off between City Hall and the Sons of Anarchy, which most people can appreciate.

Even David Hale has to admit, it’s nice to go to work and only have to worry about being a cop.

Peter, for the most part, keeps to himself. He’s visible in town for two reasons. He’s attached to the Stilinskis, and therefore can’t be that bad if the new Chief is willing to consider the man family. He’s one of few men in town that rides a motorcycle and isn’t attached to the club.

Not for lack of trying on Clay’s part.

The Sons don’t recruit. Men who are drawn to the life tend to seek them out to prospect, not the other way around. So Clay’s initial foray into recruitment falls a bit flat. Of the usual things that draw people into the Sons, only one seems to hit anywhere close to appeal for the Alpha.
He doesn’t need women, he’s soulbound to Stiles.

He doesn’t need alcohol, as he can’t get drunk.

It takes a stupid amount of drugs to make his metabolism slow down fast enough for any of them to affect him.

He doesn’t care about the money, he’s solvent for this and several additional lifetimes.

He has no interest in guns, because he’s a werewolf and doesn’t actually need a gun, though he proficient in several different model-types. He’d been curious at one point why Hunters favored them so much.

The only thing that really seems to appeal to him is the violence. Peter, like most of the Sons, has a very deep well of violent rage tucked away inside him. This is something Clay can work with, if given the opportunity.

Jax takes a different tack than Clay. He, Juice and Opie take the time to get to know Peter and Stiles. It was fairly obvious early on that the pair comes as a package deal. So the three youngest members get to know them as a pair and as individuals.

After all, some of the best allies are the people you can call your friends.

*

John wants to sit and drink a beer and watch the game. Any game. He doesn’t care if it’s tennis or volleyball or hockey, he wants to watch it. He has a beer, cold with condensation, and a pizza is on its way. He lets out a groan of satisfaction as he sits down in his armchair. He loves this chair.

“Are we sure it’s only been a month and a half since we moved here?” he asks the ceiling after pulling the lever to make the foot rest pop out and the back recline. He has no plans to move for the rest of the night.

Stiles is sitting cross-legged in front of the coffee table. He’s got a pen tucked behind one ear, a highlighter tucked behind the other and pencil in each hand. He’s got two notebooks open, and approximately a dozen old books strewn across the table or stacked up in a pile next to him. “I’m sure. If it wasn’t we’d have already had to fight off an omega or something with our luck.”

Twila, the newest member of the family, hops up into John’s lap, shedding her glamour as she goes. She settles in the middle off his chest making plaintive noises until he pets the little faerie dragon. She’s got the mannerisms and personality of a mischievous cat, and the intelligence to be able to understand several languages, read and cast a few spells.

She’s a perfect match for Stiles.

It surprised no one when she decided that John was the best thing ever.

John blinks, decides that yeah, Stiles is probably right, and reaches for the remote to turn on the television.

Peter, who is stretched out on the sofa tapping away at his laptop reaches out and knocks three times on the wooden surface of the side table next to him. Stiles snorts at that, then uses his pencils to turn to the next page in two of the open books in front of him.

John finds and selects a sporting event (basketball) and settles in to watch it by picking a team and
resolutely not asking his son what he’s researching. Odds are it’s something to do with magic by the old-and-dusty feeling the books give off, but the last time he’d assumed that John had had to try to explain to Bobby Finstock why his kid was turning a paper on male circumcision in to his economics class.

The game plays on low, accompanied by the tapping of the laptop keys as the trio settles in for the evening. Twenty minutes in the doorbell rings, signifying the arrival of the pizza. There’s an argument over whether John can have pepperoni and sausage that John miraculously wins.

“I’ve made a decision,” Stiles announces after thirty minutes and four slices of pizza. “I think you should join the Sons.”

“Oh, this will be good,” Peter mutters, then closes the laptop to give Stiles his full attention. “And why, pray tell, should I join the merry gang of gun-toting motorcycle enthusiasts?”

“Because it gives us a way to keep tabs on the crap they bring home with them,” Stiles says like he thinks it’s obvious. “Let’s face it, they’re going to bring home something they shouldn’t eventually. It’s inevitable. Especially now that they know about stuff.”

“Are you saying that just knowing about the supernatural makes you a magnet for trouble?” John asks with a look on his face that says he thinks Stiles is an idiot but he’ll listen anyway because he’s a good father. “Because I’m pretty sure it’s mostly just you, kid.”

Stiles squawks indignantly, flailing his arms and losing a pencil in the process. Peter snatches it out of the air before it can imbed itself in the sofa. “I am not a trouble magnet. Sure, I can be an instigator, but Scott’s the trouble magnet. And he’s not here!”

Peter snorts, “Stiles, darling, you regularly invite werewolves that want to kill you into your home.”

“Not lately!” Stiles defends.

“Stiles,” John says, “Peter isn’t joining a one percenter biker gang just because you think it’s interesting.”

Stiles sputters.

“While I agree that I would look good in that fancy leather vest,” Peter drawls with a smirk. “It might not be a bad idea, John.”

“Why?”

“Because I’m the Alpha, and as the Alpha it is my job to make sure none of the kids bring trouble home with them.”

“You realize I’m going to end up arresting you at some point, right?”

“Naturally. I’m a mature adult, I can handle it if you can.”

John snorts, and the room lapses into silence for a while. It isn’t until he’s clicking off the television at the end of the game and getting up to head to bed that John speaks again. “Clay Morrow does not get to think that this means I’m in his pocket. You make it perfectly clear that I’m not part of the package like Stiles is. Also, you get to deal with the fallout from your uncle and cousins when they find out. I’m not cleaning up that mess.”

“Agreed,” Peter replies.
John pats Stiles on the head goodnight, then heads for his room. Stiles pushes away his research and sets down all his writing utensils before he crawls up onto the couch with Peter. Peter sets aside the laptop as Stiles settles in at his side and places his head on his chest.

“You just want me to have something to do,” Peter accuses softly. It is no secret that he’s been getting restless lately.

“You’ll have fun being a criminal mastermind on purpose,” Stiles says with a grin.

Peter raises an eyebrow and huffs out a chuckle, “I’m not sure Clay Morrow is the kind to allow his people to be criminal masterminds without his express permission.”

“You’re smart,” Stiles retorts, “you’ll find a way.”

“A biker gang though?”

“It’ll be fun. Besides, I think Jax and Juice will make good packmates.”

“Ah, so now we get to your true motivation,” Peter gooses Stiles’ side with his claws, making him squirm in place for a moment, unable to escape the wolf’s superior grip. “What, the three of us aren’t enough pack for you?”

Stiles digs his pointy elbow into Peter’s ribs, making him growl. “I think if you think a pack of three is enough to cover our territory without ripping itself apart then you’re lying to yourself, because you aren’t stupid.”

“We are powerful Stiles, we don’t really need a bigger pack.”

“Yeah, but I can’t be in six places at once. I read the theory and I don’t think I want to try that.”

They fall silent. Peter watches lights from the street cross the wall and ceiling as a few cars pass the house. Stiles presses his ear to Peter’s chest to listen to his heart beating. They stay that way for a while, just existing.

“I won’t degrade myself by prospecting. If Clay really wants me, he’ll have to patch me in in full or not at all.”

“He’s an idiot if he doesn’t already know that.”

*

Clay Morrow, it turns out, is not an idiot. It’s one of the many things that makes him a dangerous man.
Inside Jax, below his sternum and behind his heart, something snaps into place and he can breathe again.

He doesn’t understand Pack. Doesn’t know what it means.

It feels important. More important than anything else he’s ever done.

It feels like not alone and together and family in a way the Sons never have.

---

So, this is a thing. Pack growing and things starting to spin up.

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There is a day approximately two and a half months after the Stilinskis move to Charming that things seem to just sort of start. An explosion rocks the night sky as a warehouse storing weapons and ammunition goes up in a fiery ball of glory and death. John hits the ground running with the case, which of course immediately has everyone in town believing the Sons had something to do with. David Hale is extremely vocal about it, he wants the sons gone, even if they mystery of Beacon Hills and the Chief and his kid are starting to consume his waking hours.

It isn’t hard to figure out that the company that owns the warehouse, Blue Bird Feed Co, is a shell corporation owned by the Sons of Anarchy. There’s no paperwork, but it’s fairly easy to puzzle out. This leads to a conversation with Clay Morrow that reveals personality traits in both the President and the Chief that they share.

They are both stubborn, both intelligent and both have the ability to talk their way around a person to get what they want.

Peter, who is allowing himself to go through a six-week mini-prospectship (really, he’s using it to decide if this whole motorcycle gang thing is something he’s willing to commit to for the rest of his days or not), does his best to remain out of the way while being wildly entertained by the confrontation that the two older men have.

Then the bodies are found.
And the residents of Charming learn just why John Stilinski was given the job of Chief of Police, bypassing the heir apparent in David Hale. He buckles down and investigates. He hounds the crime lab in Lodi, has Stiles look at the evidence (he has long since resigned himself to his son knowing more about his cases than he should) and they bring in a pair of men claiming the colors of the Mayans.

Clay, who has been running his own investigation parallel John’s, spits nails when he hears that the cops beat him to the culprits. He isn’t used to going in blind where it comes to Charming PD. With Unser in his pocket the last forty years have gone exactly how he wants, when he wants.

Not anymore.

Of course, there’s also the fact that Tig was apparently hitting the two women that were killed.

It complicated the investigation, pissing off everyone involved. It linked a Son to the location, causing the Blue Bird front to be burned in the course of the investigation. Bobby and the lawyers were going to have a hell of a time liquidating that asset.

Stiles, naturally, was the one that pointed out that just because Tig’s DNA was found inside the victims didn’t automatically make him the arsonist. It just made him exceptionally gross with a side dish of creepy.

The moment the two Mayans were arrested, Marcus Alvarez reached out to Peter. The hit against the Sons had been in the works for months, and he didn’t want the Alpha to feel attacked. Peter felt obliged to inform the Mayan President that the Sons were actively recruiting him, and that he was feeling inclined to let them.

Alvarez asked if the Sons, especially if their President, knew what having an Alpha werewolf in his club was going to do. Whether Morrow knew that he would be declaring the Sons Pack under Peter and what that would mean.

Of course he didn’t. None of them but Juice had any real clue.

Alvarez had a point. The Sons needed to know everything they would be getting into if they patched Peter in. The good and the bad.

They all seemed to be under the impression that creatures like Peter, like Juice were rare and came with no strings attached. That notion needed disabusing before Stiles’ power as a Spark was needed to deal with a threat to the territory.

Peter is an intelligent man with a strategist’s brain. He knows that the threats will come. Just like he knows that while his pack is strong with just himself, Stiles and John in it, it would be nearly unstoppable with a force like the Sons behind it.

Stiles recommends bringing Jax in. Jax is young, strong, smart. He sees the need for change and embraces it. Jax wants to lead the club toward more legal ventures, bringing them a safer, stronger base and fewer lean times. He’s also got the flexibility to accept what becoming part of a Pack will mean for the Sons.

Peter agrees.

* 

Peter stands next to Jax in the corridor, watching through the window at the tiny unmoving bundle that is Jax’s newly born son. Jax is pale and riveted on the rise and fall of Abel’s chest as the
ventilator breathes for him. Peter sets his hand on the other man’s shoulder, a show of solidarity and strength.

Jax can’t breathe.

He can’t think.

That’s his son. His.

And he might die.

His whole world wrapped around a four pound bundle in a little plexiglass box.

His soul feels constricted into the area of his chest where his heart should be.

It is not there anymore.

It is in there with his boy.

His Abel.

He feels like he is choking on the pain in his heart. The sobs too big to make it up his throat.

He never knew that loving someone could hurt so much.

Peter stands next to him. A solid weight. His hand on his shoulder a tether to the ground lest he be pulled away in the current.

“Is there anything?” Jax manages to force the words out. They hang heavy between them; floating in the hallway like lead weights waiting for a chance to crush him.

The hand on his shoulder squeezes, and a shift in the air tells Jax that Peter is looking at Abel with Wolf eyes. With Alpha eyes.

For long moments that drag into eternity neither man says anything. They watch the tiny chest move up and down and Jax begins to plead with whatever power might be listening to have mercy on his baby boy.

Then Peter speaks. His voice is a rumble of rocks raining down a mountainside, destroying everything that gets in the way. Include the heavy words in the air.

“Stiles is on his way.”

The air feels like it has been sucked from the room. Jax feels it freeze in his lungs, feels his heart skip a beat or several.

“How?” he croaks.

“Stiles is a Spark, Jackson,” Peter says, voice calm. Grounding. Sincere.

Jax turns his head to look into bright ruby eyes. Peter wears a human skin, but all Jax can see is a wolf. There is no lie in those eyes. Those eyes are terrifying, but all Jax can feel is a surge of relief. Peter is here, and Stiles is coming.

Abel is going to be okay.
He may not understand how, but he knows that Abel will be okay.

“Thank you,” Jax manages around the rushing sound of his own heartbeat in his ears. Over the cacophony of the heart monitor beeping in the next room.

Peter smiles. A genuine, warm thing that curls around Jax protectively. “You’re Pack, Jackson. Abel is Pack.”

Inside Jax, below his sternum and behind his heart, something snaps into place and he can breathe again.

He doesn’t understand Pack. Doesn’t know what it means.

It feels important. More important than anything else he’s ever done.

It feels like not alone and together and family in a way the Sons never have.

Jax feels the weight of the kutte on his back. Knows that Peter feels it too even though he’s only been wearing it for a few days.

“Thank you, Alpha.” It slips out of him without prompting.

The cord tying them together solidifies.

Everything changes.

And yet.

And yet, nothing changes at all.

*

Juice instinctively follows Stiles into the NICU when he sweeps past the Sons in the waiting room. The air around the Spark crackles with livewire energy. Sparks of octarine flickering off him like fireflies; unseen by mortal eyes.

Peter and Jax are waiting in the hall.

They wait until the nurse and Doctor Knowles leave the room. Tara stops to have a brief word with Jax, but Juice doesn’t pay attention. He already knows that Abel is beyond mortal medicine. Only a Healing can save him now.

The four men enter the NICU. Juice stops at the door, closes it and puts his back against it. Peter closes the blinds on the window into the hallway and posts himself there.

Stiles and Jax flank the incubator. Power flares up around the spark, making the air heavy with the scent of ozone and petrichor. He places his hands over Jax’s on top of the incubator. His whiskey eyes glow bright gold with power. Octarine glows up Stiles’ arms from his fingertips in runic patterns. When he speaks it is like the world holds its breath.

“Do you love your son?”

“Yes.”

“Then believe that he will live, Jackson Teller. Believe him whole.”
Motes of magic drift through the air like sparks; winking out of existence before touching anything. The air goes thick. Each man in the room focuses on the child in the incubator. They believe with Stiles. They will vitality into his skin. Will his organs to knit together. His lungs to form properly. The holes in his heart to knit closed.

The octarine magic of pure belief suffuses Abel Teller for nearly a minute before it fades.

Slowly his stats on the monitors begin to improve in increments.

Jax breathes out a long, heavy sigh, “Abel.”

The magic fades from Stiles’ skin and eyes. He smiles when Jax looks up at him. “It will take a while. Healing doesn’t happen instantly for plain old humans like us. And he’s new, so he can only handle so much. He will heal; it will just take time.”

Jax takes this in. He nods in agreement and rounds the incubator to give Stiles a tight hug that speaks more than any words he can currently find. Stiles hugs him back, then guides him into the chair beside the incubator.


Juice follows Peter and Stiles into the corridor, his eyes black with night and his tattoos twisting up off his head in smoky, nebulous horns. They stand in the hallway for a long time to shake off the magic. Peter’s eyes Alpha red and his canines long and ears pointed in beta-shift.

In this form Juice can see the ties that bind. The golden rope of the soul-bond between Stiles and Peter. The red heart-strings of Pack that link them to each other and to Jax and Abel. A fifth disappears into the wall, leading to the Chief, wherever he is.

There is something growing here in Charming. Something strong and immovable and ferocious. Juice has never seen anything like it, and he’s over a hundred years old. A baby for a Fae, but old for a human. Want crawls into him and makes itself at home.

“Alpha,” Juice says formally. It catches Peter’s attention, which captures Stiles’. Juice bares his throat to their combined might and asks, “Please.”

Peter strikes.

Teeth set into his neck, hard enough to bruise, but not enough to break the skin. A show of dominance and power. Not to devour or turn. A rumbling, possessive monster of a growl vibrates up from the Alpha and into Juice and for the first time in his life, Juice doesn’t fight. He submits to the Alpha, to his Alpha.

A Pack bond snaps into place behind his heart.

Juan Carlos Ortiz feels like he belongs for the first time in his life.

*

The wind is a gossip. It tells tales to anything and anyone that will listens. It whispers through trees and slides around corners. It whips up a frenzy, babbling all it hears.

The wind carries knowledge into Chigger Woods. Knowledge of change and magic. Of strength pouring into corners where the world had gone stale. It tells of sparks and teeth and shadows. It speaks of a Healing and bonds.
The beings that live in the forest. The old creatures that hide from humans and dance under the moon take the knowledge and carry it farther than the wind. They carry it into places that the wind can’t reach.

The wind is a gossip. The creatures go to confirm the rumors.

The gnomes and the faeries and the rabbits in the Stilinski-Hale garden confirm it.

There is an Alpha of the Old Kind in Charming and he is Bonded to a Spark, and together they have begun to grow a Pack.

The wind takes the confirmation and travels far to whisper it in many ears.
“Gnomes are real?” Tig asks.

There’s a buzzing sound in Jax’s ears.

Peter shrugs, but it’s Chibs that answers, “Aye, nasty l’tle blighters they are.”

“Garden gnomes can be particularly vicious,” Peter agrees. “We have a large colony of them living under the herb garden. Stiles has put exceptionally strong wards on the property since we moved in. No one with ill intent toward anyone in the Pack can step foot on the property.”

“You want to give fifty AK-47s to colony of garden gnomes?” Clay asks flatly.

Chapter Notes

I am playing it fast and loose with SOA canon. Salient points and characters will be there, but mostly I'm playing this AU. TW is canon up to the end of S4, but goes wildly AU after that.

Tara isn't going to be in this much. I have a love-hate relationship with her character, and I do appreciate the love between her and Jax, but I do believe that she shouldn't have returned to Charming at all. I get why she did, but still, running back into it was not the way to go.

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Ten:

“Everyone’s got their own set of troubles.

Everyone’s got their own set of blues.

Everyone’s got their own set of struggles.

Walk a mile in another man’s shoes…”

- Another Man’s Shoes, Drew Holcomb and the Neighbors
Change is incremental. It lingers in the back of the throat. Sometimes it is sweet, sometimes it is bitter; for the most part it is somewhere in the middle.

Stiles went back for Peter. That is where it started.

John took the job as Chief of the Charming Police Department. That is where it moved to.

The Mayans paid their respects. That is where it introduced itself.

Jax had a son. That is where it changed again, restarting.

Gemma Teller-Morrow doesn’t like Peter Hale. Oh, she gets that having him as a Son is better than not having him as a Son. He’s powerful. Power calls to power, and now the Sons have more of it then they ever have. Gemma knows. She grew up at the knee of her grandmother; a strong witch in her own right. (Rose wasn’t one, maybe that’s where the trouble began.) She knows power from Power.

Gemma likes power. She likes being in charge and being an influence on the people in command. When John became weak and Clay stepped up, she turned to him. That choice has kept her safe and comfortable.

Her son, her Jackson is next in line for the throne. If only he would stop twisting all about. She needs him to be solid. To follow in the right father’s footsteps. Not into the shallow grave that is the ghost of John Teller.

What started with Tara leaving keeps getting bigger. Jax’s doubts keep growing like a devouring beast.

Gemma has to crush that beast beneath her heel. She has to get Jax back on the right path.

But everything is changing. Peter Hale wears the kutte of the Sons of Anarchy. He looks more to Jax than he does to Clay; but doesn’t bow to either one. Jax has begun to rely on Peter and Juice more and more; unwilling to involve Opie in club business as his best friend tries to get his life in order after getting out of Chino.

Juice is adorable, Gemma loves him, but he’s not the most reliable kid.

Peter is just trouble all around.

She stands in the corridor, contemplating the nature of change and its inevitability as she watches her baby watch his baby. Abel’s taken a turn for the better, which is a miracle in and of itself. She can’t help but feel suspicious though. She knows the boy visited a couple of days ago while Gemma was away getting something to eat.

She knows, deep down somewhere in her black heart, that she owes that boy a debt she will never be able to repay. She knows that he saved her grandson’s life. She doesn’t know how, but he unequivocally did.

Gemma watches her son watch his son.

She watches something inside him, something wild (angry and festering), begin to settle inside him.

Her husband has put them on a path toward something great and terrible. Everything is going to change and there is nothing she can do about it. Clay invited the wolf in; accepted him with loving arms. The only thing she can do is hold onto her son.
She’s going to have to prove how much she loves him.

So she watches Jax; no longer her little boy, but a man tested and true.

She prays her past choices don’t come back to eat her.

Gemma Teller-Morrow watches her only living child.

And the world spins on.

Spin. Spin. Spin.

* 

“What does it mean?”

Juice looks up, blinking blearily to get his eyes to adjust to the dim light in the clubhouse rather than the brighter light of the screen of his laptop. Jax comes into focus leaning on the bar across from him. “What?”

Jax makes an aborted gesture with one hand, then taps at the center of his chest with two fingers and dips his head in Peter’s direction. Juice flicks his gaze over to their Alpha who is playing pool and giving a lecture on the history of the supernatural in California to Clay, Piney and Chibs.

“Oh, right.” Juice bites his lip and chews on it for a second while he makes up his mind. Then he shuts the laptop and rises, “Come on. We should probably talk elsewhere. Wouldn’t want to interrupt school.”

Jax smirks. Clay is having a hard time accepting the fairy tale monster that came crawling out from under the proverbial bed. Piney, strangely, is more accepting of it all. He’s usually more resistant to change than even Clay, but when he can see the writing on the wall, he knows to get out of the way. Jax thinks he’s mostly acting accepting just to watch Clay have his mind blown.

It’s good for them. Good for the club.

Tig’s decided most everything is a bad trip and has given it all up as acceptable so long as no one tries to eat his face.

Chibs has started telling some wild stories from his time in Ireland now that everyone knows.

Bobby’s being practical about it. As charter treasurer, he’s always been more practical about the club. How will this impact their daily lives? Only on rare occasions and only if Peter needs more manpower dealing with a threat. Will it cost the club any money? Definitely not. Well, alright then. Bobby’s kosher.

Jax has no idea how Opie feels about it. His best friend has always been the quiet type, and with how little time he’s been spending around the clubhouse since he got out of Chino, it’s hard to get a read on him. Opie’s leaning straight, and Jax isn’t going to try to screw with that by broaching the subject.

Leaving the Prospect, who once had a beta werewolf try to savage him in Afghanistan, to confirm that Peter’s not that kind of werewolf before he had shrugged and gotten on with things.

Juice leads Jax into his room and closes the door before settling cross-legged on the bed. Jax settles onto to the one chair in the room, straddling it backward so that he cross his arms over the back of it.
“So, what’s the question?” Juice asks finally.

“What’s it mean?” Jax asks, face drawn into a thoughtful moue. “Pack, I mean. What does it mean?”

Juice lights up, and for a second Jax can see the other in his eyes. “Oh! Right. Okay, so it’s like this – “

*

The man before him is old. Frail. Broken. Sick.

His hair is wispy; a cloud of white drifting around the gauntness of his face.

There is a smell on the air. Tar, like cigarettes, and stale bile.

He is grateful for the years of practice he has had in disguising his feeling as disgust crawls up his spine.

When the old man smiles, dark eyes glittering with the banked sort of rage that consumes people whole, his teeth are blackened in the cracks between them.

“Do we have a deal, Mr. Zobelle?” the old man demands.

His voice is strong, for all that his body is failing him. He sits, thin and threadbare in a wheelchair.

Ethan knows that this is a man who once held great power. He still does, to a degree, but not nearly to the extent that he believes he does. He has no power over the League of American Nationalists. No power over the operation that Ethan runs.

Ethan is a means to an end for this man.

“Mr. Argent,” he says, voice betraying nothing as something spidery crawls up his spine. “I don’t see how I can be of any help here, my organization has no presence in Beacon Hills.”

For good reason, too.

The old man sneers, his face twisting in an ugly moue. A dribble of black trickles down his chin, “I can deal with Beacon Hills. I need you in Charming.”

Ethan allows his eyebrows to raise in mild surprise. His newest venture is Charming. The League’s mission to clean up the country town by town had hit a hiccup when they had first encountered the Sons of Anarchy. He didn’t personally have a problem with the Sons. They could keep on being as criminal as they wanted, so long as those activities stopped causing problems for the League.

Hence why Ethan was going to Charming. To cut off the head of the snake as it were.

“And what is in Charming that has caught your interest?” Ethan keeps his voice cordial and mild.

Argent angrily wipes at the black sick with what was once a pristinely white handkerchief, now a dull gray from many washings and splotched with black like a Rorschach Blot. “A man recently moved there. Peter Hale. I want his head on a plate. All I want is information, my men will do the rest.”

“And your organization will ensure the safety of my men through certain places of interest?” Ethan asks to confirm, and Argent nods.
Ethan doesn’t particularly care for Hunters on principle. It’s not what they do. Their cause is a righteous one. They remove evil from the world. No, what Ethan doesn’t care for is their methods. Most Hunters just shoot things.

But then, chess is a gentleman’s game.

“Then we have a deal, Mr. Argent.”

Across from him, a pleased grin crosses the face of Gerard Argent.

That blackened smile makes something like dread slither into Ethan’s stomach.

He feels like he just made a deal with the devil.

*

The Bluebird explosion had set the Sons back by at least six months while a new warehouse was built. Some of their customers were understanding and willing to work with them so they didn’t go elsewhere for their hardware. All the big fish were on board, so the few little fish they lost weren’t a huge deal.

No, it appeared that the problem was their suppliers.

The IRA didn’t care that the Sons had had a hiccup. They just cared that their merchandise wasn’t being moved. If it wasn’t being moved, then it wasn’t being sold. If it wasn’t being sold, the cause wasn’t being funded.

Unacceptable.

The IRA required an advance of two-hundred and fifty-thousand dollars to keep the cause funded.

The Sons had seven days to come up with the cash or the Irish would find a new distributor.

Unacceptable.

Piney wanted to sell a bunch of their remaining stock to some paramilitary group an old army buddy of his was part of. One of their buyers had offered to take the rest at a heavy discount.

It would only give them a fraction of the cash they needed.

“Even with collecting overdue dues,” Bobby said with a sigh, removing his glasses to massage the bridge of his nose, “we got nowhere near the cash we need.”

Jax doesn’t like the idea of selling the guns right now. Keeping them may be worse though. There’s some ATF goon sniffing around and about a million eyes watching the Sons. The town is watching, because this is the first time since ’91 that the Sons business had spilled into Charming. So their popularity is down and the town’s ‘live and let live’ policy is very close to becoming a thing of the past.

Things like this. Times when they’re all facing injury, jail time or death is when Jax wishes they could earn more legitimately.

It feels like the life is slowly killing all of them sometimes.

“Five percent interest,” Peter says. He’s usually quiet in church unless he’s got something significant to say. He’s the newest Son, and while the locals have all accepted him (hard not to, Peter is too
much like them down in his core for him to not be liked), their visitors from Tacoma don’t know him.

Happy isn’t judgmental, for all that he’s a cold-blooded killer, the other guys are a handful of unknowns. They’re down for a charity ride, and all being full patches, all of them are in church.

“To be repaid over the course of the next ten years,” Peter concludes.

“Excuse me?” Clay asks. He’s on his second cigar of the meeting. He’s been basically on fire since the warehouse blew up. The only thing that’s gone in the Sons favor is Peter joining the club and the peace with the Mayans that brought with them.

The Mayans aren’t willing to mess with Peter, and by extension Stiles.

That’s a whole other pile of weird. Jax can feel the connections he has to Peter, Stiles and Juice. He can even feel a thread connecting him to Abel at the hospital. Pack Bonds. Peter is his Alpha.

That had been a hell of a conversation to have with Stiles over carne asada burritos and Abel’s toaster.

Juice’s explanation had been far less useful, though he had learned a lot about how half-fae look at the whole thing.

“I give you the money, a loan, to be repaid by the end of ten years with five percent interest,” Peter looks bored. This is deceptive. Jax has learned a lot about the Stilinski-Hales in the last couple of weeks. Peter is a strategic, deceptive little shit with a hard-on for power and control. His protective streak is about five miles wide and sharp as his teeth when he’s shifted.

Jax can’t say he’s not just as protective.

“You have that kind of money?” Tig demands.

Peter shrugs, “Insurance payout from the fire has been sitting in my account for ten years gathering interest.”

Tig whistles, low and long.

Jax fights the urge to wince. The Hale fire is something all of them know about. It was the first thing Juice had found when he’d gone looking. They all know better than to bring it up. Nothing gets Peter’s back up then talking about before he and Stiles became Them.

“We don’t need the full two-fifty,” Bobby says, thinking hard. “If we sell our current stock – “

Jax cuts him off, shaking his head, “It might not be a bad idea to hold onto what we’ve got. Besides, if we sell them now, we’ll only get a fraction of what their worth.”

“My friend is solid – “

Jax raises a hand, cutting Piney off, “I believe you, Piney, but we both know he only wants them because the discount is good.”

“What do we do with them then?” Clay demands. “We’ve got nowhere to store them and the ATF is in town.”

“We break them down and split them up,” Jax says. “We’ve all got a stash at home.”
“Yeah, spread out the possession of a deadly weapon charges,” Tig sneers.

“We could always bury them,” Juice pipes up thoughtfully.

“What, like out in the woods somewhere?” Tig demands, looking like he wants to say something snarky but knows better with the mood everyone is in.

Juice shiftly looks to the three Tacoma Sons, then meets Happy’s stoic gaze. Happy terrifies Juice, but he trusts him. Happy gives a minute nod. “I know a dryad that owes me a favor. We could ask her to mask the site. Then we can bury the guns and the only person that’ll be able to find them would be the people that go to bury them and Stiles.”

Peter makes a thoughtful noise in the back of his throat, “I’ve got a better idea.”

The smile on his face is so perfectly congenial, it’s terrifying.

“I’m afraid to ask, but go ahead,” Clay says, waving his cigar through the air to indicate that Peter has the floor.

“We give them to the gnomes living in my yard,” Peter says, face and voice perfectly serious. There’s a long, drawn out silence.

“What?”

Jax isn’t sure who said that. He feels like he’s having an out-of-body experience.

“Gnomes are real?” Tig asks.

There’s a buzzing sound in Jax’s ears.

Peter shrugs, but it’s Chibs that answers, “Aye, nasty l’ittle blighters they are.”

“Garden gnomes can be particularly vicious,” Peter agrees. “We have a large colony of them living under the herb garden. Stiles has put exceptionally strong wards on the property since we moved in. No one with ill intent toward anyone in the Pack can step foot on the property.”

“You want to give fifty AK-47s to colony of garden gnomes?” Clay asks flatly.

“I dare you to try and find all the pieces of fifty AKs protected by class-A wards and gnome magic by digging up my back garden,” Peter says with an evil smirk.

Juice looks positively terrified and Chibs edges his chair away from the werewolf.

“Chibs?”

“I wouldnae trust a gnome as far as I could’ throw it, aye?”

“We can trust these ones,” Peter responds.

“Oh?” Chibs prompts.

“My fiancé is a Spark that welcomed the colony into his protection,” Peter explains. “They’re quite devoted. So are the faeries that live in our rose bushes, the dryad that lives in the willow tree by the pond, the rabbits that live by the vegetable patch and the family of brownies that live in the walls.”
“Oh my god,” Jax says with disbelief.

“I feel like I ate some bad ‘shrooms, man,” Tig says. His eyebrows are scrunched together in disbelieving curiosity. “Did we get teleported into a fairy tale?”

Peter bares sharp wolf-teeth at Tig, “Well, I am the Big Bad Wolf.”

Happy snorts in amusement.

Clay stares at the reaper carved into the table for a full minute before he replies, “Five percent?” Peter nods. “Write it up. Jax, Juice, Opie, you three deal with the guns and the gnomes.”

Jax nods and exchanges looks with Opie and Juice.

Peter nods, “I’ll have a contract drawn up and will make the withdrawal this afternoon.”

Jax doesn’t ask whether or not a withdrawal that huge will cause any red flags to pop up. He’s not sure he wants to know the answer. He’s also not sure how he feels about gnomes and faeries and brownies.

“This is the strangest conversation we’ve ever had,” Tig announces after Clay bangs the gavel to end the meeting. He looks like he’s still wondering whether or not he’s tripping on bad ‘shrooms or not. Even a little hopeful that he is.

Jax can’t really blame him, but this shit’s been happening since the Stilinski-Hales came to town and it doesn’t look to stop any time soon. Better to just embrace it and go with the flow.

He chooses to completely ignore the way that Happy and Peter exit church together, deep in conversation.

*

Stiles watches the three of them from the porch as they try to bribe the gnomes into taking the weapons. Opie is sitting, stoic and silent, face carefully blank as he dismantles the rifles. Juice has gone full-on fae in his attempt to coerce the gnomes into doing what he wants them to. Jax has taken to bribing them with bits of chocolate chip cookie.

The gnomes themselves have a blast. It’s like a game. One quarter of a cookie for one gun part; or one Fae trick from Juice in exchange.

It’s the most genuine entertainment Stiles has had in months.

The three Sons agree never to speak of it to anyone else.

*

“Hey, you okay?”

Jax looks up at Juice. The younger man is chewing on his bottom lip and twisting his fingers together like he needs something to do with them. This isn’t the first time Juice has caught Jax up here on the roof contemplating the world.

It’s a lot to take in.

He’s a father. Has someone wholly innocent who relies on him for everything.
The supernatural exists. Juice is half Faerie, Stiles is some kind of wizard and Peter is a werewolf.

Jax is part of a Werewolf Pack.

It’s like being a Son, only he can feel the bonds inside his chest. He doesn’t need to see a kutte to know whom to trust.

Juice is Pack. Juice can be trusted.

Because he doesn’t know who to trust any more.

Not after finding his father’s manuscript.

“Nope,” he says flatly, and offers Juice the binder that feels like it weights a thousand pounds.

Juice takes it and flops down on the edge of the roof next to him, flipping open the cover to read the title page. His eyebrows go up in surprise and he looks at Jax with those eyes. The fathomless black pools of shadows that are his real eyes.

Jax shrugs, “I found it in a box of his things when I was looking for baby things in the storage room.”

“You read it?”

Jax nods and then goes through the motions of lighting a cigarette just to have something to do.

“What’s it say?”

“A lot of shit,” Jax frowns, half pissed off and half confused. “It’s half the mad ramblings of a man lost in grief and half manifesto.”

“Okay. What did you get from it?”

“That Dad wanted to get the Sons out of guns. Wanted to take the club legit before it killed us all. He didn’t want this life for me and Tommy.”

Juice contemplates the pages, flicking through to skim the first few. He loves being a Son. Loves having his Brothers at his side, loves belonging to something. But he gets it. Juice isn’t violent by nature. Oh, sure, he’s had the last hundred and thirty-two years to figure out that he doesn’t do well on his own, and so long as he’s got people he doesn’t care what side of the law he’s on.

Human laws are stupid and convoluted.

He isn’t violent. He can kill with a touch and a word. He’s got shadows and midnight etched into his skin because his father was a Winter Fae, but he’s more about misdirection and stealth than confrontation and combat.

“You want that?” he asks, looking up at Jax.

Jax stares into his midnight eyes for a minute, giving the question the due thought it deserves. “Yes. I don’t want to lose the club. What it means for each of it. But I don’t want to have to worry about who’s gonna raise my kid if I go to prison.”

Juice doesn’t tell Jax that Abel’s covered. He doesn’t have to. They both know that Gemma would take him if needed. They also know that Peter won’t let Gemma raise Abel without direct Pack involvement.
“You know,” Juice tells him instead, “I didn’t join the Sons because I like the life. Sure, getting drunk and laid on Friday nights is nice and all, and I can’t say the adrenaline rush of a run isn’t one of the best highs out there, but I don’t think I’d miss it that much.”

“Why did you?” Jax asks, curious. “I mean, you’re a Tweener, you could have found a Pack or something before now, couldn’t you?”

“Sure I could have,” Juice says amicably. He doesn’t tell Jax that Peter is the first Alpha that’s looked at Juice and seen him and found value there. “But for a really long time I didn’t want to admit to being more than just some average guy, you know? I’ve never really... liked what I am before.”

Jax can’t imagine not liking who and what he is. It’s the one thing he’s always been sure of. He’s Jackson Teller, Son of Anarchy. It’s what held him together when Tara left. It’s what binds his feet to the ground. But he also doesn’t have weirdo powers and a lifespan longer than the average human.

The pair of them sit in silence for a while. Jax smokes his cigarette and Juice reads through bits of the manuscript. The silence is companionable. Comfortable and steady. There is a link between them. A Pack Bond that ties them together in a way only choice does.

The sun paints the Teller-Morrow Automotive lot in shades of orange and red as it sinks down the horizon. Dawg, Half-Sack and Lowell are closing the garage for the day. Bikes lined up along the rail by the clubhouse, shiny and chrome and beautiful.

This has been Jax’s world his whole life. It still is.

But everything is changing.

There’s a dark blue road king down there between Happy and Bobby’s bikes. It belongs to a man who can turn into a wolf.

Their Alpha. The head of their new second family.

 Entirely entwined with the Sons, and yet entirely separate.

“Have you shown this to Opie?” Juice asks as the lights on the lot come on and the sun finishes sinking and the moon begins to rise.

Jax shakes his head. Opie is his best friend. His brother more than the rest of them. He doesn’t know how to help Opie; he wishes he did.

“You should,” Juice advises. “You should invite him, Donna and the kids to Pack Night, too.”

“You think?” Jax doesn’t know what Pack Night is supposed to be like. He thinks like one of Gemma’s family dinners without the disguised hostility that has permeated them lately.

“I think Opie needs his brothers, but he can’t turn to the Sons like he used to because of Donna. And I think Donna needs to know that we’ve got her, and even though we’re Sons, we’re more than that. I think she and Op need Pack, maybe even more than you and me.”

Jax takes the manuscript back when Juice offers it. The other man hasn’t read the whole thing, but he has skimmed through it, and he’s a much faster reader than Jax. It feels like a cinderblock in his hand, awkward and deceptively heavy.

“This is a lot. It’s a lot about who your old man was before he died, and a lot about what the Sons
were originally meant to be,” Juice begins. He looks down on the lot when voices come from the clubhouse preceding Clay, Tig, Bobby and Peter’s exits. “Wanting what he wanted is great, but don’t let how he wanted it get in your head. You’re not your father, man. You’re Jax, and you gotta do this Jax’s way.”

Down on the ground, Peter turns to look up at them. Jax gets the feeling he can hear them.

“Yeah, you’re right.” Jax puts out his latest cigarette. “Besides, I’ve got a lot of things he didn’t.”

Juice claps him on the shoulder, “Come on, let’s go get tacos or something.”

Jax nods, tucks the binder under his arm, and turns to follow Juice off the roof. “You mind swinging by Op’s on the way?”
Winston

Chapter Summary

Donna Winston used to believe in the club. Then her husband got sent to jail because of it and she was left alone with two babies and nowhere to run to. Oh, sure, she had help. Sort of. The Club gave her Opie’s cut of whatever illegal thing they were doing, to help with the bills. Piney came around to spend time with the kids, but it wasn’t the same.

Nothing was the same.

Chapter Notes

I have *feelings* about Donna and Opie. I think they totally got shafted in the show. Donna had potential to become a really awesome and badass character, but she got killed too early for any of that to really show. And Opie would have been different if she had lived. He never got over her death and it lead to some really bad choices.

So, Donna gets to live in this fic, and be Pack Mom.

I also feel like Jax may have done things differently if he hadn't hidden the manuscript and stewed in it for as long as he did.

Disclaimer: Octarine as the color of magic belongs to Terry Pratchett and the Discworld. I own nothing SOA or TW.

Eleven:

Donna Winston used to believe in the club. Then her husband got sent to jail because of it and she was left alone with two babies and nowhere to run to. Oh, sure, she had help. Sort of. The Club gave her Opie’s cut of whatever illegal thing they were doing, to help with the bills. Piney came around to spend time with the kids, but it wasn’t the same.

Nothing was the same.

She had to learn to do it all on her own. She had a one-year-old and a three-year-old and she had to be mother and father. She had to do it all.

And then Opie got out, and she had thought it was all going to be okay.

But they didn’t know how to be them anymore.

He’s been gone for five years. His kids don’t know him from a picture on the wall. Donna doesn’t know how to not be a solo act anymore. She wants him to fix it, and she knows he’s trying. Lord is
he trying. But he doesn’t know any way to earn but with the club.

And Donna hates the club.

The club took her beautiful, joyous life and turned it into a shit-show the like of which is usually only seen on television.

But she can’t hate Jax. Jax has always been here. Any time she needed anything while Opie was inside, Jax was there. Her kids call him Uncle Jax. He’s one of her best friends. She’s known him nearly all her life.

So when Jax comes to the house and asks to talk to her and Opie, she lets him in.

Even if he’s got that mohawked idiot from the club with him.

Donna keeps her hands busy by making coffee while Jax paces around clutching a binder in his hands and chewing on the inside of his cheek. Opie just sits, quiet and observant and gigantic like he’s always been.

She wishes for once he wouldn’t be quiet. She wants him to say something. Anything.

“So,” Jax clears his throat. He stops, turns and hands the binder to Opie, “I found this the other day when I was looking for baby stuff.”

Opie takes it, clearly confused, and opens it. “What the fuck is this?” he demands after a minute.

Jax collapses into a chair at her kitchen table and looks helpless for a bit until Donna hands him a mug. Then he takes to staring into it like it’s got all the answers. “I think it’s a path out of all the shit.

“Excuse me?” Opie says flatly.

“My dad wanted the club to go legit, but he died before he could make it happen.”

Opie makes a noise. It’s a sound in the back of his throat that speaks to disbelief. Donna hasn’t heard that sound in a long time. It makes her miss him.

She can’t believe she still misses him.

He’s right there, and she misses him.

“Why are you showing us this?” Donna asks because she can and Opie won’t.

“Because I want my son to know who I am when he’s six years old,” Jax says, making both Winstons flinch. Kenny doesn’t know his father, not really. Neither does Ellie and she’s two years older. “Because I don’t want to die before I’m forty. Because there’s a light at the end of the tunnel.”

“Clay will never allow the club to give up guns,” Opie says with no inflection in his voice. It’s a statement of fact.

“Yeah, well, Clay won’t be able to ride for much longer,” Jax snarls, then visibly calms himself. “You can’t ride, you don’t get a vote.”

“That could take years,” Opie states.

“It’s going to take years anyway,” Juice pipes up.
“What do you want from me?” Opie asks after another awkward silence. “I’m out, I’m earning straight.”

“I know,” Jax says. He looks over at Donna for the first time. She can see something in his eyes; something determined. “But you love the club just as much as I do. You were raised to it the same way I was. It’s all we know how to be. I think it’s time we step up and make it what we always dreamed about.”

Jax drains his mug and stands. “Look, I’m not trying to twist your arm or nothin’. You want to stay out, I’ll listen. But… read that, please. Read it and think about what I’m sayin’. It’s not a road-map or anything. It’s mostly contemplative bullshit and existential philosophy, but there’s meaning there.”

“He’ll read it,” Donna says. Opie turns to look at her, so she gives him a hard look. “He’ll read it. So will I.”

Jax nods, “Okay.”

Jax heads for the door without saying goodbye. Juice stays long enough to make an offer, “Listen, we’re having Pack Night at Peter’s this Saturday. You guys should come. Bring Ellie and Kenny and just, hang out. Be around people who don’t have any expectations, but love you.”

He follows Jax out the door.

Donna busies herself with cleaning up the mugs while Opie sits and stares at the manuscript that’s been left in his possession. Then she sits down next to her husband and sets her hand on his forearm. When he meets her eyes she offers him a tentative smile; an olive branch smile.

“We’ll read it together,” she tells him.

After a moment, Opie nods, and together they turn back to the manuscript.

“The Life and Death of SAMCRO: How the Sons of Anarchy lost its way, by John Teller.”

*

Sometimes, when the world is all soft edges and quiet moments, Peter can’t remember what it felt like to be without Stiles. It’s only been a few months. Winter is turning into spring and the world keeps spinning around in a lazy circle and Peter can’t remember.

When Stiles lays in his arms late at night with a purring faerie dragon on his pillow because Stiles’ has pressed his ear over Peter’s heart. When the young man’s dreams make him flail in his sleep and Peter has to catch a stray limb or risk being whacked in uncomfortable places. He feels like he’s always been here.

This place. This house. This town. These people.

His Pack.

He hasn’t lost who he was; he’ll never lose who he was. Not ever. He’s come through too much hellfire to ever forget.

But sometimes, quietly, he marvels at how it all feels worth it.

And then the morning comes, and Stiles flails awake and the world speeds up to catch up with him and Peter forgets to marvel at how he feels.

Peter was a monster once. He paced in the shadows with bloody teeth and scratched at the door menacingly. He bit and he chewed and he maimed until death came, slow but inevitable.

He’s escorted plenty of people to the threshold, then pushed them through to walk the moonpaths.

He doesn’t know when the monster that he was became a thing that lives inside him instead of the thing he is.

It rears its head at strange moments. Coiled like a dragon around his heart, wrapped up in ribbons like it can be restrained. It’s all ruby eyes and sharp, sharp teeth. Ash and smoke and fire.

There’s something to be said about ribbons.

Pretty things really. Thin and wide, lace and satin. Deceptive strength wrapped up in pretty colors.

There’s a bright gold one, braided cords of pure sun-gold that shine even when the monster in his chest batters at its cage and threatens to eat him. It wraps and wraps and wraps around the beast; tighter and tighter until he’s not made of shadows any more.

Stiles. Beautiful, sly, witty, effervescent Stiles.

The simple red cord, deeply velvet and hard-wearing like Christmas ribbon.

Solid, strong, Father. John.

Black and wispy, taffeta smoke, deceptive in delicacy. Always curling this way and that.

Quick, eager, coy. Juice.

Blue and deep like the deep, deep ocean. Or gray like the deepest of storm clouds. Or steely-blue like storms over water. Coils upon coils of endless tether to anchor one down but never tie them.

Strong, smart, loyal. Jax.

Blue and green ribbons all twisted together. A sunny day with the glint of the sun off a dozen free-floating mylar balloons.

Innocent, pure, love. Abel.

Pack.

Peter Hale is a monster hiding in a human skin. He bares his teeth at the world and smugly shows them “Look. See what’s mine. Try to take it and you will die”. He protects what’s his, and revenges when he can’t protect it. That’s an Alpha. A real Alpha, a good one.

“Hey,” Stiles wraps his arm around his waist and sets his chin on Peter’s shoulder. His eyes are pure mischief. At their feet, Twila twines around their ankles, her Egyptian mau glamour firmly in place. “You’re thinking way too hard.”

Peter smirks, “One of us has to.”

“Hey!” Stiles protests as the pair head down onto the lawn. The grill John bought is set up in the lee of the Willow tree for the shade, which is where the folding table got set up.
Peter laughs and accepts the salad bowl his soulmate shoves into his chest, following after him.

“Dude!” Juice yells, voice indignant. “Chips!”

Jax laughs around the handful of chips he’s already shoved into his mouth. He’s examining the area marked out with stakes and rope where he’s been duly informed Peter has plans to build a playhouse for Abel. A pirate ship of some kind.

He’d tried to talk the Alpha out of it, but he’d been backed by John. He’d been unilaterally told that playhouses were happening because as Pack Elder that means John gets to be grandpa to any and every child in the pack. So there.

Jax had chosen to give in graciously after that.

John seemed to be taking to the word ‘grandpa’ better than Gemma was taking to ‘grandma’. But then, Clay was handling the title far better than Gemma, and the man was stubborn as all hell and hated being reminded that he’s getting older. Jax tries not to examine the fact that Clay is better about being a grandparent than his mother.

Oh, Gemma’s there. She’s reliable and helpful. But there are moments where Jax wonders if she forgets that Abel isn’t hers. That Abel’s Jax’s.

“How big is this thing gonna be?” Jax demands after walking the perimeter. “He’s like three weeks old, man.”

“He’ll grow into it,” John says stubbornly.

“Oh my god,” Jax says, and shakes his head.

“Just roll with it, my dude,” Stiles advises as he sets down what is apparently his own birthday cake. It’s a sheet cake from the grocery store, is enrobed in enough frosting to give every one of them diabetes and Sully from Monsters Inc. wishes him a garish happy birthday from the top.

Jax takes the advice it’s meant to be and eyeballs the cake, “Seriously? Are you six?”

“Nope, eighteen,” Stiles replies with a guileless shrug.

“Not ‘til Monday,” John reminds his only son, jabbing his tongs at him for emphasis.

Stiles immediately looks mutinous, but the sound of a car on the gravel drive gives them enough pause that nothing devolves into a fight.

Peter stands and gives them all a quelling look, “let’s try to make a good impression, yes? For Jax if nothing else?”

*

Opie Winston hasn’t got much good in his life. Ever since he went to prison his whole world has crumbled down around him. Donna’s pissed at him all the time. His kids barely know him. He’s felt lost at sea for months. Ever since he got out of Chino.

Then Jax handed him that stupid manuscript.

He pulls the car to a stop behind a Police Department SUV and inhales deeply. At his side, his wife takes his hand and offers him a smile. It’s tremulous, but reassuring.
They’re in this together, so even if he feels like he’s standing on the edge of a cliff, he knows they’re going over together.

“Okay,” Donna says, turning to look at Kenny and Ellie, “I want you guys to be polite and thank Mr. Stilinski for the invitation, okay?”

“Oh, Mommy,” Ellie says while Kenny nods emphatically next to her.

“Uncle Jax is gonna be here, right?” the six-year-old asks.

“Yeah, kiddo,” Opie tells him, making Kenny smile.

The family of four gets out of the car, Donna clutching a giant bowl of potato salad in her arms as the only sign of how tense she is. They let Ellie ring the doorbell when she asks and wait a minute before it opens. Peter Hale stands before them in dark jeans and a gray Henley. Opie can see his kutte hanging on a hook by the door behind him.

“Opie,” he greets with a smile on his face that seems more genuine than the few Opie’s seen at the clubhouse. “Mrs. Winston. Welcome!”

“Yeah, thanks.” Opie shakes the offered hand, surprised at the firmness of it, but pleased. He puts a hand on either of the kids’ shoulders. “This is Ellie, and this is Kenny.”

Ellie latches onto the back of Opie’s shirt shyly, but Kenny just nods.

Donna offers the bowl, “It’s Donna, please. We brought potato salad.”

Peter takes the offered bowl and steps aside to let the family in. “Wonderful, now Stiles can’t complain that John didn’t eat something healthy today. Please, come in. We’re actually out back.”

Opie takes in the house as Peter and Stiles lead them through it. The living room is large, with a big television and a comfortable looking couch. A well-loved armchair dominates prime position in front of the TV. A lot of old, leather-bound books dominate the coffee table, and more are lined up on bookshelves on either side of the fireplace.

The kitchen is clean, save for the dishes used to prepare for tonight, it looks like. It’s not big, a little smaller than their own. The dining room is clean.

Peter points out the closest bathroom, just in case anyone needs it, and then they’re stepping out the French-style back doors into the garden. Peter wasn’t kidding about it. Planter boxes, perfectly square, lined up in evenly measured rows practically overflow with their bounty. Huge rose bushes line the back of the house, and a large shed sits off to one side, the door propped open.

The grass of the lawn is green and well-maintained. A large section appears to have been portioned off for a future project of some kind.

There’s a pond at the back of the property, overshadowed by a large willow tree. This is where Peter leads them. There’s a large grill set up near a long folding table. A cooler is propped open at one end, and when Opie gets close enough he sees cans of soda mingling with a few beer bottles in ice.

Peter introduces the Chief of Police, who is wearing a kiss the cook apron and manning the grill; and his fiancé, a lean young man who’s grin goes on for days and makes Opie feel both startlingly aware and comfortable at the same time.

Stiles and Juice steal away the kids to kick around a soccer ball while they wait for burgers and hot
dogs to cook. Opie is handed a beer by a smiling Jax, and Donna is drawn into a conversation about what she put in the potato salad by John and Peter.

Something in the atmosphere. The sense of safety, the laughter of his kids. The feeling of togetherness and family in the air. It all makes Opie relax for the first time in ages. He sits next to Donna at the table and participates in a conversation about old motorcycles and watches his kids kick around a ball.

And he doesn’t feel like he’s got to watch his back.

It feels good.

When they yell that the burgers are ready, and everyone crowds around the table, and Kenny and Ellie are talking over each other about how they’re going to project a move on the side of the shed when it gets dark enough, Opie meets Jax’s eyes and gives him a nod.

Jax smiles back at him.

His wife leans into him instead of away.

Peter watches over them all with a protective indulgence and Opie feels like he’s part of something for the first time in nearly six years. Something good and meaningful.

And he thinks, maybe they can do this. Change everything. Maybe they can.
Bite

Chapter Summary

Peter lays his bike down twenty miles outside of Charming.

Chapter Notes

The timeline here is a little vague, so to clear things up: The Stilinskis and Peter have been in Charming for several months, meaning that John has settled into the role of Chief, Stiles has established a routine, and Peter has finished his trial and is a full Son. Because reasons.

Also: Abel comes out of the toaster earlier in this than he did in canon. Because in canon he didn’t have a Stiles to heal him, so he had at least two surgeries that I am aware of before he could be taken out. Also, speaking from experience with my nephew when he had similar problems at birth (for different reasons) the doctors would have given him at least 6 - 8 weeks before taking him under the knife to try to let him grow and gain as much weight as possible to up his chances unless they had no other choice. So here no need for surgery = shorter incubator timeline.

As you can tell I have strong feelings about Abel. Congenital heart defects are no joke. They are absolutely and utterly terrifying, and I can only imagine how bad it was for my sister. Nephew was born with two versions of it, giving him two holes in his heart. Happy to report that eight years after the roughest of starts and six surgeries (one open-heart) kid is doing fantastic and about to turn 9.

Not all stories turn out with happy endings. My nephew is one of the lucky ones. If you feel up to it, and you have some change to spare, to help fight CHD today visit the Children’s Heart Foundation, and donate here.

Disclaimer: Octarine as the color of magic belongs to Terry Pratchett and the Discworld. I own nothing SOA or TW.

Twelve:

Stiles finds that the longer he lives in Charming, the less he thinks about Beacon Hills. Occasionally he feels a pang of guilt about it. He does not miss Scott or the others. He feels relieved, actually. There is a lot of heaviness associated with Beacon Hills.

The rift between Scott and himself.

The unspoken horror that lingers because of the Nogitsune.
The ghost of Allison Argent.

The Hale Fire.

All if it just sits over Beacon Hills like boulders held up by sticks; ready to snap and crash down at any moment. Charming isn’t like that. Charming is heavy in its own way, sure, but it isn’t the same. The Sons aren’t a problem he helped create. He didn’t cause the Nords to start dealing in Charming. Didn’t cause the warehouse explosion.

He is pretty sure he did something to make Gemma dislike him, but he digresses. That is a hard woman to please.

He’s building things in Charming. A life with strong ties and family that trusts him. In Beacon Hills he only ever seemed to help destroy things.

His education is engrossing. He has access to Peter’s library and to the books at Caliana’s, so his magical education is just flying along at breakneck speed. He’s signed up for a couple of interesting online summer courses at UC Berkely to get a head start on either a Mythology and Folklore or a Criminal Justice degree – he hasn’t decided which to major in and which to minor in.

He knows he can do both.

His birthday was fantastic. He’d gotten to spend it with his Dad and Peter; and with their growing Pack. There had been cake and a good time was had by all. Monday had seen Peter’s official move into Stiles’ room. Honestly, it had mostly just him moving a few token objects into it.

But now Stiles is eighteen, and they’re officially engaged because Peter had given him a ring set with moonstones. John had gone a pinched around the eyes until Stiles informed Peter that he wasn’t going to plan a wedding and go to college, so he was going to have to wait until Stiles was done getting said education.

Peter had shrugged and taken it in stride. It was a symbolic token more than anything else.

But it had made John feel better about how quickly things between the pair was progressing, so there was that.

It’s Wednesday now, and Abel Teller is being taken out of the Toaster today. Stiles is so excited he’s practically vibrating on the spot as he waits for the elevator to finish taking him up to the fourth floor. The other occupant of the elevator car (an older guy in a white tank-top with some exceptionally racist tattoos) looked genuinely relieved when the doors open and Stiles got off it. Rude.

A bunch of the Sons are milling around in the waiting area when Stiles turns the corner into the children’s ward. Gemma looks to be practically vibrating with impatience next to Clay, who looks positively asleep in comparison. Juice is seated in the corner looking determinedly supportive. Jax is sitting between Opie and Donna looking like he hasn’t slept.

He probably hasn’t.

Opie is silently supportive. His gigantic frame takes up less space than Stiles feels like it should. Donna is holding Jax’s hand and murmuring quiet reassurances in his ear.

Peter, Stiles knows, is on a run with Tig, Chibs and Bobby.

Stiles skids to a stop in front of Jax and demands, “Am I late?”
Jax looks up and the corner of his mouth twitches, “Nope.”

“Oh, good.” Stiles flops into the chair next to Donna. Stiles adores Donna. She’s a tiny badass who reminds him of Lydia before the Nogitsune changed everything and her best friend died in front of her. Donna gives him a smile and he grins back.

The Winstons have been around more in the week or so since Pack night. Peter had had several long discussions with Opie about what becoming Pack would mean for him and his family. Donna had decided that if knowing about all the crap Opie got himself into meant saving her marriage then she wanted to know it all. Stiles himself had had several conversations about the magical side of things.

Donna had gone out for coffee with Dad a few days ago, and she had come out of it with a healthy human perspective on what all of this could mean for Ellie and Kenny.

Stiles felt pretty optimistic on their chances of adding the Winstons to their pack.

He’s torn out of his reflection as Dr. Knowles rounds the corner with a smile on her face. She takes in the various people surrounding Jax with a slight frown, but she doesn’t say anything nasty. Stiles hasn’t been able to decide if he likes her or not.

Jax stands to meet her, Gemma is at his side seconds later. “Well Doc?”

Tara smiles at him, this one not showing anything negative, “We’re ready. Just you and one other person, okay? We don’t want to overwhelm him.”

“Right, yeah,” Jax nods, reaching for his mother’s hand. “Ma?”

“I’ve got you, baby,” Gemma says, taking the offer.

“Alright, well, come with me then,” Tara says, and leads the pair from the room.

*  

When Tara sets Abel into his arms, Jax feels a bit like she’s handing him something far heavier than a six pound baby. He’s riveted by the blue eyes gazing up at him with trust. And his heart squeezes painfully in his chest when tiny fingers curl around one of his. He can feel the tears welling up.

“Hey kid, I hate to tell you this, but I’m your old man.”

*  

Gemma feels her heart stop and her breath catch as she watches her son hold his son for the first time. The warm feeling in her chest leads her to guide him into the rocking chair in the corner of the room and crouch next to the pair. She places her hand behind Jax’s under Abel’s head and smiles back when he looks up at her, eyes brimming with tears.

“You know Gramma, too, huh?” Jax asks Abel.

“Hi sweetheart,” Gemma says to her grandson.

Abel’s eyes and head briefly turn in her direction before looking back up at Jax.

She stays where she is, watching her baby and her grandbaby for the longest time. Until her thighs, knees and calves ache and the feeling starts to go out of her feet. She’s not going to ruin this moment for Jax. Even if part of her wants to get up and violently eject Tara from the room.
Don’t get her wrong, she appreciates everything the little bitch has done for Abel, but she knows that the Doc should have left them alone. She shouldn’t be trying to horn in on this moment. But there she is, looking at her son with emotion in her eyes that tells Gemma that the little witch came back to Charming for Jax, no matter what she says.

She prays that he doesn’t fall for her act. She doesn’t want to see him heartbroken like that again.

Eventually, Jax looks up at her, “You want to hold him?”

Gemma grins, “Are you kidding? Hand him over!”

Jax chuckles, and they trade places so that Gemma’s the one sitting in the chair cradling Abel to her chest and Jax is the one crouched next to her unable to stop himself from brushing his fingers across the top and sides of the baby’s head.

“He’s beautiful Jackson,” Gemma tells her son. “Absolutely perfect.”

And he is.

*

Jacob Hale has always felt a modicum of responsibility as the older brother. David is more like their mother than he is. He’s got a soft heart when you get past the Hale exterior. So Jacob’s always looked out for his brother; and likes to believe that because of this, David is the man he is.

Or, so he thought.

“You can’t be serious,” he demands. David’s jaw clenches and Jacob has to blink at him in astonishment. “I can’t believe what I’m hearing. David, you can’t be serious. There’s a reason Dad never let us anywhere near Aunt Talia and her kids! They’re monsters!”

David’s eyes narrow and Jacob can tell by his stubborn expression that he’s made up his mind. Dammit.

“I looked at the case files for the house fire that killed them, Jacob,” David insists seriously. “No one deserves that, not even monsters.”

Jacob doesn’t want to be having this conversation anymore. He sighs and sets down his fork and knife, breakfast no longer appealing. “It doesn’t matter if they deserved it or not, David. What’s done is done, we have to deal with here, now.

“They were all alive when the fire started,” David bulls on like he can’t hear Jacob. There goes that famous selective hearing his little brother has perfected. “They were trapped in that house and it was set on fire. Peter was the only one that got out, and he was burned over seventy percent of his body. He was in a coma for four years, and a catatonic state for two. Derek and Laura lived solely because they weren’t home, and they had to run for their lives.”

“Peter is a horrible person, David!” Jacob cuts in. He doesn’t want to hear this. “The first thing he did when he got to town was join the Sons!”

David bulls forward, “I can’t find any records from the intervening years that say they stopped running. And then there’s Cora – “

“Who the hell is Cora?” Jacob demands, and regrets it instantly.
“I’m so glad you asked,” David hisses sarcastically. “She’s our baby cousin. Just turned seventeen three months ago. You want to know what happened to her after Peter managed to get her out of a burning house that held her entire family?”

“No.”

“He told her to run, so that eight year old little girl ran and ran and ran until she found a safe place.”

“David.”

“In South America.”

Jacob sighs and runs a hand down his face. “None of this is on us, David. Dad did what he thought was best for him, and for us. They’re monsters, whether they deserved being trapped in a burning house or not.”

David’s jaw flexes as he clenches his teeth, “Did you know that Uncle James was human?”

Jacob stares, “No.”

“So were the twins. They were four years old, and never showed any sign of being wolves.”

“Don’t do this, David.”

“I think Dad was wrong.”

“David.”

“Jake.”

Jacob sighs. He picks up his cup of coffee and takes a drink from the rapidly cooling liquid, trying to figure out how to word what he wants to say in a way that will make his brother listen to him. David waits, sitting there in his uniform. Jacob sets the cup down, and the ceramic clinks against the plate beneath it.

“It’s all done, David,” he says, meeting David’s eyes and holding his gaze. “Even if there was something to be done, it’s all past. We can’t help Derek or Laura or Cora. It’s been eight years, and it’s been nearly thirty since we had contact with that side of the family. I don’t think they’d accept our help now if we offered it.

And Peter doesn’t want it. You’ve seen him. How he is, what he is. He rejected us as family as soon as he let the Sons recruit him.”

David’s jaw flexes again, “He’s family, Jake. And I’m not sure about him rejecting us. Stiles talked to me about them. And John’s a good man, and I don’t think he’d let Peter anywhere near Stiles unless there was some hidden redeemable quality about him.”

Jacob snorts. He doesn’t like the new Chief. For man who held a political office for over ten years, he’s got no political aspirations. He won’t listen to any of the proposals Jacob has taken to him about moving Charming into the twenty-first century. He’s just… a police officer. A good one, sure, but that’s all he is.

“Peter is our cousin, Jake.”

Jacob has had enough, “As far as I’m concerned, no he isn’t. He’s a werewolf. He’s a Son. Both of those things make him our enemy.”
He doesn’t wait for a response, he just stands and tosses a few bills on the table to pay for his meal before he walks away from his brother.

It’s time to talk to his father about David.

*

Peter lays his bike down twenty miles outside of Charming.

Mayans started following them when they hit Oakland. Then they decided to try and run them off the road. It’s late at night, the only vehicles on the road are the bikes. Peter’s not sure who fires the first shot, but he hears Tig’s yell when he’s hit.

So Peter lays his bike down twenty miles outside of Charming.

He takes the shooter with him.

He comes up roaring, road rash all up one side healing rapidly as he uses his bike as a launch pad. He’s in beta-shift and tears one of their attackers off his bike before the other Sons can get turned around to come to his aid.

It’s all gunfire and blood from there.

They may not be in Peter’s territory, but they’re close enough for Peter to feel comfortable tearing into his target. He defends his brothers, his pseudo-packmates as they defend him. He takes three bullets, all in the left side of his back and chest. If they were wolfsbane, Peter could very well be dead.

It’s enough for him to forget himself.

For the first time since Scott McCall, Peter Bites.

The Mayan in his arms screams in terror and pain.

Everything stops as both sides gape at the sight before them. Peter loses his shift, his back arching as his body morphs into what Stiles calls Monster Mode. It’s a transformation far closer to the classical werewolf, and it’s eerily similar to the shape he took the first time he was Alpha.

His clothing rips, and he releases the man in his jaws as his face morphs. Then he’s on all fours, and his massive wolf jaws clamp around the man’s side as he hits the ground on all four paws, fully wolfed out. His prey screams, so he growls in return. A basso rumble that the other men on the road can feel in their feet.

It’s a macabre tableau. The sight of nearly a dozen motorcycles lined up on opposite sides of the Alpha wolf, guns aimed. There’s blood all over the road, gleaming wetly in the light of the three-quarters moon overhead.

Chibs recovers first, rising quickly and rounding his bike, gun aimed. His heart is going a million beats a minute and his grip on his pistol is white knuckled to prevent his weapon shaking. He comes up on Peter’s shoulder, aiming at the Mayans that thought attacking them just outside their territory was a good idea.

“Guns down!” he snarls, trying to ignore the horse-sized wolf just behind him. The Mayan trapped in his jaws has quieted to whimpers, pain and blood loss probably. “Do it!”
It’s amazing how quickly all the guns are lowered. The Mayans have a rapid conversation in Spanish and Chibs finds himself wishing he knew the language, not for the first time. Then one of them steps forward. A massive man with dark eyes and a goatee that makes him look like a devil in the moonlight.

“Ah ah,” Tig snarls, coming up on Chibs’ left, gun at the ready. His hair is wild, and he’s got a pretty feral look on his face. He looks psychotic. “That’s close enough.”

The spokesman raises his hands to show them as empty. “Paz,” he says, eyes flicking from Son to Son and then to the wolf. “We’ve got no quarrel with the Alpha.”

Tig snorts. Chibs frowns, “Tha’ Alpha’s a Son. You go’ quarrel with the Sons, you go’ quarrel wi’ him.”

One of the others yells something to the spokesman, but Chibs ignores it as Bobby circles around Peter to flank Chibs on the other side. There’s a gurgle behind him, and the Irishman has to stop himself from looking. The Mayan spokesman pales at whatever he’s seeing.

“Por favor. Let us take him. We will not come back. I will claim responsibility for this.”

“You know we’ve got a truce with the Mayans, right?” Bobby asks.

“Si,” is the reply. “Es stupido. Sons are our rivals, we saw an opportunity. We took it.”

“You can explain that to Alvarez, man,” Tig says. “He’s the one that made truce with the Alpha.”

“Si. Yes, I will. Please. He does not deserve to die this way.”

Chibs laughs and there’s nothing pleasant about the way it sounds. It’s torn from him in a way that makes him feel like his chest should ache. He lowers his gun and gestures to the wolf behind him, “Ye wan’ him, come get him.”

The spokesman doesn’t move.

“I Didnae think so.”
He wants to scream, but it catches on the blood in his throat.

The immediate aftermath of being bitten by a werewolf.

Chapter Notes

You didn't think I was just going to leave this poor OC alone did you? How sad. The poor thing. :P

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Thirteen:

Fire crawls along his veins like a thousand crawling ants. Huge and red; marching all along his body. An iron band compresses his chest, lungs fighting to expand. His body is taught like a bowstring pulled back to fire.

A steady beat that makes his body throb.

He wants to scream, but it catches on the blood in his throat.

* 

The door of the clubhouse flies open so quickly and with such force that it cracks audibly against the wood paneling of the wall. The doorknob punches through the wood and into the drywall behind, lodging the door open until forced free.

“What the fuck happened?!” Clay demands as Bobby and Chibs drag a man through the doorway. All three men are covered in blood, and the one in the middle drags smears of red across the floor in the shape of the toes of his boots. He sags, a dead weight.

“Mayans got us outside of town!” Bobby huffs, face red with exertion.

He and Chibs don’t stop as they cross the room into the chapel to throw the man they’re carrying onto the redwood table. He moans in pain as he’s laid upon it. Chibs screams at the Prospect to get the first aid kit, voice high and desperate.

“Who the fuck is this?!” the President demands as Juice enters the clubhouse, supporting Tig’s
weight. Tig’s covered in his own blood, his left arm hangs useless at his side as an indication to his injury. Juice has got his other face on. The smoky horns spiraling off his head and his eyes black as night.

“Mayan,” Tig offers, cussing as he’s set on the couch. He leans back with a groan, “Fuck me.”

Juice is already heading toward the door as the Prospect dashes by with the well-stocked med-kit in hand. Piney sits on his usual bar stool, sipping idly at his glass and watching as Chibs yells orders at the prospect.

Bobby steps out of the chapel, paler than anyone has seen him since his last divorce. His phone is pressed to his ear as he speaks rapidly to the person on the other side of the line.

Clay stops Juice by stepping into his path and placing a hand in the middle of his chest. He looks down at the younger man. Tries to glare past the otherness that he hasn’t really gotten used to yet. His jaw clenches, then releases.


Before anyone can reply, a growl rumbles up from the doorway. Deep, basso and menacing.

* He prays. Begins to chant “Our Father, who art in heaven” blood pouring down his throat and out the corners of his mouth.


Red is all he sees, staring upward. Red, red, red.

His body thrums. Something heavy presses down on his shoulder and his side. Pain like nothing before bounces through him like a ping-pong ball.

He screams until his throat tears itself apart.

* Stiles punches the gas as he blares around a corner with a shriek of tires on asphalt and the smell of burning rubber. On the seat next to him, Twila screeches a warning, even as she digs her claws into the upholstery. Her glamour is nowhere in sight, her wings flared out to help her keep her balance.

The bond between Stiles and Peter is a live-wire; sparking hotly with rage, pain and a savage sort of glee.

His link to Juice is muted in comparison. The fae is alarmed, but calm.

Bobby’s call had told him all he needed to put the puzzle together. Peter is stuck in Alpha form, because he bit someone, and he’s going to protect his claim until the guy either turns or dies.

Stiles takes another corner at breakneck pace.

Behind him, flashing lights flicker on and a siren goes off once in warning.

Stiles does not slow down.
Peter manages to fit his frame through the door, but it’s a close thing. He stalks to the door of the chapel and parks himself in the doorway without intention of being moved. His red gaze riveted on the man that Chibs is attempting to keep from bleeding out.

Half-Sack is standing over him, his arms bloody to his shoulders, sweat and flecks of red coating his face. He’s so pale he matches his white t-shirt, but his grip on the towel he’s pressing into the huge bite mark on the Mayan’s side doesn’t waver.

Chibs stands at the head of the table, pressing his own towel to the much smaller wound in the meat of the shoulder. He’s streaked with blood like he’s been through the wars. His eyes are a bit hollow, like he’s remembering something else from a time long past.

Maybe he is.

Peter’s ears flicker as Clay gets the gist of the situation from Tig and Bobby and begins to issue orders.

“Call Jax and Opie, I want all hands on deck. Get Jax to bring the Doc with him.” Clay himself pulls out his burner with a tense expression. “We need to give the Chief a heads up, this might get ugly.”

“No point getting the Doc,” Juice says, eyes flickering over to the mess in the chapel. “He’ll either live or he won’t. I’ll go tell the Chief.” He steps into the shadow of the doorway next to Peter. He flickers out of sight as he steps into the Tween. The shadow between spaces. Outside of the Real, but not quite on the Moonpaths.

“I’ll keep an eye on the gate,” Piney offers, heaving himself off his bar stool. He’s pale, but he always is these days, the way his health is declining.

Clay nods in acceptance, and Piney hauls himself out of the room. He looks at Bobby, who is attempting to help Tig stem the the bleeding in his arm. Tig is pale and sweaty, but has all his faculties, “Somebody should probably call Stiles.”

Peter growls at the sound of Stiles’ name.

“Already did,” Bobby says.

Clay turns, focusing on the wolf in the room. Somewhere, in the back of his mind, sits a gibbering wreck of a man as the absolute terror of facing a predator like this settles into his spine. Some primitive part of his brain that tells him to never turn his back on the beast.

He doesn’t know what he was expecting of Peter’s wolf form, but this isn’t it. Intellectually, Clay had understood the meaning behind the whole werewolf shtick. Had understood that when Peter said he could turn into a wolf, he’d meant an actual wolf. But that’s where the similarities end. He’s too big, gaze too menacing and piss terror inducing to be compared to the average wolf.

In the back of his mind a thought occurs. Clay had wanted this. Had actively recruited Peter to the Sons. This is what he fought for. He can’t help the small curl of satisfaction that settles in the pit of his stomach, even as he meets the burning ruby gaze of the wolf and finds he can’t hold that look for very long before he has to look away.

Peter Hale is a Son. Which makes the monster his.

He flicks open his burner phone and inputs a number he’s had memorized for years.
As much as he hates Marcus Alvarez, he’s got to nip this situation in the bud now, before it blows out of control and war comes to Charming. The Sons can little afford it right now, they don’t have the means or the firepower.

Alvarez, Clay is aware, doesn’t find the idea of war with the Sons any more appealing than Clay finds war with the Mayans. They both remember the last one well enough.

Then the screaming starts.

*  

It burns. Not like fire, though. Fire is heat and smoke. This is cold. This burns like ice.

It sludges through his veins. He can feel it crawling through him with every beat of the drum.

Thud. Thud.

The screaming around him is too loud. Stop it! No!

Blood dribbles from the corners of his mouth, throat screamed bloody.

His back bows off the table as he seizes. The fire has reached his heart.

“Hold ‘im down!” someone yells.

*  

Twila doesn’t know what those flashing lights mean. Humans are strange. She can tell that her Stiles doesn’t like that they’re there. They appear to be a hindrance in their mission to reach the Alpha. She can deal with that. With a twitter and some effort, she extracts her claws from the seat beneath her and flaps her wings a couple of times to get into the air.

Gliding into the backseat, she perches on the back of the seat so that she can see out the rear window at the car chasing them. She’s not a destructive creature, but she has a few tricks she’s learned over the years. She concentrates, choosing her moment carefully, building up the magic by absorbing the octarine sparks her human is shedding.

She releases her spell.

The road behind the back tires of the jeep appears to erupt between them and their pursuer. Great chunks of concrete and asphalt reaching toward the moon like the fingers of some great stone giant.

Satisfied, Twila nods to herself and flits over to perch on the headrest of her Stiles’ seat.

*  

David Hale slams on the brakes as huge chunks of the road erupt between him and the speeding jeep he’d been following. He gets out of the car to stare at the twenty square feet of destruction in front of him.

He wonders how he’s supposed to explain this to his boss.

A minute later, his question is answered as the rubble flickers, then vanishes altogether.

An illusion. Dammit.
Traveling in-between makes Jax feel nauseous. Good to know. It takes him a minute to gain his bearings, but when he does, he can only stare in shock at the chaos Juice has brought him into.

Chibs and Half-Sack are trying to hold down a guy that looks to be having a seizure on the redwood table. Bobby is putting a jagged line of stitches into the arm of a cussing Tig. Clay is pacing up and down by the pool table, phone pressed to his ear, his expression serious in a way that Jax isn’t sure he’s ever seen before.

Then there’s Peter.

Jax has never seen Peter’s wolf-form. For all that he’s part of the Pack, there hasn’t ever been a need for Peter to shift. Their lives have been quiet and steady. Until now.

Jax wonders if the fact that he thinks Peter is magnificent says anything about him as a person.

Peter’s ruby gazes looks him over, and Jax gets the feeling that his Alpha (not his brother, not right now) is looking him over for injuries. Once that’s done, that gaze leaves him and goes back to the man dying in the chapel.

“I gotta go get Opie,” a quiet voice says in his ear. “You good?”

Jax turns his head and his breath catches. In the half-light of the dormitory doorway, holding Jax steady by the arm, stands Juice.

Jax’s heart starts to race, “Goddamn you’re beautiful.”


Juice has never looked less human than he does right now. His eyes are that deep black scattered with stars that Jax has started to get used to. His tattoos spiral off his head, looking more like horns made of glittering space dust than ever. His usually deep caramel skin is gray. The kind of gray shadows look like in the daytime on concrete. Flecked with slivery specks like freckles.

Jax wants to touch him. See if that silver stuff will come off if he rubs his fingers across it.

Juice lets go of Jax’s arm, “I – I have to go get Opie.”

Jax watches the half-Fae step back into the doorway and vanish in a flicker of shadows.

“What just happened?” Jax asks himself.

Stiles barrels into the clubhouse, shedding sparks. His eyes glow with power as he crosses the room to the wolf in the doorway. He buries a hand into the fur at Peter’s neck and takes in the sight of the chaos in the room. Peter’s head turns just enough to acknowledge the Spark standing at his side.

“Do you want me to ask him?” Stiles whispers into his ear. Peter growls an agreement.

Stiles takes in the sight in the little room that the Sons consider sacred. Chibs’ admirable efforts to keep the Mayan alive. Half-Sack’s admirable efforts to be of use to the Scotsman. He breathes in deeply, drawing the scent of ozone into his lungs. He reaches out to his connection with his Familiar.

:Ask him:
Twila flickers into visibility as she lands on the bitten man’s uninjured shoulder. Chibs shouts in surprise, but holds fast, eyes widening at the sight of the tiny violet dragon perched under his face. She chirrups at him and bumps the underside of his chin with the top of her head before she turns toward the man under her claws.

Flickers of octarine touch her scales and settle in her feathers as she absorbs her person’s magic. Then, she takes the limited telepathy she has and reaches for the mind of her target to ask him a very specific question.

* * *

Something brushes against him. It reminds him of the cat that his mother had adopted with he was just a little boy. Soft and warm and soothing.

:*Do you want to live?:*

Where is that voice coming from? Wait, it’s not really a voice, is it? It’s a presence. Something or someone asking him a question in a way without words, but also with words. His brain provides the words. She’s warm, whoever she is. A flicker of purple light in his mind.

Does he want to live? Will the burning stop if he does?

:*You won’t be the same.:* the voice tells him.

He wonders what that means. He will still be himself, won’t he?

:*You, but more. A wolf in human skin.:*

*Lobo.* He knows a few wolves. Does he want to be one? Does he have a choice? Of course. He can live as a wolf, or die.

Does he want to die? No. He wants to live, he thinks. He’s not done experiencing new things.

:*Good.:*

* * *

Stiles steps forward into the chapel. He waves Chibs and Half-Sack away as he places his hand in the center of the Mayan’s chest. Twila shifts to places her forepaws atop Stiles’ hand. He reaches along the glowing cord that links him to Peter. He reaches into the Alpha and draws him along their connection.

He believes.

Sparks of octarine flicker through the air, settling on everyone and everything in the room before winking out. Bone, muscle and flesh begin to knit together as this man in believed whole.

Stiles roots through the damage, follows along the strains of wolf crawling sluggishly in the man’s veins until it is sped up to his heart. Finds the frayed, tentative connection to the Alpha. He grabs hold of Peter’s end of the bond and believes it into life.

He believes the wolf to take in this man’s blood. Integrates it into his genetic makeup. Washes out any signs of rejection. The Alpha trips along the bond and believes strength into his new Beta.

Out in the man clubhouse, Tig starts swearing as the flesh of his arm heals together around the stitches Bobby’s been sewing into him. Then he swears even more as the stitches themselves appear
to be absorbed into his flesh, leaving no trace that he’d been shot earlier other than a line of pink, new skin as evidence.

Piney, settled onto his stool at the bar after following Stiles into the clubhouse next to his son, suddenly feels the iron band around his chest ease. He breathes deeper, then feels lightheaded as he takes a hit of pure oxygen off the tank at his hip. He fumbles for the nozzle and turns it off. The light-headedness fades.

He feels younger, lighter. He looks at the wolf in the door, then to the boy leaning over the Mayan in the chapel. He doesn’t know how, but he’s been healed and that boy is somehow responsible.

On the table in the chapel, Jaime Martel opens his eyes. They glow an electric, otherworldly blue as his wolf settles into his chest. Pack bonds unfurl out of him to click into place. Five in his immediate area, five others stretching out beyond the building he’s in.

On one corner of the redwood table, a single bud blooms out of the wood and unfurls into a single, tiny green leaf.

*

The Nemeton hums to itself. It drinks deeply of the magic that flows from the river below its roots. It can taste the new power feeding the current. Recognizes the source. It can feel the pillar of pure belief towering into the sky to the south as the Spark performs another act of Belief.

Faeries, the little ones that take care of plants and encourage the seasons, flicker in the Nemeton’s branches where they’ve taken up residence. The Nemeton doesn’t mind. Being able to sustain life like the faeries is a sign of the oak’s good health and strength.

The Nemeton reaches for the Spark. Stretches itself along the ground, moving beyond the borders of the preserve to the south. It’s power grows, but it cannot yet reach that far. Cannot link itself to the land that the Spark’s Alpha has claimed. Cannot become part of it. Not yet.

But soon.

The ancient tree turns its attention down toward the current again. It drinks deeply.

Soon.
Aftermath

Chapter Summary

The earth beneath the Sons of Anarchy clubhouse eats the magic that the Spark feeds into it. Devours it and tries to latch on to eat more. It’s starving. Charming is starving. It wants to eat and eat and eat until its hunger is sated and it is once more like it was a thousand years ago. Rich and lush and wild with it.

So it eats, and it tries to eat more.

Chapter Notes

SO, for clarification because I did not update tags: Jaime Martel is an OC, not an SOA character. Oh, and his name is pronounced KHIE-meh, not like Jamie. For anyone who might argue that it's not pronounced that way, I have a co-worker for whom the OC is named that would beg to differ. It is a Spanish/Portuguese form of James. I used it because I like the way it looks in text.

Jaime Lannister can kiss my ass. -_^

Disclaimer: Octarine as the color of magic belongs to Terry Pratchett and the Discworld. I own nothing SOA or TW.

Fourteen:

Juice strides the shadows in-between. He flickers along the edges of the moonpaths; flirting with the other. He has shed his human skin entirely. He can feel the bonds tugging at him, like hooks sunk into the skin of his back.


Jaime.

Home urges him to turn around. To follow ribbons across the Tween and into the Real.

He can’t. He doesn’t understand.

Jax thinks he’s beautiful. Thinks his Fae skin is anyway. Juice knows what he looks like. All shadow and glitter. It’s taken him years to be able to look at himself in the mirror. His reflection has never looked right. His Fae skin is too inhuman. There’s too much shadow there. But his human skin is the opposite. It’s too human, too fragile and breakable.

A hum echoes down the bond from Alpha. Warmth and welcoming wrapping around Juice’s heart
and squeezing until his chest burns and aches with it.

Family. One thing he never had, but does now.

He’s not beautiful, but maybe… Maybe he can be okay with other people thinking he is.

*

The earth beneath the Sons of Anarchy clubhouse *eats* the magic that the Spark feeds into it. Devours it and tries to latch on to eat more. It’s starving. Charming is starving. It wants to eat and eat and eat until its hunger is sated and it is once more like it was a thousand years ago. Rich and lush and wild with it.

So it *eats*, and it tries to *eat more*.

But the Spark won’t let it. The backlash as the Spark cuts the connection with a hot knife of magic ripples across Charming. An alligator breaching the surface of the water for a single moment, revealing that there is no safety here.

Cali and Blake at the magic shop are forced to stop brewing as the potion abruptly curdles in protest. Blake loses his glamour for a few seconds. Cali herself feels the connection break and the earth of Charming attempt to reach out and latch back on.

“Oh, that’s not good,” Cali remarks. Blake mews in agreement, eyes made of stardust blink up at her. “I think a Wakening may be in our immediate future, Blake.”

The Shaman of the Coyote Pack on the Wahewa reservation wakes from his dreams, screaming. The earth is trying to swallow him.

The Nemeton in Beacon Hills, roots stretching toward Charming, feels the ripple. Yes. Give it more. Feed the earth, let it reach across the great distance. Let it grow and entwine and become Great. The Spark is there. The Alpha is there. The Nemeton *wants*.

The earth beneath the Sons of Anarchy clubhouse settles. It returns to sleep with a grumpy mutter. It knows now, though, and there is no going back. It holds a Wellspring where one wasn’t before. It has been *claimed* by an Alpha. The current has widened here. There is a new Ley-Crossing at the place of the Wellspring.

All across the city, *things* blink into existence. Lesser fae forced from one plane to another. Creatures of magic that have no category seek places to hide and nest. There is Power in Charming now. It hums through the air, small but existent and growing.

For the first time in several hundred years, the coastal region known as Central California can sustain magical life on a wide scale not seen in over three hundred years.

The wind takes this news and whispers it across the world.

*

Alvarez hangs up the phone with a sigh. He feels tired. He lets himself have a moment where his weakness shows, because he is alone. Then he packs it away and heads into the clubhouse where his men are drinking and playing the night away. A softly-spoken order has the music stopping, and anyone who is not a Mayan vacating the area.

Marcus waits, quietly.
A sense of unease takes over the clubhouse.

Then three Mayans enter the clubhouse. One has been shot, but the bleeding has stopped. The other two look tired and nervous. Two of the men that went on the run are missing. Marcus knows where one is, and assumes the other is dead. A smear on the road outside of Charming.

“Do you understand what you’ve done?” Marcus asks into the quiet.

Javier, Manolo and Daniel exchange looks before Javier heaves a sigh and steps forward. He meets Marcus’ gaze, wary but resigned. “We made a mistake.”

“Sí,” Marcus says. He feels sad inside. Jaime was a good brother, and now he’s lost to them. It is like he is dead. Marcus knows better. “I don’t care about the Sons, ese. I care that the Alpha was among them. I just got off the phone with Clay Morrow.”

Javier winces. Someone swears softly. Marcus can’t bring himself to care who.

“Jaime will live, I think, but he is no longer Mayan,” Marcus tells them all. “He is a wolf now. A wolf that belongs to the Alpha. You’ve given Clay Morrow a weapon.”

“The Alpha won’t take orders from Morrow for long – “

Marcus barks a sharp laugh. It isn’t pleasant. “Morrow is living on borrowed time, only he doesn’t know it. That Alpha is going to take Charming and everything in it, including the Sons.”

Oscar, eyes bright beta gold, speaks from his place at the bar, “I think it’s time to reach out to Hale.”

“I agree,” Marcus replies. It’s past time. He’s been waiting for things to settle, but with this incident, he knows they’re only going to escalate. “Javier, you go talk to Jaime’s mama, you tell her what’s happened. Manolo get that gunshot seen to. Daniel, you’re going to be my messenger.”

Daniel swallows hard. He doesn’t want to go back to Charming. Doesn’t want to see that wolf again. He has no choice, not if he wants to live. He can see that Marcus is livid.

“Let me make this clear, brothers. None of this gets back to Mexico. The last things we need is Hunters or Galindo trying to come deal with this. If we want to survive what’s coming, we keep our heads down and we keep out of the way.”

* 

Agent June Stahl stops driving. She has to. She pulls the black government issued SUV over onto the shoulder of the road and gets out, swaying and drunk on the power she can feel surging up and out of Charming like a tidal wave.

It makes her nauseous.

She throws up in a scraggly little desert plant on the side of the road in the middle of the night.

When she is finished and she turns to get back in the car, the headlights glint off razor sharp cheekbones and bluish spots at her temples. Her eyes reflect the light like a cat’s.

* 

It is quiet when he wakes up. He is in a bed, the sheets are good quality cotton, worn soft with use and smelling faintly of detergent. That false sort of fresh spring day that smells nice, but doesn’t actually resemble a fresh spring day.
There’s a little weight on his chest, and he can feel the sun warming him.

For a moment he just lays there, basking in the rare occasion of waking up slow and lazy. Then the events of the night before (Was it last night? Has it been longer?) come back to him. He practically jackknives out of the bed in an attempt to find his wounds. A wild look around the room reveals a mirror propped up on the dresser, and he goes over to it to stare into its surface.

He tilts his head from one side to the other, fingers touching his neck. He knows he was bitten on the neck last night. His neck should be completely mangled. Instead all he sees is himself. A little too thin for how tall he is, skin darkened from hours on a bike in the sun. Black hair, a little on the long side as it’s started curling around his ears. He could use a shave.

He steps back to pull up the t-shirt he’s wearing (it smells like detergent and a little bit of gunpowder) to stare at the flawless skin on his side. He’d been savaged by a monster. His side should be a mangled mess of blood, muscle and bone. It isn’t. The only marks on his skin are a couple of moles and a scar from a bullet graze he took a few years ago.

Somewhere in the back of his head, a little voice cowers in a gibbering wreck.

The smell of bacon, sausage and eggs wafts up the stairs to his nose. He can hear voices and the clinking of dishware.

The room he’s in is pretty generic. Gray sheets and a blue bedspread. Decorated, but no personal touches. A guest room. The carpet is thick and plush against his bare feet. He goes out into the hall and finds the bathroom. The bathroom is lived in, he observes as he uses the toilet. There are two toothbrushes on the edge of the sink (one green, one blue) he notices as he washes his hands and splashes water on his face. There a razorblade in the soap dish (the soap is in a dispenser) and an electric one hooked into a charger on a shelf above the toilet.

The bathroom has a nautical theme.

He’s wearing a Beacon County Sheriff’s Department t-shirt and gray sweats. They are not his clothes.

He ventures out into the hall, his feet making the floorboards make tiny creaking noises.

It’s easy to find the kitchen. He just follows his nose. Down the stairs and through the living room until he’s standing awkwardly in the doorway watching as two kids set a table that’s been set up just outside the back doors, which have been propped open.

There’s a petite, dark-haired woman at the stove with a spatula in one hand as she pokes a young guy with gravity-defying hair in the side, causing him to yelp and flail away with her. He turns on her, threateningly clicking the metal tongs in his hands at her. She laughs and dodges while expertly smacking the hand of a humongous guy with a lumberjack beard and a beanie on his head.

Then Jaime Martel spots Jax Teller, the Vice President of the Sons of Anarchy lounging at the table, a bundle of blue in his arms and it all comes back to him. Going after a few of the Sons on the run. Running the one off the road, being tackled. Bitten. Savaged by the world’s biggest (and scariest) wolf.

He remembers the pain. And he remembers making a choice.

“Oh good, you’re up,” a voice says behind him.

Jaime jolts in surprise and turns to see a man standing behind him. He’s got blue eyes, brown hair
and Jaime knows exactly who he is even if he doesn’t know his name. Alpha. His Alpha.

“Grab the orange juice would you?” he says, brushing past to grab a carafe of coffee and head out to the table.

Jaime follows the order. The giant hands him a huge jug of orange juice and he takes it out onto the porch and sets it on the table and sits when the Alpha tells him to.

Another Son, this one with a Mohawk and skull tattoos is sitting on a folding chair that’s been pushed away from the table and over to the rose bushes where several tiny figures with glittery translucent wings are fluttering around him in an apparent tizzy.

The giant steps out of the house and sets a tray of bacon, sausage and eggs on the table before pulling out a chair for the woman after she sets down a plate piled high with toast. She gives him a kiss in reward for the manners he shows.

“Okay, okay!” the skinny teenager says, plopping a tray of pancakes on the table. “Breakfast is served!”

There’s a twitter and a whistle, and a little creature blinks into existence on the table. She looks like a tiny purple dragon and Jaime feels like he should recognize her even though he doesn’t as she steals a sausage link and takes it to a little dessert plate down the table near where the Alpha and the teen are sitting.

“Twila touched the food first!” the little girl exclaims, pointing. “She has to say grace!”

“Nice try, Ellie,” her mother says with a grin, “but Twila can’t talk, so that makes her exempt.”

The girl pouts, but grace gets said and then chaos reigns for a few minutes as everyone piles their plates with food.

“I’m Juice,” Mohawk guy says by way of introduction as he drags his chair over to the table and sits between Jaime and Jax. He proceeds to fill a plate for Jax, and then for himself, talking all the while. “That’s Opie, Donna, Kenny, Ellie, Stiles, Peter, Jax and Abel.”

“Jaime,” he replies, feeling a little shocky at the acceptance these people are showing for having a Mayan in their midst.

“Nice to meet you, man,” Juice says cheerfully. He’s wearing a chain of flowers around his neck and it really doesn’t match his kutte or the t-shirt he’s wearing underneath. He doesn’t seem bothered in the least by it either.

Peter’s eyes flicker red for a brief moment when Jaime meets his eyes, “Yes, welcome to the family, Jaime.”

Warmth suffuses Jaime’s chest at that. At the accepting tone in the Alpha’s voice and the welcoming demeanor of the people around the table. He doesn’t know what the hell he’s gonna do now, but he knows he’s not going to have to face it alone.

He digs into his breakfast, suddenly ravenous.

Everything can wait until after food.

*
The shop is exactly what he wanted. Small, with a classical small town façade. It will most certainly need a makeover, but he can make it look and feel like the finest of cigar shops. Because that is what he does. He owns cigar shops all up and down the coast (and a couple out east). He knows what a good cigar shop is, and he knows a good cigar.

He knows a few other things as well.

Like how something happened two nights ago that lit Charming up in a mystical sense that even he could feel, and he’s as far from that world as he can possibly make himself. Something big.

Something Argent is going to hear about, despite his invalided life.

Ethan feels that the agreement he made with the aged man is going to come back and bite him. There is obviously more going on in Charming than a simple werewolf moving towns and territories. Ethan isn’t sure what, other than that he doesn’t want anything to do with it.

He cannot leave, however. He has a duty to the League and his colleagues.

His mission is a righteous one; and it cannot go undone.

He can get his daughter away from here, though. He doesn’t want her anywhere near this city when the Hunters and that Werewolf clash. Ethan gets the distinct feeling that Argent is going to entirely underestimate the wolf, and he’s decidedly against advising the man further. For one, Gerard Argent takes counsel from no one but himself and perhaps that psychotic daughter of his. For two, Ethan knows when to protect himself from certain situations.

This is one of those times.

“Mister Weston,” Ethan says, turning to his associate (not friend, never friend). The man turns those bottomless black eyes on Ethan, and again he represses a shudder. If AJ Weston is completely human, Ethan will start a charity venture for underprivileged black Americans. “Why don’t you take a drive? Get the lay of the land around here, seeing as we’ve only just arrived.”

The scariest thing about AJ Weston is not his brutality or his unwavering zeal for the Cause, but his intelligence. Weston is a militaristic strategist who is willing to get his hands dirty. It makes him a great lieutenant, but a dangerous man to have at one’s back. For multiple reasons.

Weston nods, understanding the subtext in what Ethan is telling him. “I’ll look for a few good places to advertise the shop,” he says in that way of his, flat and devoid of feeling.

“Wonderful idea,” Ethan agrees. Weston nods once and leaves the shop. Ethan turns back to the realtor with a congenial smile, “Now, Ms. Brooks, shall we discuss the paperwork?”

*  

When Chibs was young; when he was a brash kid just out of the army and with a chip on his shoulder the size of the Isle of Mann, he had an adventure. It wasn’t the last one he would ever have, but it was certainly one of the most significant events of his life.

After all, he’d met Fiona and joined the Sons.

Sometimes he remembers what it was like, being chased across the Irish moors by a Cu-Sith. Trying to outrun the spectral embodiment of death in dog form is a bit like trying to outrun a moving train. He hadn’t realized at the time that the dog had been an omen more than anything else at the time. Karianne was only a few months old and life had seemed perfect.
But no one crosses Jimmy O. No one gets in the way of something he wants. And he had wanted Fiona and Kerianne.

And Chibs had paid the price.

He’s got more than a Glasgow smile to show for it.

He was chased by the Cu-sith once. Straight into the arms of a Faerie Mound.

It doesn’t matter what Court a Fae is from, they’re all tricksters at the end of the day. All cruel in their way, if only because they are not human, and therefore have expectations that a human can’t understand.

He doesn’t know why Ardghal Mac Og had chosen to help him, and Chibs knew better than to ask.

He’s wary of Juice, which is not something he likes. He’d sponsored the kid into the Sons. Thinks of him more as his own son than his brother. He’s been having a rough time with the knowledge that Juice had hidden his Fae heritage from him. That he hadn’t been trusted with such a thing.

He understands why, but that doesn’t mean he has to like it.

Juice has apologized, and explained. Chibs has forgiven him, but it’s opened his eyes. He can see what’s going on. The changes being wrought right in front of Clay that the President is only just beginning to understand are happening.

It’s like watching an avalanche roll down a mountainside.

Peter Hale has too much momentum for anything to stop him now; and all of the Sons are in his path.

Chibs has to make a choice. Stay where he is and be buried in the rubble, become one of the rocks rolling down the mountainside creating change, or step aside and let it happen while he hopes he doesn’t get caught in the fray.

Does he warn Tig, Bobby and Piney? Does he warn Happy, whose been looking to transfer to Charming to be closer to his mother? Does he warn Clay?

He sees the way the boys all circle around Peter. The way that Jax, Juice and Opie all defer to him in a way. Oh sure, Jax is in charge of them when it comes to the Sons business, but Peter is in charge of everything else. Peter and Stiles.

Chibs knows what a Spark is. His time with the Sidhe had taught him many things, mostly survival based, but a few others beside. There had been a Spark among the Sidhe when he’d been captive among them. Nothing had happened without her say, without her approval. She’d been a direct link to the Queen even if she wasn’t the Lord of the Mound. Chibs knows better than to even think of her name, much less dwell on her existence for long. She would know.

“There’s an ATF agent in town,” Jax says, breaking Chibs out of his thoughts.

He looks around at his brothers. At the men he would bleed and die for, and he makes his choice. Jax is the future of the Sons. If Jax trusts Peter enough to join the man’s Pack, then that needs to be enough for Chibs.

Jax has that pinched, angry face of his on. The one where he presses his lips together in a flat line and you can almost see the scream of rage he’s containing in his eyes. “Kohn. Met him at the hospital when I took Abel in for a checkup. Me made some vaguely menacing comments. Tara
Clay takes a drag off his cigar, “That what she’s doing back here?”

“I don’t think her thing with the guy has to do with the club. I’m not sure he’s even here for us, not really,” Jax says. There’s a lot of things in his voice. Many of them speak to the anger he still feels at Tara for leaving like she did. Juice sets his hand on Jax’s shoulder, shaking his head once. Jax swallows down whatever it is that’s making him make that face of disgust. “She keeps trying to rekindle us.”

“Fuck,” Clay says on a sigh. “Your Mom know?”

Jax snorts, “If you think I could have prevented her from figuring it out, you don’t know her man.”

Clay huffs a single chuckle. Everyone at the table knows how impossible it is to keep Gemma from sticking her nose into anything and everything. Much less prevent her from meddling. “Let me guess, he’s looking into the Club because he doesn’t like that the little Doctor came running back to you.”

Jax nods, “I’m pretty sure this is gonna end with that guy dead.”

“We’ll deal with that when it happens,” Clay decides. “If he comes after Abel or you, we’ll deal with it.”

Jax nods.

“What’s next?” Clay demands.

Chibs decides to chime in, “Irish are happy wit’ tha cash. Say we’ve got six months to star’ tha pipeline back up or they’ll find another buyer. Got an offer to move small arms up the coast in the meantime.”

Clay nods seriously. Keeping the real IRA happy means they all get to go home at the end of the day. No one know what would happen if they pissed off the Council, and no one wants to find out. “Good. Look into how we can do that, best to keep something moving than nothing at all. Keeps ‘em from running out of patience on us.”

Chibs nods.

There’s a long silence after that as everyone stares around at each other. No one wants to broach the topic, but it’s going to have to happen. Especially after that messenger Alvarez had sent.

“Is this going to cause problems?” Clay finally demands, meeting Peter’s gaze.

Peter cocks his head to one side, a bit like a curious dog. A smirk curls at the corners of his mouth. “I’ll deal with it if it does.”

That isn’t an answer Clay likes.

It’s the only one he’s going to get.
Oh, Stiles,” Cali says on a sigh. “Do you know what you’ve done?”

Stiles knows he did something when he Healed Jaime. He just doesn’t know what and how much change it caused. “Sort of? I’m still kind of new to this whole Spark thing.”

The Witch blinks, then bites her lip thoughtfully. She looks at the familiars on the counter for a few long moments. This is far beyond her. She may have been born on an Octarine day thirty-seven years ago, to a Witch mother, but she’s never been more powerful than the average witch.

“We’d better have a cup of tea,” she decides finally. “I’ll tell you what I know and then I’ll give you a free reading.”

So, I accidentally deleted a chapter this morning. Thankfully, it was one I had already posted here, so I don't have to rewrite anything, but boy did it cause a minor panic attack until I figured it out. This is why we back up our work, people.

On another note: I completely imply that Clay is Jax's biological father here. Explanation: When Gemma finds the box of old things that Jax brought out of the storage room she takes a wedding picture out of the box. In it are JT, herself (heavily pregnant) and Clay. Because Gemma is Gemma, I could never see her feeling ashamed that she was pregnant with Jax before she and John got married, so she must have been trying to hide something else.

This is never addressed in canon, and it really bugs me. There's real possibility there of Jax not being John Teller's son. Fun fact: Ron Perlman was blond before he went all silver fox on us. Blond hair, blue eyes, remind you of anyone? Also, we know that in canon Clay and Gemma plotted to kill JT together. I feel like they had to have been together behind his back at least since Thomas died and he left for Ireland, if not before. I don't think that Gemma would turn to someone like Clay at that time, what with him being her husband's best friend and the risk of it getting back to him being extremely high, unless there was already something there.

So yeah, that's my headcanon: Gemma never did know which of the two Sons was Jax's real father, but she probably suspected the whole time. And I believe it leans heavily toward Clay being the father versus John due to the fact that two people with dark hair have a very slim chance of producing a blond kid.

Disclaimer: Octarine as the color of magic belongs to Terry Pratchett and the discworld. I own nothing SOA or TW.
Fifteen:

“Heart, cover your tracks

The blood that you spill will wash what you lack

Soul, sew up your wounds

Test out your engine, give it some room…”

- Cover Your Tracks, A Boy & His Kite

Gemma is an intelligent woman. She can see the writing being written on the wall from a mile away. Change may not be something she likes, but it is an inevitability that she accepted way back when she left home.

There’s something inside her son. Some strange strength that wasn’t there before Abel was born.

Then she finds the manuscript while packing up his things from the clubhouse and she knows. If she doesn’t get ahead of this somehow, her whole world is going to crumble down around her. Her son will hate her, her husband will probably be buried in a shallow grave somewhere outside Charming, and she’ll have nothing.

She burns the manuscript and prays that Jax hasn’t had the time to finish reading it.

*

“Well look at you! Aren’t you gorgeous!”

Twila preens at the compliment and sits primly on the glass counter-top. She is very pretty, and she knows it. Her tail flicks back and forth as the lady that smells like potions and stardust gives a good scratch beneath her chin.

Another cat lands on the table-top. A black one. He circles around her once and then they touch noses. He flickers, the expanse of space dotted across his coat and his eyes containing small galaxies. She flickers back, her wings spreading jewel-bright over their heads as she twitters playfully at the other familiar.

“Oh, Stiles, she’s gorgeous!” Cali exclaims, giving the young man a grin.

“She is, isn’t she?” Stiles asks fondly. Twila and Blake are deep in conversation, probably about their humans. “How are you, Cali?”

“Oh, I’m doing alright. There was a Surge the other day.” She’s poking for information. She has an inkling about what happened, but needs confirmation.

Stiles smiles and scratches the back of his head sheepishly, “Yeah, that was me.”

“Oh, Stiles,” Cali says on a sigh. “Do you know what you’ve done?”

Stiles knows he did something when he Healed Jaime. He just doesn’t know what and how much change it caused. “Sort of? I’m still kind of new to this whole Spark thing.”
The Witch blinks, then bites her lip thoughtfully. She looks at the familiars on the counter for a few long moments. This is far beyond her. She may have been born on an Octarine day thirty-seven years ago, to a Witch mother, but she’s never been more powerful than the average witch.

“We’d better have a cup of tea,” she decides finally. “I’ll tell you what I know and then I’ll give you a free reading.”

Stiles’ eyebrows raise, but he nods gamely. He’s never had someone read his tea leaves before. It should prove interesting.

Cali closes the shop. It’s Tuesday, which has never been her busiest day of the week. (She is under no delusions that the people of Charming are her finest patrons. Most of her business is conducted online these days.) Then she leads Stiles into the workroom in the back. She’s got three different potions on the brew, and there are bundles of drying herbs from her garden hanging from the ceiling. Stiles sits at the little worktable she uses to do the shops paperwork when instructed and Cali bustles about making tea.

“You used a lot of power to do whatever it is you did,” she starts. She studiously doesn’t look at him, giving him a little freedom to react how he wants is the least she can do in this circumstance. “I mean, you used a lot of power when you set those wards at your house. That place shines with power so strongly it’s become a Ley Crossing, but that’s not a huge thing. Ley Crossings happen all the time. Well, not every day, but certainly more often than what happened the other day.”

Stiles interrupts her rambling, “What did happen the other day?”

“You woke up the land, Stiles.”

Cali turns to look at the teen then. He’s watching her keenly, but stays seated as she brings the tea tray over. He remains silent as the tea begins to serve itself as she retrieves a chair for herself.

“Around three hundred years ago, maybe more, when white people came here and started stripping the land of her riches, the Natives performed a ritual. In order to ease the pain of the Earth, the Wahewa and many other tribes all across the country sang the Earth to sleep. You see, white people, we came here and we took over and we were a bit like locusts. We took and we took and we took and we never gave the Earth time to replenish itself. She couldn’t sustain both us and herself.

Magic in this country is a contradiction. It’s an old and wild sort, but it’s also a young kind of thing. Most practitioners brought the ways of other lands here. Most don’t practice local traditions. We use the magic of a place that never learned to bend to it like the land in Europe and other places has.

We don’t have many Old Places here, not like other places in the world. There honestly aren’t that many Wellsprings here, and most don’t know how to tap them even if they come across one.”

“What are you saying, Cali?”

“I’m saying you’ve started something. Power calls to power, Stiles. That’s the way of things. You created a Wellspring under your house, which created a Crossing. That was fine, it’s small in the grand scheme of things.” Cali sets her teacup down while Stiles swills the dregs around in the bottom of his cup and peers into them like they’ve got some kind of an answer for him. “You’re power personified. Peter is the strongest Alpha on the west coast, maybe even in the country. Things are going to come for you; and they’ll want one of three things.”

Stiles flips his teacup over on its saucer to let the last bit of liquid to drain out and sets it down on the table. He doesn’t look at her when he speaks, “To join us, to gain protection, or to kill us and take
She knew he wasn’t stupid. He’s got intelligent, cunning eyes. “Charming knows you’re here, Stiles. Whatever it is you did, you woke the land of Charming up. She reached for you and she tried to eat you.”

Stiles looks up at this, stares at her in shock. “It what?”

“It tried to eat you, Stiles,” Cali tells him. Her voice is hard, implacable. It presses the seriousness of what happened into Stiles’ skin. “You generated a hell of a lot of power. Nearly every light in the city turned Octarine for a few seconds. The land of the city woke, and the land beneath the Sons clubhouse tried to eat you. It wanted your power. The power you put out into the world like a broken hose.”

“Why would it want to eat me?”

“Because nothing like you has been seen here for hundreds of years, Stiles, and humans have been stripping the earth of her riches and power for longer than that. You have the ability to generate as much power as you want just by believing it exists. If you let it, the land will eat everything you’ve got until the power consumes you from the inside out.”

Stiles swallows hard. Takes the warning for what it is. Healing like he can is both blessing and curse. “What happens now that it’s awake.”

“Don’t plan on taking any long road trips, for one.” Cali reaches for Stiles’ teacup. “You’re Charming’s favorite son now. You’ve revitalize a dying place. Creatures, little ones that can be sustained on this level of Wakening will start appearing. It’s going to get harder to hide the supernatural from the average Joe. Things that want power are going to start seeking you out, and through you, Peter.”

“Okay. We figured that would happen anyway.”

Cali looks into Stiles’ cup, turning it counter-clockwise slowly. “You have enemies surrounding you that will do everything they can to stop the Change you represent from coming to fruition. There are enemies on the horizon that have noticed your presence. One that knows you approaches to strike.”

“What do we do?”

“Keep being you,” Cali says, looking up. Her eyes gleam with octarine. “The path you’re treading as a Spark is the one you are meant to be on. The one you walk with Peter is the most important one you will ever have, hold tight to that. I recommend being fully Mated within the year. There’s something coming that will try to break you two apart. Being Mated will mean that you can withstand it.”

Stiles inhales and holds his breath for a count of five, then slowly exhales.

“Keep your Pack close, your Love closer, and never, ever ignore your instincts.”

“Anything else?”

Cali gazes at Stiles silently for long enough that he starts to squirm a bit in his chair. She’s not really looking at him. More like looking through him. He’s never met a Seer before, but he feels like he has now. When she speaks, her voice is a little distant, like she’s speaking from down a tunnel.

“Something is reaching for you along the Current. Something old and hungry. It doesn’t seem evil,
but it wants. It comes from the north.”

Twila hops into Stiles’ lap. Her limited telepathy conveys concern for him. She can tell he’s disturbed by Cali’s news. He wraps her up in his arms and holds her close. She tucks her head under his chin and purrs to comfort him.

“What else?” he asks softly.

Cali’s eyes focus on him, her face serious. “Offer Jax the Bite. He will lead the Sons, and be Pack Second, but only if he has the healing of the Wolf on his side.”

*

David knocks on the Chief’s door politely. He’s learned over the months since Stilinski arrived that to be polite is to err on the side of caution. The door may be open, but that doesn’t mean anyone can just barge on in. His fellow officers like their boss, and David hasn’t been able to find a fault with the man (despite Peter’s unfortunate alliance with the Sons) aside from the fact that he’s got the job David wants.

“Sir?”

John Stilinski looks like he’s smelled something unpleasant. He waves David into the room, then gestures for him to close the door. David does so.

“We’ve got a problem, Hale,” John states baldly.

David settles into one of the chairs across from the Chief, “More than her?” He uses his thumb to point over toward the closed door.

John snorts, “Oh, she’s a piece of work. And I’ll eat my badge if that woman is fully human. She’s the least of our problems right now.”

“But?” David prompts. There’s always a but.

John sighs, “She could quickly change that and become most of our problems.”

“She’s after the Sons, I don’t see how wanting to clean up Charming is a problem.” David remains steadfast in his opinion that Charming would be better off without the Sons.

John nods, “That woman will go through us and anyone else that gets in her way.”

“Fun.”

“Mmm,” John purses his lips in thought. “The ATF Agent we need to worry about is that Kohn fellow that’s been lurking around the last few months. Agent Stahl just confirmed he’s not here on any sort of case involving the Sons that she’s aware of.”

David’s brow twitches in a frown, “He’s from Chicago.”

“Yes, and I’m going to call the Director up there and find out why Kohn’s here. I want you to watch the man. Set a plain-clothes deputy on him if you have to, but I want to know where he goes, who he speaks to and what he’s doing in Charming.”

“Yes, sir. Anything else?”

John unveils a slim file from his desk and hands it over, “The Mayor called a few weeks ago about
a potential problem that may be moving into town. I’ve kept it shelved until I saw something worth investigating.”

David opens the file curiously, his eyes flickering over the three sheets of paper in the file. “The League of American Nationalists, sir?”

“White Supremacists with deep, influential pockets.” John reaches for his mug and makes a moue of disgust at the cold coffee within. “They have a habit of moving into a town and… rearranging it to their liking. Crime rates tend to skyrocket for months after they move in.”

“This Zobelle character is an FBI informant?” David demands. “How’d you even get that information, don’t they keep that stuff confidential like we do?”

“I’ve got a friend in the FBI that owes me a favor or six,” John waves the question away. David feels the burning of curiosity, but knows his boss won’t elaborate. “And yes, he is. We may not be able to touch him, but his associate is fair game.”

David skims the rap sheet that is the remainder of the file. It’s rather extensive.

John reads his expression, grants him a completely humorless smile and says in a flat voice, “There are worse people in the world than the Sons, Hale.”

*  


There are things Clay Morrow doesn’t like. Change. Arthritis. Jax rising to power like he is.

There are two things he loves. His Club and his Wife.

Gemma frets about Jax, but Clay isn’t worried in the same way she is. He knows the boy is following in his father’s footsteps. After all, Jax may not know it, but he isn’t John Teller’s blood. He’s Morrow through-and-through. Gemma doesn’t think Clay knows that he’s Jax’s father, but he does. After all, John had been on a run when Jax was conceived. The dates hadn’t matched up to make John the father.

So Jax’s grabs for power are expected. He’s his father’s son.

Clay had done the exact same thing in his time.

John Teller had had to die for Clay to get what he wanted. He isn’t ashamed of the fact that he’d orchestrated his best friend’s death. A few words in the right ears. Some really good drugs and a few thousand bucks, and Clay was sitting the President’s seat at the Table.

He waited a year to marry Gemma for respectability.

Jax wants to be President. He wants to take the Sons into a future that Clay doesn’t want to. He wants the club to lean legit and possibly get out of guns altogether. Clay can see the pretty portrait that Jax has painted himself. But that’s all it is.

After all, you can’t throw away a forty-year relationship with an organization like the real IRA without consequences. If Jax wants out of guns, he’s got to be careful about it or the IRA will let them out of their agreement by purging the Charter, possibly the Club in its entirety.

Clay knows what he’s done. He’s a criminal, an intelligent one that has had more than half his life to
figure out the ins and outs of a life running guns.

Also, the money is fantastic.

He’s going to have to step down one day. Sooner than he’d like. His hands get worse all the time, and a fact of Club life is that if you can’t ride, you don’t get a vote. If he can’t vote, he can’t be President.

Until then, Clay is going to hold onto the gavel with every ounce of strength he’s got.

There’s also the Hale problem.

He knows he bit off more than he could chew by recruiting Peter to the Sons. But the man’s full-patch. It would take a unanimous vote to oust him, and Clay will never get that. Besides, Peter has never done anything to put any of the Sons in danger, so Clay has no reason to bring it to the table.

But the power Peter wields makes Clay nervous.

Peter Hale has influence on Jax, Opie and Juice. Chibs has all but declared that if forced to choose, he’s setting up camp in Peter’s backyard. Piney likes Stiles (Stupid kid who can’t keep his nose out of anything and could kill him with his brain.), which means he’s more inclined to lean toward Peter than toward Clay.

Unsurprising, considering that he and Piney have been quietly feuding since JT died.

But Clay has Tig, and with Tig he can move mountains. If he can get Happy, then he’s got two weapons in his arsenal that none of the others can possibly counter without outright murdering one of them.

And Brothers don’t kill Brothers.

Do they?

*

Jaime feels naked without a kutte on his back. He feels its loss like a missing limb. He joined the Mayans the day he turned eighteen, despite his Mama not wanting him to. He father had been a Mayan, his brothers are all Mayans. Jaime had wanted to be a Mayan.

Not a single day of the last ten years has he regretted Prospecting.

His heart wrenches as he leads his Pack onto the lot of the Mayans clubhouse.

He can’t be a Mayan now. Not with his Alpha being a Son. Not with Jax Teller as Pack Second.

He doesn’t regret the wolf he is now. He’s had a few weeks to learn about himself. Spent his first full moon running through Chigger Woods with his Alpha and the Alpha Mate. He’s run through shadows with Juice and been entrusted with Pack Mom Donna’s little ones. He’s held little Abel in his arms and been entrusted with his safety.

He has his own room in the Pack House.

He rolls his bike to a stop, and the three bikes that followed him line up next to his. Oscar is waiting by the doors of the clubhouse, eyes bright Beta gold. Jaime feels his own eyes flare at the sight. Oscar isn’t Pack.
Peter’s hand clamps down on Jaime’s shoulder, squeezing tightly to remind him that they’re here under a truce. No violence and no threats.

Jaime climbs off his bike, collects his kutte out of the left-hand saddlebag and leads Peter, Jax and Juice into the clubhouse. Every footstep is like lead. Every eye watches him with caution and a little hostility. Most have a hint of sadness around them. He’s no longer a Brother, and it wasn’t his choice. (It was, but they don’t know that. He could be dead instead. If he was, he’d still have his kutte.)

Marcus Alvarez rises as they enter the clubhouse and walks forward to greet them. He reaches out and shakes Peter’s hand. “Alpha Hale, welcome.”

Peter nods, “Thank you.”

Alvarez turns to Jaime and smiles a small, sad sort of smile. “Jaime.”

Jaime swallows, and lets the man who is like a father to him draw him into a hug. Listens as “It’s okay mijo” is whispered in his ear. He clings for longer than he should. No one says anything about it. This is the end of a part of his life he never thought he’d have to leave.

When they pull apart, Alvarez speaks, “Come, let’s have a drink and talk, si?”

“Sounds great,” Jax says with a grin.

Every Mayan in the room takes note of the fact that none of the Sons that came here with Jaime are wearing their kuttes. This is, after all, Pack business, not Club business.

Several of them wonder how long it will be before those two things are one and the same.
Choice

Chapter Summary

“Have you ever thought about what it would be like to be a werewolf?”

Opie looks at Jax, leaning against his bike and lighting a cigarette like they hadn’t just come out of one of the most serious conversations they’ve ever had in their lives. “Sure. Why?”

Jax puffs on his cigarette for a second, exhaling a plume of smoke on a sigh, “What do you think it would be like?”

Opie shrugs one shoulder and shifts his weight to the other foot, “Weird.”

Chapter Notes

This chapter is being published two days early due to a death in the family. I will not have time to post this Saturday, so I am posting this early. Next week's chapter will come out on our regular schedule.

My AKA title for this chapter is: Also, Boys Kissing.

Disclaimer: Octarine as the color of magic belongs to Terry Pratchett and the Discworld. I own nothing SOA or TW.

Sixteen:

Jax loves the road. He loves the wind whipping at his face like it’s trying to tear his skin off. He loves the extremes of hot-to-cold with the weather. He loves riding in the rain and the snow and the heat. He loves the roar of his bike in his ears. The vibration of the engine singing through his body.

He loves every crack in the pavement, every steep incline and dip. He loves sharp turns and slow turns.

He loves the road.

Juice loves the road, too. He loves the steady firmness of pavement under wheels. The whispers of the wind in his ears as it tells him about the latest things it finds interesting. He loves riding under the moon and the stars far from the city where all he has to do is rise from his seat and reach up to touch the infinite.

He loves the predictability of it. The sight of oncoming headlights and fleeing taillights. The numbness in his hands after a day-long ride.
He loves the road.

They both breath in tar and sand. The sizzle of hot pavement and bugs hitting them with little stinging moments of the reality of the road.

They’ve grown closer since they became Pack. Grown into themselves and each other and their places in the world.

Jax is Second to the Alpha like he is VP to the President. That is where the similarities end. He doesn’t want to be the Alpha. He’s perfectly content to follow Peter’s lead in everything supernatural. With the Sons, he’s forever chomping at the bit. Eager and straining to take Clay’s place. Clay is an old man who is stuck thirty years in the past.

The world has changed. Charming has changed.

The Sons have to change if they want to survive.

Juice is forever the penultimate Intelligence Officer, it doesn’t matter what face he wears. As a Son, he’s the computer savvy info-gatherer. As Pack, he’s born to shadow and observation. He’s strong and worthwhile and he knows it now. The Pack don’t treat him the same as the Sons. He isn’t the butt of everyone’s jokes. He’s an asset, with things to offer and who is loved for who he is.

It’s starting to bleed over into the Sons. Jax and Opie treating him with more respect than before. The others see it and can reflect it because they can see that Juice has finally grown into his skin.

He will back his VP when the time comes.

The pair of them roll to a stop in front of the Devil’s Tribe clubhouse in Nevada. They breathe in hot desert air and exchange exhilarated looks. Something between them is growing, but neither wants to acknowledge that it might be anything more than strong friendship.

Opie parks his bike between theirs with a shake of his head.

It’s good to have Opie back. Jax missed his best friend while he was in Chino, and then when he’d gotten out it had almost seemed like he was still inside for all that they saw each other. But Donna and Opie have figured it out. They still struggle sometimes, but not with each other.

Besides, Donna runs roughshod across all of them as the only woman in the Pack. She’s taken up the mantle of Pack Mom and run with it. She makes sure they’re all taking care of themselves. Kenny and Ellie think it’s great that she packs lunches for grown men that consist of peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches and carrot sticks just like theirs.

None of them have the guts to refuse a lunch from Donna Winston.

She’s taken to the care and feeding of the Chief with a zeal that makes Stiles crow with vindication.

Jax dives into a back-slapping hug with the man he calls Uncle Jury. Jury isn’t really his uncle, but the Devil’s Tribe President had served in Vietnam with John Teller, and that made him family.

“How you doin’ Jax?” Jury asks as the trio of Sons are welcomed among the Tribe with cheer.

“I’m great,” Jax tells him, letting himself be led into the bar. “Kid came home last week.”

“That’s fantastic!” Jury exclaims. The grin on his face tells Jax that he’s genuinely pleased for Jax. He gestures to the brunette behind the bar to get the three Sons a drink and leads them to a table. He
waits until they’re all settled in and comfortable before asking “So, what brings you out to my neck of the woods?”

Jax exchanges a look with Opie and Juice. They’re committed to why they’re here. They’ve talked it out among each other and with Peter, Stiles and the Chief. John is surprisingly on their side in all of this, though he’s reminded them all to remain objective.

Change rarely happens all at once.

“I wanted to ask you for some advice,” Jax says carefully.

Jury raises his eyebrows and catches his own VP’s gaze over the blond’s shoulder. The man shrugs, but turns his attention to the conversation anyway. This seems serious.

“I want to know how you did it,” Jax continues. Steel in his blue gaze as he meets Jury’s.

“Did what, Jax?”

“How you got your club out of the dangerous stuff.” Jax’s voice is determined. “How you got legit.”

Jury sits back in surprise. He never expected this. The Sons have always been part of the one-percent. Taking a Club legit could kill it. Especially a club that has over a dozen Charters across the country and at least one in Ireland. Getting one Charter out of it would be relatively easy, if it wasn’t the Mother Charter. The Redwood Original Charter is the founding Charter of the Sons. All of the other Charters look to them for an example.

“You know what you’re asking me for, Jackson?” Jury asks seriously. They both know Jax isn’t just asking for advice.

He’s asking the President of an Allied Club to fall down on his side when the VP of the Sons of Anarchy makes a play for the Chair.

“I do,” Jax says. “I know it puts you in a tight spot, but I’m asking anyway.”

Jury takes a drink from his beer to buy himself some time. The clubhouse has gone a little too quiet to convince him that his brothers aren’t listening in. They’re all waiting for him to make a decision. He looks up at his own VP again, and watches him nod once. The Tribe will back their President.

Jury sighs, “First, you’ve got to line up as many of the other Charters behind you as you can….”

*

Peter likes running the woods around Charming. His paws hitting soft loam and hard ground instead of concrete and pavement. He can hear himself think out here. Hear the wind in the trees and the bugs as they go about their business. He likes the feeling of his lungs expanding with heavy breaths from the exertion, the pounding of his heart in his chest.

His wolf form is greater than Talia’s ever was. She was a black wolf. She’d been elegant and beautiful, and she had made Peter unendingly jealous every time he say her shift into that form. Now, however, Peter is more than she ever was. He’s bigger, more powerful. His eyes gleam ruby; his coat is black as midnight save the faint silver patterning of burns all across his left side.

And it is sliver, not white, not gray, silver.

He doesn’t mind the pattern, really. It signifies what he’s been through to get to where he is.
Off to his left, Jaime crashes through the underbrush in his beta-shift. The younger man is still getting the hang of being a werewolf, but he’s made more progress in the last month-and-a-half than some have made in lifetimes. Though he’s tried Peter’s patience more than once.

Peter huffs at him, and Jaime makes a noise back. Something between a laugh and a bark that is utterly confused and entirely his own.

Peter huffs at him, then growls playfully and charges at him. Jaime yelps in surprise and takes off. It’s time for Jaime to attempt to evade his pursuer instead of being the pursuer.

Charming was a good choice.

His soul tugs inside him where it is tied to Stiles. The golden rope that anchors him in the here and now. He tugs at it playfully, telling Stiles that he’s thinking of him, that he’s happy.

Stiles responds by tugging at his own end, sending joy and love down the rope with glee.

For a second, all Peter can smell is old books and ink, then he’s back in the forest with the pine and the earth and the scent of decaying leaves. He shakes off his momentary distraction and bounds off in pursuit of his beta.

* * *

“Have you ever thought about what it would be like to be a werewolf?”

Opie looks at Jax, leaning against his bike and lighting a cigarette like they hadn’t just come out of one of the most serious conversations they’ve ever had in their lives. “Sure. Why?”

Jax puffs on his cigarette for a second, exhaling a plume of smoke on a sigh, “What do you think it would be like?”

Opie shrugs one shoulder and shifts his weight to the other foot, “Weird.”

“You’re probably right.”

Opie has thought about it. This Pack that they’re in has done more to help him and Donna get their shit together than the Sons ever have. Donna is happier with being in-the-know than she ever was being on the outside of everything. She’s a hell of a strong woman and Opie knows he’s a lucky bastard since she hasn’t kicked him to the curb yet.

“You thinkin’ about it?”

Jax looks pensive for a moment, “Yeah.”

“Could kill you,” Opie points out.

Jax nods. They’d all say through Stiles’ lecture on the perils of the Bite and how it’s not a choice to come into lightly. “It’s why I haven’t asked yet. I mean, if I die what would happen to Abel?”

Opie snorts, “You know Gemma won’t let anything happen to Abel that she doesn’t approve of.”

Jax winces. He loves his mother. She’s a tough-as-nails, no-bullshit woman who’s weathered no small amount of shit in her life. Thomas’ death hadn’t broken her like it had his Dad. His Dad’s death hadn’t broken her either. She’d squared her shoulders and gotten on with raising Jax. That strength and willingness to do whatever it takes is the only reason Jax had been willing to accept how quickly she’d moved on after John Teller’s death.
“I’m not sure I want her to have him.” He feels like a horrible son saying it out loud, but it’s true. He’s not sure he wants Gemma raising his son if something happens to him. He’d be raised into the Life just like he was, and he wants so much more for Abel than that.

“Donna and I would take him. Stiles and Peter would be willing to do it too, you know.” Opie offers up. “You’re seriously considering this if you’re thinking about what happens if you die, man.”

Jax nods, “It’s not just the Bite, though. What we’re doing here, this whole thing with changing the Club and ousting Clay? That’s life and death, man.”

Opie usually walks around with a soberness to his expression and demeanor. That soberness is joined by a sort of serious concern that makes Jax grateful that the huge man is his best friend. “Clay’s not likely to go down easy, but we can’t wait until his hands force him out to start making the changes.”

Jax nods, “I know.”

He does. Clay’s hands could go out on him next week, or they could last another five years. Jax can’t live with his plans hedging on uncertainty like that. Opie and Peter have both advised he start getting his ducks in a row now. If everything is in place, then Clay’s inevitable fall will be when and where Jax wants it to be. It won’t be on Clay’s terms; because if that happens the man’ll drag the Sons into the grave with him.

And Jax won’t let that happen to his club.

They stay silent for a few minutes, smoking as the sun sets across the Nevada desert. Eventually Opie speaks, “You know I’ve got your back, no matter what you decide. But, brother, find a lawyer that isn’t Rosen and make a will. It’s not just you you got to worry about anymore. You need to make sure Abel’s taken care of, no matter what. You do that and everything else will come easier.”

Jax nods. It’s solid advice. Any will he has made can’t be stored at his place. If Gemma gets wind of it or the idea that Abel won’t go to her if Jax dies, she’ll tear his place apart until she finds it and makes sure that it doesn’t exist. No, he’ll leave a copy with the Chief, just-in-case.

“I think I might talk with Peter when we get back.”

“After you see a lawyer,” Opie says.

“After I see a lawyer,” Jax agrees.

There’s another long, comfortable silence. The sun finishes setting and they are bathed in shadows and the yellow light of the clubhouse’s exterior lights.

“So,” Opie prompts eventually, “What’s with the weird tension between you and Juice, man?”

Jax groans.

* *

If college had a smell, Stiles thinks, it would be a combination of books and desperation. Desperation smells like coffee and bad choices. Bad choices smell like old socks and pizza grease. College has a convoluted smell.

Stiles loves it.
Regular classes don’t start for a few more months, but early enrollment and a forty-five-minute drive has Stiles wandering around the UC Berkeley campus with nothing to do but sip at a giant iced coffee and map out the place in his head.

He’s very excited about college.

He’s double-majoring in Criminal Justice and Occult Studies. He’s going to be a hot commodity in the law enforcement world when he graduates. John’s already promised him an actual internship with the police department next summer, giving him some practical experience that he will actually be able to put on both his school transcripts and a resume.

Peter thinks his enthusiasm is adorable.

Stiles can’t help it, though. He’s determined to be able to protect his family from anything and everything. He’s always loved a good puzzle, and his determination is a dog with a bone. Law enforcement is a good fit for him. Specializing in the occult and mythology means he’ll be in demand for his skills by organizations like the FBI.

He wants to excel.

He doesn’t know any other way to be.

He’s jolted out of his thoughts as he wanders down the sidewalk when he spots someone he never thought he’d see again. His heart speeds up in his chest for a minute and then he gets spotted and waved at and all Stiles can think is that he’s grateful that the person he’s run into is actual ray-of-sunshine Danny Mahealani and not one of Scott’s Pack.

“Stiles!” Danny crosses the street to reach him, and Stiles can’t help but grin and return the hug that Danny offers him.

“Hey Danny! How are you?”

“I’m great,” Danny replies with a grin. “I got a scholarship!”

“Lacrosse?” Stiles wonders, and smiles when Danny nods. “You touring campus?”

Danny nods, “Yeah. You?”

“Well, I didn’t drive forty-five minutes because I like Oakland.”

Danny laughs, and Stiles feels like maybe this won’t be so bad after all. He can spend an afternoon with a guy he likes and used to consider a pseudo-friend. After all, Jackson’s still in London and without him around to snarl at Stiles, Danny has no reason to feel awkward around him. Besides, they’d mostly buried the non-existent hatchet last year while Danny was dating Ethan.

“Want to get lunch and check out the library?” Stiles asks.

Danny grins, “Sounds great.”

*  

Joshua Kohn hates stakeouts. He hates being stuck in a cramped rental car that smells like stale air freshener and old fast food. It’s part of the job, and he’s gotten used to it, but that doesn’t make him like it any less.

He can do this though. For Tara. For them.
He just needs proof that Jax Teller isn’t the kind of man she wants in her life. That Joshua is a much better choice than Jax ever was or could be. He knows he’ll get it, he just has to be patient and wait. Something is bound to happen on this run that will give him the ammunition that he needs.

The waiting is making him bored out of his mind.

*

Jax steps out of the smoke-filled interior of the Devil’s Tribe clubhouse and takes in a deep breath of clear desert air. It’s a chilly night, with the moon hanging fat and low in the sky, nearly full but not quite. It’s covered by a haze that makes it look orange.

He’s been thinking about the moon a lot lately.

“Hey,” Juice says with a nod when Jax stops walking next to him. Juice is seated sideways on his bike, puffing absent-mindedly on a cigarette and looking up at the stars with fathomless black eyes. Jax watches him watch the sky for a minute. He lights up his own cigarette and turns to sit on his own bike facing the other man. Their feet bump together as he situates himself.

Juice isn’t the person he thought he was. He feels everything deeply. He’s cheerful by nature, but protective in his bones. And for all that he appears to be made out of shadows and pixie dust, he’s as solid as a rock.

Jax isn’t sure where he’d be if he hadn’t had Juice to lean on these last four months.

“You’re thinking awfully hard,” Juice remarks after they’ve sat in silence together for nearly ten minutes. He takes his eyes off the stars for long enough to flash Jax a teasing grin edged with a shimmer of magic and fangs.

Jax stares for a long time. Long enough that Juice shifts in his seat and turns his eyes back to the sky. His cheekbones sharpening. A shimmer of silver freckles across the tan expanse of his flesh. Not for the first time, Jax thinks he’s beautiful. It’s a dangerous kind of beauty. The kind that eats at you slowly so that you don’t realize it’s doing so until you’ve already died.

It’s the same kind of beauty that Stiles has when he’s gone full-Spark. All golden eyes and firefly-motes of octarine illuminating his skin and making him look even paler than normal and vaguely ethereal.

It’s the same kind of beauty that Peter has. With ruby gemstone eyes, gleaming fangs and a coat so black it almost seems to suck in the light around it. With flashes of gleaming silver that show his battles across his coat in a display of strength and endurance.

The kind of beauty that Jax sees when he looks at his son. Holds that tiny frame in his arms and gazes into innocent blue eyes and can only feel wonder and a deep, aching sort of love that he knows will never fade. Abel is hope, something Jax has been without for far too long.

Looking at Juice, bathed in moonlight with his other half playing peek-a-boo with the world, Jax feels something clench in his chest with a dull pain. His fingers itch and he finds himself standing and closing the short distance between them until Juice’s head is tilted back to look up at Jax instead of the sky. Jax stands there for a long time, not quite touching the other man.

Juice has stars in his eyes.

“Jax?” Juice’s voice is low and careful.
Jax feels like he isn’t controlling his own body when he reaches out and takes Juice’s head in his hands, lowers his own and presses his lips to the other man’s.

Juice makes a low noise in his throat. Jax feels lips press back against his own and suddenly he’s back in his body and everything is overwhelming. The rasp of stubble against the palms of his hands. The smell of smoke, leather and something strange that’s a bit like dust and a bit like glitter and possibility. The sound of crickets chirping, the ache in his chest.

He deepens the kiss, and Juice reciprocates.

There’s a roaring in his ears, and the steady thumping of his own heartbeat.

He’s kissing another man; and he doesn’t hate it.

* 

Joshua has nearly fallen asleep when Jax Teller leaves the bar. He nearly dozes off again as the man sits on his bike next to the guy with the skull tattoos. Nearly misses it when Jax gets up.

He’s suddenly very awake when Jax and Juice Ortiz start kissing.

It takes him a few seconds to fight through his shock and raise his camera to capture the moment. This is exactly what he needs to prove to Tara that Jax isn’t the one for her. That Joshua is what she needs. After all, who wants a man who kisses another man like that?

Joshua ignores any trepidation he might have about all of this in favor of the adrenaline rush of victory.

Tara is going to be his again, and if it happens to destroy Jax Teller’s life at the same time, well, Joshua isn’t the kind of man to look a gift horse in the mouth after all.

* 

Something feels different.

There’s always been something other about the Beacon Hills Preserve. The trees hide secrets in their branches; obscuring the world of the supernatural from the mundane. When he was a child he had loved it. Loved running through the trees with his parents. Playing games with his sisters.

Then everything had changed, and it was all his fault.

Running had seemed to be the only solution at the time.

Now he’s back, and the trees have changed. Oh, they don’t look different. It’s not like any of them decided to uproot itself and move three feet to the left just to fuck with him. No, it’s in the air. There’s a thickness to it. When he breathes in deeply out among the trees he feels wild. Like he wants to run forever and bay at the moon.

There are things in the preserve now. Things his mother only ever told him stories of. Little fae creatures that dart and dash across the ground just at the corners of his vision. Flower faeries that tend to flirt with the gardens in peoples yards along the edge of town. Giant bees the size of small cats that make humming music as they pollenate the forest.

Uprooted boulders that have been moved to make a playground for baby rock trolls so deep in the trees that the only people who have sighted them have claimed to see Bigfoot in Northern California.
on the internet.

His return to Beacon Hills had come with a lot of surprises. Mexico had been a lot, and Braeden had been a boon to his battered soul. Her nomadic lifestyle appealed to him on a base level. She let him hunt with her, making him feel useful. He’s faced more horrible creatures in the last few months than he has in his entire life.

But he had needed to come home. Put the ghosts to rest and move on. Braeden is dealing with a Ghost in Plainsville, Iowa, and he’s going to meet her there when he’s done.

It’s not really a surprise to realize that none of the current Beacon Hills Pack has noticed the change to the Preserve. Scott is too wrapped up in Kira and his senior year, and the rest are too wrapped up in the woes of teenaged angst to care. So long as nothing comes tearing out of the trees to try and kill them all, they ignore the signs.

It worries him when he finds out that Stiles left town. Moved south after Peter saved his life and burned for it. Honestly, he’s less surprised that Peter lived through immolation than he is that Stiles apparently broke all ties with the guy he thought of as his brother.

But Derek came here for answers. To lay his demons to rest. The only way to do that is go out into those wild trees.

It’s time to find answers.
Anticipation

Chapter Summary

One of Tara’s most significant flaws is her need to know absolutely everything. Whether that thing is good for her or not, or involves her or not.

She opens the envelope. She pulls out a handful of photographs. All taken at a bad angle and from afar. The two people in the photos are significantly shadowed, but she would know one of them anywhere. It doesn’t matter who the other person is.

She drops the pile of photographs on the table and slide across the surface. A couple flutter to the floor, scattering the evidence across her kitchen.

She really shouldn’t have opened the envelope.

Chapter Notes

This chapter and the next couple of chapters will be posted a day early on Friday instead of Saturday due to the fact that I have volunteered to help pack up my Grandmother's house, and she lived four hours away from me so my usual Saturday morning writing time is going to be sucked up by travel time.

Not to worry, I am still several chapters ahead in this, so even though I might not get as much writing done over the next three weeks as I usually due, the posting schedule should not suffer for it.

Also: thank you to those of you who sent condolences. I really appreciate it.

Disclaimer: Octarine as the color of magic belongs to Terry Pratchett and the Discworld. I own nothing SOA or TW.

Seventeen:

The first inkling that gives Peter the idea that something is wrong comes to him when he steps out of the diner on the corner of Main and Seventh with Chibs, Tig and Happy and gets a weird nod of acknowledgement from his cousin who is leaning against his police SUV across the street.

Tig, who has become exceptionally superstitious about the weirdest shit since he found out about the supernatural being real (Werewolves are no big deal, and he feels like he could take a vampire, but offer to introduce the man to a pixie or a house brownie and he’d make the sign of the cross.), makes claws with his three middle fingers and pushes out away from himself like he’s warding off evil.

Peter vaguely wonders where Tig learned that, but then decides he really doesn’t want to know.
Peter watches David watch his brothers straddle their bikes and start strapping on helmets, then comes to a decision. “Give me a minute,” he tells the others, then heads across the street toward David.

To his credit, David’s only sign of his discomfort at being seen associating with a Son is the straightening of his posture from leaning against his vehicle.

Peter lights a cigarette to complete the picture of biker outlaw stereotype as he comes to a stop just out of arm’s reach of his cousin. Cigarettes do nothing for Peter. The nicotine filters out of his system too fast to have any sort of effect. He doesn’t like the way they taste, and Stiles doesn’t like the smell. Peter carries a pack to help him blend in with the other bikers. For some reason, seeing Peter do normal things that they do every day helps to put them at ease.

Especially after seeing exactly what Peter turns into.

“David,” he says congenially. He deliberately keeps his posture non-threatening and his expression perfectly mild.

“Peter,” David replies.

The cousins stare at each other for few awkwardly long seconds before David opens his mouth again. “Jake told our father that you’re in town.”

Peter raises both his eyebrows, “Fascinating.”

David clears his throat and looks briefly away. The struggle is real with this one, Peter muses.

“Spit it out, we’ve both got better places to be,” Peter advises.

David glares at him, which Peter feels is an improvement to the awkward non-stare, so whatever. Peter smirks at him just to rile him up a little more. No one ever accused Peter of not being an instigating little shit.

David visibly stops himself from retorting. He instead says his piece. “The ATF is in town.”

“Oh? I would think you’d be pleased by that.”

“You’d think so,” David says with a scowl. “If one of the agents wasn’t giving me the creeping heebies.”

Peter latches on to part of the sentence, “One of the agents?”

David gives a single nod. “Yeah. An Agent Kohn. Showed up a few weeks ago around the same time that Teller’s kid was born. Then last week another agent showed up, Stahl. Difference between the two is Kohn came into town on his own, and Stahl came with a team and set of brass balls.”

Peter snorts, “Feds usually like to swing their dicks around. Why are you giving me a heads up?”

David shrugs, “I don’t like the Sons. I think they’re what’s at the heart of what’s wrong with Charming, but I don’t like a fed that comes into my town and sneaks around for days or weeks before introducing himself to the local PD. I also don’t like a fed that avoids other feds.”

Peter raises an eyebrow, humming thoughtfully, “I’ll look into it. Thanks for the heads-up.”

David nods once, uncomfortably. He turns to get back in his truck, but pauses. “Hey Peter?”
“Hmm?”

“I’m pretty sure Jacob told our father you’re town.”

Peter feels surprise suffuse through his chest. He’d been wondering is Adrian knew. Surely the man wouldn’t let Peter being in his territory go unanswered. “I see. Thank you.”

David gets in the car and Peter turns to head back to head toward the guys. Movement out of the corner of his eye has him pausing part of the way across the street. A glimpse of a man ducking around a corner and out of sight. He inhales deeply, eyes bleeding red as he scents the air. His instincts are telling him something is wrong; and he’s always been the type to listen to his instincts.

The dryness of the air hits him first. Dust, high desert vegetation. Leather, smoke, gunpowder. Something acrid on the edge of his awareness. Dusty and floral. He knows that scent.

Wolfsbane.

“You okay?” Happy rasps, having stepped up next to him. His eyes gleam with danger and the kind of awareness that speaks to heightened senses. Not for the first time, Peter wonders what this man is. His patches declare him an Unholy One, one of the club’s elite assassins. Peter wonders what else that title can be applied to.

“Youngs,” Peter tells him flatly. Happy straightens out of his slouch. He’s not a short man by any means, but he disguises it with his posture to hide that not only is he a lean whipcord of muscle and death, but that he’s a tall SOB to go with it.

Happy’s eyes bleed black with tiny silver irises in the middle. The first true indication that he isn’t human that Peter has seen. He wonders what the other man can see with those eyes.

“Hunters,” Happy rasps flatly. It seems that he likes them about as well as Peter does.

“So it would seem,” Peter remarks. The two Sons return to their bikes, where Tig and Chibs wait impatiently debating the merits of motorcycle engines.

Before they reach earshot of the others, Happy speaks, voice laden with hidden meaning, “Watch yourself, Alpha.”

Something sharp pierces through Peter, causing him to pause before he gets on his bike. A bone needle looped through his soul, threaded with a thick, translucent wire stronger than steel but as flexible as fishing line. As he straps on his helmet and follows the others with the roar of motorcycle engines in his ears, he follows the thread.

It leads him to Happy Lowman; who is anything but human at the other end of the new Bond. He gets the impression of ragged claws and hundreds of long, needle-like teeth gleaming in the night.

An Alpha’s Left Hand to match his Right in Jax.

*  

He hates bikers. They’re always so… stupid. All they ever care about are women, blow and beer. Not necessarily in that order.

These ones seem to have added guns to their very short list.

He hopes the hunters slaughter them all on their way to that werewolf that joined them.
It would make his job easier.

He appreciates Ethan’s ability to outthink their opponents. To keep the true purpose of the League under the radar of anyone that could cause them trouble. He appreciates his ability to create plans within plans and watch everyone do exactly what he wants.

He wasn’t so sure about the deal with Argent, but AJ Weston can admit when he’s wrong.

It doesn’t happen very often.

The hunters will tear through the Sons like the wrath of god in their war against the monsters. Then AJ can come in and clean up whatever is left.

Quick and easy.

*

Tara Knowles doesn’t know what to do.

She had known, in the back of her mind, that dating Joshua had been a bad idea. But he’d been charming and funny and as far from Jax Teller as she could possibly get. And that had been what she’d been looking for, wasn’t it?

It didn’t matter that she’d been gone for years by that point. That she’d finished medical school and was training in her specialty. It didn’t matter that she’d come so far as to be getting ready for a residency of her own.

Jax had never left her mind once.

He’d been everything she wanted and represented everything she hated.

Oh, how she had wanted him to go with her.

She’d known he wouldn’t, but oh how she had hoped he would.

Chicago had been huge. Strange and terrifying, but exciting all the same in ways that Charming never could be.

Josh had been those things, and then some. She had cared for him, believed that they could have built something strong even if she could never love him in the same way that she loved Jax.

But then he’d hit her the first time, and Tara knew they never would. After the second time, she knew she couldn’t become a statistic. She couldn’t be one of those women that she saw during her ER rotation that earned the pity of strangers that could do nothing to help them because they wouldn’t help themselves. So when it came time to apply for a residency, Tara started looking out of state.

She still doesn’t know what possessed her to apply when she saw the opening in Charming. She had sworn when she left that she was never going back.

But Joshua was harassing her, and Charming meant Jax, and Jax may as well be synonymous for safe as far as Tara is concerned.

So here she was, in her old hometown, living in her old room in her old house while she cleans out her father’s things. Pining after her old boyfriend like he’s looked at her twice. He hasn’t, which bothers her. Oh, sure, he’s been friendly enough, but the spark is gone. At least it is on his side of
Abel had been a complete surprise. Tara hadn’t been expecting him to be a father. Somehow, she had always expected him to be just the same as he was when she left. He isn’t. He seems to have grown into himself. He’s always had wide shoulders, but now they seem to fit him. He carries himself with confidence and swagger.

And damn but he makes it look good.

She doesn’t know what to make of these strangers that surround him now. She can deal with Gemma and the Sons. That’s old hat, and Gemma hasn’t changed. She never changes. No, it’s that teenager and that Peter guy. The one who wears the kutte, but still somehow seems a bit removed from it. It’s the guy with the stupid Mohawk, who always seems to be nearby.

It’s Opie and Donna, who are solid and still together even after all these years. Donna who doesn’t know how to treat Tara, even when they’ve run into each other a few times around town. They used to be best friends; and it hurts that Donna doesn’t seem to want to pick that back up.

She guesses she deserves it. After all, when she’d left she’d cut all ties.

Then Joshua followed her across the country. Oh, he says he’s looking into the Sons, but Tara knows better. He’s not a very good liar. He’s here for her, and he’s using the Sons as an excuse.

She’s terrified of what will happen. What he’ll do to try and get her back. She can’t go to the police, because he’s one of them and they aren’t going to help her. She’d had to file for the restraining order five times before she was granted it. She may as well have not wasted her time and effort for all the good it’s doing.

But David has noticed, which is nice. He’s noticed her a lot more since she got back than Jax has in the months since his son was born; and she’s the kid’s doctor.

With Wendy out of the picture, she had hoped they might rekindle.

She’s starting to doubt her certainty that Jax still wants her.

And she doesn’t know what to do if he doesn’t.

*  

June Stahl meets Stiles Stilinski on a cool April day when he blows into the station with a sack lunch for his Dad from Donna. She’s been in town for a little over a week and hasn’t been able to find much of anything on the newest Son other than his familial connection to Judge Hale (and the Deputy Chief) and the fact that his DMV records state his place of residence as Chief Stilinski’s house.

The Chief is being helpfully unhelpful. He’s given her everything she’s asked for, loaned her team office space and even shared his intel on Kohn with her. He just hasn’t given her anything to help her nail the Sons of Anarchy to the wall.

Which is what she’s here to do.

She wants to do her job and get out of town because she’s pretty damn sure she doesn’t want to find out what caused the power-surge that happened the night she got into town. She may have a lifetime of experience living on the outskirts of the supernatural world, but that doesn’t mean she wants to get involved.
She is, at the very core of her being, a true believer in Darwinism.

So Stiles is a significant thing that she can’t unknow. They don’t really interact or even speak, but she feels him the second he enters the building. Stiles Stilinski is a beacon of power, radiating so much octarine in his aura he couldn’t hide it if he tried. And he doesn’t try to hide it. At all.

Stahl feels a wave of vertigo pass through her as the sleepy earth beneath the Charming police station sways in his direction as he passes the conference room she’s commandeered. It puts her hackles up as her eyes go cat-like in response.

The cat-like earth spirit that she is can’t decide whether to run as far as she can get or rub up against the boy for any scrap she can get.

They lock eyes when he leaves the Chief’s office, and June Stahl knows that he knows exactly what she is.

* *

She finds the envelope propped up against the side of the house by the front door, hidden by the shrubbery from the road. It’s a plain, eight-by-eleven manila envelope with a metal tab keeping it shut. She flips it over once to try and find a name or addressee, but finds none. She carries it into the house with the rest of the mail.

Life in Charming isn’t so bad if one leaves out her personal problems. She’s doing good work at the hospital where she’s swiftly earned the respect of her colleagues. Her father’s things are mostly cleaned up. Gemma still hates her; which is a mutual feeling.

She has fewer bills, what with not having a mortgage on the house, so she’s managing to save a little in between student loan payments. Enough that she’s thinking about going on a cruise next summer.

She hangs her purse from the hook by the door and tosses her keys into the little dish on the hall table, flipping through the mail. Junk, junk, bill, junk. A few ads and the local weekly coupon mailer. She sets the envelope on the kitchen table and stares at it thoughtfully as she starts a pot of coffee and rummages around for everything she needs to make a sandwich.

It’s probably from Joshua.

Which means she won’t like whatever is in it.

She should probably just throw it away.

One of Tara’s most significant flaws is her need to know absolutely everything. Whether that thing is good for her or not, or involves her or not.

She opens the envelope. She pulls out a handful of photographs. All taken at a bad angle and from afar. The two people in the photos are significantly shadowed, but she would know one of them anywhere. It doesn’t matter who the other person is.

She drops the pile of photographs on the table and slide across the surface. A couple flutter to the floor, scattering the evidence across her kitchen.

She really shouldn’t have opened the envelope.

After a few moments of heart-squeezing anguish, she sifts through the damning pictures until she finds one that she picks up. Unlike the other photos, this one isn’t at all risqué. The occupants of the
picture aren’t wrapped up in each other like they are in the others. They aren’t pressing their bodies
together in heated kisses as shown in so many of them.

No, they’re sitting side by side passing a cigarette (possibly a blunt) between them. They’re both
seated on the same motorcycle and their sides are pressed together. The darker one of the pair is
gazing up at the sky with no little amount of wonder. His eyes almost look like they’re filled with
stars.

And Jax is sitting next to him gazing not at the sky, but at this other man. His face is calm, but Tara
learned to read Jax Teller a long, long time ago. She can see the rawness in the crease between his
eyebrows. The wonder at the wideness of his gaze. A little bit of lust in the tilt of his mouth.

These pictures were meant to hurt her. And they do. A pain she’s been feeling for a while comes to
the forefront of her mind and squeezes painfully in her chest.

Jax has not only moved on from Tara Knowles, but he’s gone so far that she’s not even in his
rearview anymore.

Something hard settles into the pit of her stomach. She’s not going to get Jax back, not if this is the
way the wind is blowing. She can’t deny him happiness. Besides, she wouldn’t want to be anywhere
near those two when this blows up on them. As far as she knows, the Sons are extremely
homophobic. When it gets out that Jax and another Son are in a relationship like that, they’ll be
ripped apart.

Maybe they can still be friends, however. After all, when this hits the fan, Jax is going to need all the
friends he can get.

*

She is flitting about her grove when the wolf comes. He’s dour and pale. Handsome in the way of
humanoids, but he has too much skin and not enough leaves for her. Her tree is the best one for a
mile. Tall, with spindly, gnarled branches adorned in thick green leaves. The bark of her trunk is
black with the charred remnants of the fire. She is unique, and she knows it.

She has cultivated a garden of flowers, ferns and vines around the stone. Encouraged green moss to
grow into the symbols etched into it and then to spread. Other denizens of the forest come to leave
tribute to the Spark that woke the forest.

The Nemeton doesn’t mind that the creatures in its forest pay tribute to another. It wants the Spark to
return as well. It reaches out with its roots in the boy’s direction.

She knows he isn’t human, and she isn’t scared to show herself to him. When he asks her to tell him
the story of her birth, she smiles and spins her tale. She doesn’t lie, there is no need.

He barely believes her as it is.
Awake

Chapter Summary

“I know it wasn’t you, Stiles.”

“Do you?” Stiles asks, voice conversational. He looks away, down at the happy baby chewing happily on one of his own feet. “I wake up sometimes after I’ve been dreaming and I’m not so sure.”

Chris reaches out and sets his hand on Stiles’ shoulder heavily, drawing his attention away from the safety of Abel. His voice is soft, but heavy with meaning when he speaks, “I do not blame you, Stiles. I blame the Nogitsune.”

Chapter Notes

So, FYI, Chapter 19 is finished and 20 is nearly there. I'm going to try to keep ahead of the posting schedule, but as my life is right now, I really don't have that much time to write. I'm having to find 30 minutes here and there as I can, and it hasn't been the most productive of writing schedules. The business of my life is probably going to last another eight weeks, but then I will be able to go back to Saturday as Writing Day and get a lot more done.

For these next 8 weeks, I will continue to post on Friday until such a day comes as I run out of completed chapters and I cannot keep up. Hopefully that day won't come. After that, we should go back to the regular Saturday morning post, and my staying ahead of the curve.

Once again, my thanks for all the condolences I have received. I appreciate it.

Disclaimer: Octarine as the color of magic belongs to Terry Pratchett and the Discworld. I own nothing SOA or TW.

Eighteen:

Jax finds him on the edge of the woods. There’s a turn-off from the highway that leads about a quarter mile down a dirt road to a series of hiking paths that lead through some of the more scenic areas of the woods. It’s rarely used by anyone who isn’t a local, and the locals usually only use it early in the morning or around sunset. It’s where Peter parks his bike when he comes to run the territory.

Jax leans against his dyna and finishes his cigarette while Peter shifts back to his human guise and puts on his pants.
“You okay?” Peter prompts as he buckles his belt and reaches for his shirt.

Jax shrugs. His version of okay usually works on a sliding scale from content to oh-shit. Right now he’s somewhere in the middle (but only if he ignores the Juice-shaped panic in the back of his brain). “Sure.”

Peter sits on his bike and bends to put on his boots, “You wouldn’t be out here if everything was dandy, Jax. Not when you know there’s food at home. And Abel.”

Jax tilts his head to one side in acknowledgement. Two of the great loves of his life are his son and food, and everyone knows it. He’s not ashamed to admit to putting on every bit of charm he possesses just to get one more cookie. He knows what he’s about.

“I’ve got a question.”

“Shoot.”

“Would you give me the Bite if I asked?”

Peter stops tying his boot to look up at Jax with laser focus. His eyes are a kind of blue that make Jax think of glaciers. He lets the Alpha study him for as long as he wants, resisting the urge to shift his weight uncomfortably. He’s put a lot of thought into this. He’s made arrangements with an Estate Lawyer with about a hundred addendums for his son just in case. He’s consulted his best friend on the subject.

He’s thought about it.

“That depends,” Peter says carefully, and then finishes tying his boot, “on why you want the Bite.”

Jax lights another cigarette as Peter shrugs on his kutte and pockets his wallet. The pair head for the paved path that loops a mile around back to the other side of the little parking lot. Peter doesn’t push for answers, instead watching the trees around them and listening to the birds twitter in the trees.

“I have to be able to protect my family.”

“You are perfectly capable of protecting Abel, Jax.”

“No, I’m not. At least, not against the kinds of things that really matter. I can protect him from the club. From Clay and even from my Mother. I can protect him from the truth of what his mother really was. I can protect him from bullets and drugs and all the other shit normal life throws at him; but I can’t protect him from the other shit.”

“That is what you have Pack for, Jackson.”

Jax nods, inhales deeply and exhales a long plume of smoke. He crushes the butt under his boot and tucks his hands into his pockets, “Abel’s not the only person I want to protect. You guys, the Pack, are my family. I want to protect you as much as you protect me.”

“You protect us every time you ride with us. You stand with us when we make decisions. When we get into fights, you stand shoulder to shoulder with us.”

The two of them walk in silence for a bit, stopping on an overlook that has a conveniently placed bench where one can watch the sun set. Jax flops onto the bench, taking up more of the space there than he needs to. He rests his arm across the back and fiddles with the worn edge of his kutte with the other hand. The rings on his hands glimmer in the sunlight.
SO on one finger; NS on the one next to it.

“I’ve always been a Son. My Dad was a Son, and all his friends were Sons. Mom is so entrenched in the life that there was no way we were not going to be raised into it, even after Dad died. When she married Clay, I knew it was inevitable. I was never going to leave Charming. Never get more than a high school diploma and a mechanic’s certification.

I didn’t mind; and I don’t regret it. I love my club. But there’s more in the world than just Charming. And it feels like it’s all going to come here eventually. We’ve got ATF agents up our asses with the Irish. The Mayans are watching us, and I can’t decide if they’re waiting to pick us off like vultures or sign an alliance in blood once Clay is gone.

Clay. I swear to god, if I didn’t respect all the things that man has done for the Club I’d kill him and be done with it.”

Peter says nothing. He doesn’t even look at Jax.

This is familiar to Peter. This flailing for solid ground. He’d done it all his life with his sister and her Pack. Never feeling like he belonged but never belonging anywhere else.

“I want to be the brick wall. The one the danger hits against and can’t get past. I want to be strong and ready.” Jax finally looks up at Peter, who gazes into his eyes with a seriousness warranted by the situation. The blond stands and walks over, back straight and shoulders squared. “I want to be a Wolf.”

Peter’s eyes go red as he looks at his Second. “Okay,” he says, and then he smiles.

Jax smiles back.

*

Contrary to popular belief, Stiles is great with kids. His Dad jokes that it’s because he’s a child himself, but Stiles likes to believe that it’s just because he’s that awesome. Kids are easy. They want someone to listen to them and make them feel heard. They want someone to hug them when they need it, and to leave them alone when they don’t. They want someone to play games with them.

Stiles is easily Donna’s favorite babysitter. He’s also Jax’s go-to when Gemma can bring herself to part from the baby and Nita isn’t available. Nita is great. An excellent housekeeper and nanny, but even she needs days off.

And that’s where Stiles comes in.

Every Wednesday, Stiles collects Abel and takes the baby with him for the day. Sometimes they stay in and have a nice relaxed day. Sometimes Stiles plays distract-the-baby while he tries to continue his magical studies. He’s an absolute whiz at telekinetically making the baby’s toys float around him.

Some days, like today, there are errands needing to be run. With the baby seat in the back of the jeep and a list of things needing doing, Stiles and Abel spend the day running around Charming.

They’re halfway through the grocery store, Abel’s car seat affixed to the upper basket of the cart and the larger compartment half full, when the takes a turn for the worse. Stiles is halfway through pretending to eat kicking baby feet (and earning himself wild, screamy baby laughter) when someone clears their throat behind him. He raises his head and turns to look.

“Nope.”
“Stiles,” is said clearly when Stiles turns back to Abel and begins to push the cart out of the cereal aisle. Unfortunately, Chris Argent follows him. “We need to talk.”

“Nope,” Stiles says again. He halts, jolting his arms, the cart, and the baby in a flail. Abel makes a noise of protest, and Stiles fixates on him so that he doesn’t have to look at the father of the girl his body murdered.

“Stiles.” Chris always did have a good Dad voice. The man stops next to the cart and looks down at Abel with a look on his face that Stiles reads to mean that he can’t believe that anyone would leave Stiles Stilinski alone with a baby, much less entrust one into his care.

“Hey!” Stiles exclaims, forgetting the awkwardness for a moment in his indignation. “I’ll have you know that I am excellent with children!”

Chris raises his eyebrows in a moue of disbelief, but leaves the matter alone. “My father is missing.”

“What, you misplaced him? That was stupid of you.”

“I didn’t ‘misplace’ him, Stiles.” Ah, there’s that tone of exasperation he hadn’t known he’d missed. “I left him in a care facility for the elderly who need twenty-four-hour care.” Chris makes angry eyebrows here, like he’s still pissed about what happened. Not like it’s Stiles’ fault. Stiles had nothing to do with poisoning Gerard with mountain ash; and he certainly hadn’t had anything to do with what that did to him when Derek bit him. “He was incapable of feeding himself, much less getting up and walking out.”

Stiles shrugs, “How is that my problem? He’s your Dad.”

Chris heaves a heavy sigh, “Stiles.”

“How did you even know where I was anyway?” Stiles demands, then starts pushing the cart again. He might as well finish the shopping while they have this conversation. “The only person in Beacon Hills that I told where I was going was Scott, and I’m pretty sure he forgot we’d even talked as soon as I was out of sight.”

“Parrish,” Chris says. That makes sense, so Stiles says nothing. “We both know what kind of man my father is, Stiles.”

“What, nine types of psychotic?”

Chris sighs again. He seems to do that a lot around Stiles. Stiles can’t bring himself to care. “I’m fairly certain he’s probably working on revenge.”

“Then why am I a target? I’m pretty sure he didn’t know I was there that night.”

“No, but you are harboring a Hale.”

Stiles stops abruptly, interrupting the content baby-babble coming from the car seat for a moment. “Excuse you,” he says warningly.

“The Argents hate the Hales. My father more than most. He loved Kate, and he’s always wanted revenge for her death.”

“She started it,” Stiles says baldly.

“I’m not arguing with that,” Chris says placatingly. “That doesn’t mean my father sees it that way.
Kate was just doing what he raised her to do, kill monsters.

“And are we monsters?” Stiles says, looking Chris in the eyes and letting the octarine into his eyes. His jaw is tight. “Are we all monsters who deserve nothing but death at the sword of a madman?”

Chris’ own jaw tightens, but he refuses to rise to the bait. “Once upon a time I believed that.”

“And now?” They both know what Stiles is really asking. Does he believe that he, Stiles, deserves death after his hands killed his only child?

“I know it wasn’t you, Stiles.”

“Do you?” Stiles asks, voice conversational. He looks away, down at the happy baby chewing happily on one of his own feet. “I wake up sometimes after I’ve been dreaming and I’m not so sure.”

Chris reaches out and sets his hand on Stiles’ shoulder heavily, drawing his attention away from the safety of Abel. His voice is soft, but heavy with meaning when he speaks, “I do not blame you, Stiles. I blame the Nogitsune.”

“I killed it, you know,” Stiles blurts in the face of such seriousness. “I healed Peter in the preserve and there was so much magic it just sort of burned the Nogitsune up.”

“Thank you,” Chris replies.

Stiles takes a deep breath. “Okay. So, you’ve warned me about Gerard. We’ll keep an eye out.”

Chris nods, “I’m heading up to Beacon Hills to try and trace him, but you have my number if you hear anything.”

“Sure.”

The two of them stand and stare at each other for an awkwardly long moment before Chris nods once and turns to leave. Stiles watches him go, then look down at Abel and says, “Sometimes being a grown-up is weird as hell, kiddo.”

Abel blows at spit bubble at him in response.

“Nice.”

*

Most people believe that Happy is a nickname. It isn't. It’s his actual name; given to him by his hippy-dippy mother when she figured out that her newborn son was going to turn out to be just like his father. She named him Happy so that he could always claim to be happy, even when he wasn’t. She knew he’d have little enough reason to ever feel the emotion.

That was in 1809, when Marisol Lowman had allowed herself to be swept off her feet by a wandering vaquero who wandered through their village one dusty summer day. He hadn’t stayed very long, and he never knew he had a son. Marisol wasn’t stupid. She knew the stories, had heard the tales. Believed in magic and kept her charms and superstitions.

She knew what he was; and she loved him anyway.

Happy had done everything he could to stave off his mother’s death. He’d done deals with witches and devils alike to prolong her life. To keep the only person who loved him with him. But she’s over two-hundred years old, and she’s tired. She’s been an old lady for a lot longer than most people, and
the last cure for old age is wearing off.

She’s asked him not to make another deal.

Happy has killed a lot of men in his time. Many of them monsters, like him. He’s turned on people he’s made deals with. He joined the Sons early on because their lifestyle allowed him to hide his nature from the world. After all, who was going to miss a few gangsters that other gangsters put hits out on. No one’s ever asked him what he does with the bodies after he’s killed a target.

By the time he’s done and he’s had his fill, there’s nothing left for the authorities to find.

Lately, Happy has been feeling adrift. He’s never truly been alone in the world. Mama had always been there. Now she’s slowly fading and he hasn’t been able to do anything.

Then that werewolf had walked into the clubhouse.

Happy had been wary at first. One monster to another. But Peter had proven himself, and Happy had felt his loyalty slowly forming for the man. After a time, he’d been perfectly content to tie himself to the Pack. Nearly half the Charming charter called Peter Hale their Alpha. And Happy could see which way the wind was blowing.

Happy is, at the end of it all, a predator.

Clay Morrow is weakening, and his grip on his power is tenuous as his hands give out in him.

Happy sort of wants to eat him. He is an equal-opportunity offender. He doesn’t care if his prey is live or dead, strong or weak, he’ll eat it either way. But he is a predator, and weakness has to be culled from a pack to keep it strong. Clay is a weakness now; one the Club can little afford in these changing times.

Being Pack has its benefits, most of all that he can eat at the power that comes off Stiles in waves and feel satiated for the first time in years. The hunger that has always gnawed at his spine no longer there as power and family fill in the gaps.

He may be a loner by nature; but his mama had nurtured him to need people.

He is half human, and humans need other humans to remember that they are human.

* 

The raid on the clubhouse is a scare tactic. A way for Stahl to let the Sons know that she’s in town and send them scrambling to cover their asses. She doesn’t expect to find anything. No, Morrow is way too smart for that. The Sons have been in operation for over forty years, and no criminal organization survives that long with stupidity at the helm.

She borrows a bunch of cops from the Charming Police Department to pad her unit’s numbers and they hit the clubhouse early on a Wednesday evening. Late enough that most of the Sons are there and the garage is closed for the day, but early enough that it’s still light out and witnesses on the street see the whole thing.

Stahl wants this town to turn on the Sons. It’s the only way she’s going to take them all down.

She takes Kohn with her just to see what he does when given authority and an opportunity to use it.

She steps into the building just in time to watch Morrow slam into the ground under an officer and to
see another officer attempt to force the newest Son on record, Peter Hale, to the ground. Attempt being the keyword. He doesn’t move an inch and she can see the officer straining to try to budge him. He turns icy eyes on the doorway when she steps inside, making something cold and sharp shiver down her spine.

A subvocal growl makes its way to her from his throat, and he maintains eye contact as he lets the officer take him to his knees. He refuses to be pushed onto his stomach like most of his Brothers, however.

June Stahl is very aware of the predator watching her as her men tear the clubhouse apart. All the pictures on their glorious wall of fame are knocked down, the glass broken and the pictures trod upon. The balls of the pool table are scattered across the room. The jukebox damaged. As the men filter into other parts of the clubhouse, Stahl comes to crouch between Clay Morrow and Peter Hale.

She introduces herself with a congenial, yet predatory smile. She makes a crass comment as Morrow is hauled out of the building.

Peter Hale smiles at her with pointed canines showing as he is brought to his feet to follow after the President. He makes a show of leaning just a bit into her and inhaling deeply, taking in her scent. A sibilant hiss lingers in the air behind him as he allows himself to be escorted from the building and she freezes in place.

An icy fist clenches around her heart for a moment before she shakes the feeling off. She gets threats every time she does this. It’s never stopped her from doing her job before, and she’s not going to let it now.

“I’m going to rip your throat out, little kitty. With my teeth.”

*

It prowls around the barrier, testing it for weaknesses. There are none. The creator was thorough. The barrier extends below the ground and up into the sky like an egg surrounding the property. It hungers. It wants to eat that power and sate the gnawing ache in its belly. The spirits on the other side of the barrier watch it with trepidation.

Yes. Good. Fear is like ambrosia.

They know that the only thing protecting them from its hungering jaws is the barrier.

It doesn’t have a name. It had one, long ago. Before it grew sleepy and closed its eyes. Back when the world was wild and vast. Now everything is close together. There are fewer trees to hide among. Jungles of stone and steel rise up in their stead. It does not like the change, save for that now there is more to prey upon.

Drool drips from its fangs, each drop hitting the ground with a hiss of smoke. The grass under each drop withers and dies. Deep furrows are dug into the ground with each step. Its’ long claws dig furrows in the ground. Footprints of blackened dead grass appear behind it.

It cannot be seen unless it chooses to be, but nothing can hide the signs of its passage.

It will eat the power behind the barrier. It will drink from the Spring and grow strong again.

And then it will consume all that come under its claws; for it hungers, always.

That is the way of things. How it has always been; how it will always be. It has been woken into this
new world that is unprepared for the likes of creatures like itself. This new world will rue waking it. They should have left it slumber undisturbed until the ending of the world and beyond.

They didn’t, and it is now awake.
Chapter Summary

“I can be subtle,” Jax says with indignation.

“Like a bat to the head.”

Chapter Notes

So, I honestly believe that if Jax had had structure and support around him during his early days as President, instead of being surrounded by the unreliable and with his mother in his ear, SOA would not have ended the way it did. If Opie hadn't gone off the rails, he'd have been a major guiding force for Jax. So I have given him the structure and support he needs.

Also, I am hoping ya'll have ideas on what Happy really is. I giggled a little when I decided.

This is the last chapter I have had completed and ready long before post date. My current schedule is not really conductive to writing; however, I have written time into my schedule next week so that I can have chapter 20 out on time. It's about half done at this point, so I'm confident.

Disclaimer: Octarine as the color of magic belongs to Terry Pratchett and the Discworld. I own nothing SOA or TW.

Nineteen:

Peter crosses his heel over his knee and leans back in the uncomfortable (and somewhat creaky) chair while Officer Palamas processes him. The other Sons sit around him at the desks of other deputies, getting their fingerprints taken and new photos added to their records. Peter likes Kerri, knows she’s just doing her job, but this is honestly ridiculous.

“Kerri,” Peter drawls, just as the Chief’s voice raises into a shout from behind his closed office door. Officer Palamas flinches and looks at him with wide eyes. Peter offers her a comforting smile, “Breathe. None of this is your fault. Do your job.”

The woman bobs her head in a nod and readies Peter’s very own fingerprint card. She flips open the ink pad and Peter allows her to pick up his right hand and begin the process of taking down his prints.

The front door of the station opens and a scent wafts Peter’s way, causing him to raise his head and turn it to look in the direction of the man who just entered. Ah. Agent Joshua Kohn, the liar. He
smells of anger and desperation and a little bit of psychosis. Two desks over, Jax sights the
disgusting cretin and growls impressively for a man not yet turned wolf.

The shouting coming from the office ends, the door slams open and Agent Stahl stalks out in a rage.
John steps into the doorway and yells at his staff, “Stop wasting my time and yours! Cut ‘em loose.
We’ve got no cause to hold or process any of the Sons.”

A door down the hallway that Stahl went down slams, making the pictures on the wall rattle.

Officer Palamas sighs in relief and releases Peter’s hand just before she was going to press it into the
ink pad. Peter flashes her a smile and she tentatively offers one back. One of the benefits of being
seen as the Chief of Police’s son-in-law is that they all know and like him, making them all reluctant
to arrest him.

“HALE!” John bellows at the top of his lungs.

If Peter didn’t know better, he’d think that bellow of pure frustrated rage was meant for him. Luckily,
there haven’t been any weird happenings since Jaime was bitten a couple of weeks ago. Peter turns
to look at the Chief with an eyebrow raised as he rises anyway.

“Not you, the other one,” John snarls, then turns on Kohn, “And you, in my office. Now.”

When Kohn walks past Peter, he snarls threateningly under his breath, making the gray-haired man
scuttle forward with a bit of panic as he went past. Peter smirks to himself and follows his brothers
out of the station.

“That bitch,” Tig begins as they climb into the van that Half-Sack came to collect them in, “is gonna
end up in the morgue, and I’m gonna be the one that puts her there.”

“Not if I get to her first,” Opie snarls. He shoves his phone into his pocket. “That was Stiles. He’s
got the kids, the bitch picked up Donna in the middle of the damn grocery store.”

“What?” Clay growls.

Stiles’ ringtone blasts from Peter’s pocket, and he retrieves the object to answer it. The news isn’t
good, and halfway through it Peter catches Clay’s gaze with fury blazoned across his face. The van
quiets as the others become aware of the tension now filling their President’s face.

“What is it?”

“She had Gemma, Luann and a few of her girls picked up as well.” Peter’s voice is perfectly level.
“She tried to have Stiles brought in as well, but her goons couldn’t get past the wards on the house.”

“RICO,” Bobby declares. “She wants to use RICO on us.”

Clay cusses and punches the wall of the van; then starts cussing when his arthritis protests the abuse
painfully.

No one says anything. They don’t need to.

*

Peter Bites Jax on the following Friday night when they know that there is no Sons business for the
weekend. Stiles is on hand just in case his body decides to try to reject the Bite. Donna takes Abel
for the night, willing to guard and protect him while Jax can’t.
Jaime, Juice and Happy set up a vigilant perimeter around the Pack House for the duration. They’re vulnerable because Peter won’t leave his Second while this happens and neither will Stiles. Also, it’s instinctive for all of them.

The fever hits about an hour after the Bite. Jax’s temperature spikes so quickly that he gets vertigo that takes him to the floor in seconds. After that, it’s a waiting game.

It was agreed on that none of the Pack would divulge Jax’s change in status from human to werewolf to anyone outside the family. It goes unspoken, but they all know the reason why: Clay. Clay Morrow finding out that his step-son and ambitious VP is a werewolf is a disaster in the making. He’s already realized that he made a mistake when he recruited Peter; and he won’t take kindly to the idea of Jax having that kind of power as well.

Everyone figures he’s probably already plotting how to turn all of this subtle change to his favor. That he’s probably already considered hiring someone to deal with the problem. It wouldn’t be the first time he ordered a hit on an ally; it wouldn’t be the last.

And if there’s one thing they all agree on it’s that Clay needs to be deposed sooner rather than later.

When the horizon begins to grow gray with pre-dawn light and birds begin to greet the sun while the stars and moon still hang in the sky, the bite takes.

Jax doesn’t reject the Bite.

*

There are moments when you become aware of something and you realize that, oh shit, you are in trouble. You then spend quite a lot of time trying to figure out how to get out of a situation that you, yourself, had a hand in creating. Most of the time it is already too late.

Most of the time.

For Joshua Kohn, that moment comes while he is vulnerable and bare and trying to remind the object of his obsession of how good it can be with him.

Tara shoots him in the side, and while his blood trickles down to soak into the waistband of his jeans and Joshua Kohn realizes that perhaps maybe, just maybe he did this all wrong.

But it’s already too late.

*

Abel smells like formula and soft cotton. Jax cradles the infant to his chest, that feeling of absolute love and adoration burning in his chest once again as his son sleeps in his arms. It is dark in the nursery save for the night-light that casts the shapes of sailboats across the walls. He rocks the chair gently and just marvels at this little life.

He’s been in awe of Abel since he first laid eyes on the kid. Gemma says that love never goes away. That desperate need to love and protect your own child. Jax remembers a time when Gemma’s love was pure and ample. When he needn’t do anything to gain her approval, just exist and be happy. Then Thomas had died, and Gemma had changed.

She’s always been a self-righteous person. Always correct even when she was wrong. Always clinging onto what she considered hers with ever-tightening claws. She had clung desperately onto her remaining child and hadn’t let go since.
Jax gets it now, why she is the way she is where her children are involved. He feels that same desperate need to protect, to be everything his son needs to him to be. He hopes he never becomes overbearing and manipulative like her.

He hums a little in his chest, the vibration making Abel shift toward him.

“Hey.”

Jax looks up at Juice in the doorway. The tweener has his arms crossed and is leaning a shoulder against the doorframe, his feet crossed at the ankles. He looks so human. So much the spastic Son that Jax always thought him to be.

“Hey,” Jax says back, quietly so as not to wake Abel.

Juice walks over and crouches between Jax’s knees to place a warm hand over Abel’s chest. Abel’s vague fussing ceases under that hand, finally starting to edge deeper into a sleep where Jax can put him in his crib without waking him.

“When did you get here?”

Juice looks up at him with a little smile dimpling his cheeks. “A few minutes ago. How’s he doing?”

“Colicky. Also, I think he might be starting to teethe.” Jax reaches over and grabs a small tube of numbing agent off the side table by the crib. “You mind?”

Juice takes it and Jax positions Abel so that the other man can rub it across his gums to soothe whatever ache that may exist. The two men watch the baby for a minute, and Juice settles onto his knees. Jax breathes deeply and holds it in. Juice smells like a sunbeam with dust particles swirling visibly through it, with a hint of smoke and leather, cordite and grease.

“We need to talk,” Juice says. “I need to know what it meant, Jax. This – “ he waves his hand between them vaguely, “ – is important, whatever it is. But it’s also a huge risk.”

They both know that while the Sons don’t claim any prejudices, it isn’t hidden that most of the old guard don’t like guys who like guys. So some of them, being gay (or bisexual if you asked either Jax or Juice) is one of the biggest unspoken sins in the Club. Clay himself is a giant homophobe, and while none of them know how Piney feels about it, neither are giving him the benefit of the doubt. The man is the worst kind of racist: the kind that claims they aren’t.

The others would be fifty-fifty on it. Opie would support them because that’s just the kind of friend he is. Tig is a psycho, and his opinion could change on a whim. Chibs and Bobby are unknowns. Happy won’t give a shit, but that’s his default setting.

“They accept Peter and Stiles,” Jax offers up, a touch of hope in the words.

Juice swallows a snort, “They haven’t got a choice with that. And Stiles and Peter don’t rub it in their faces.”

“We wouldn’t do that. We know how to be discrete.”

Juice chuckles silently. A huff of air more than a real laugh. “We’re not subtle in any way, dude. Especially you.”

“I can be subtle,” Jax says with indignation.
“Like a bat to the head.”

They both chuckle at that, but the mood quickly goes somber again.

And then Jax’s phone rings.

* 

Tara screams bloody murder when the shadows in the corner of her bedroom coalesce into the forms of two men she recognizes. Jax crouches in front of her where she’s huddled in the opposite corner clad in her bra and panties and a ripped open button-down shirt. Her face and hands are flecked with blood, and she’s clutching her father .9mm in her hand with white knuckles.

Juice takes in the scene and cusses a blue streak as Jax coaxes the gun from her hand.

“You shot me, you bitch!” Joshua Kohn’s hysterical voice says from the doorway to the bathroom. “I can’t believe you shot me! You – you have to help me. I need a hospital.”

A growl rumbles up from Jax’s chest. A deep, terrifying sound that makes Tara whimper and huddle deeper into the corner. His eyes flare bright electric blue as he turns his newly lupine gaze on the man bleeding out slowly on the bathroom floor. Kohn freezes as he meets the gaze of a predator.

Juice appears behind Kohn, his human guise completely gone. His fingers are curved into shadowy talons, his horns shedding stardust and smoke off him and flecks of silver spattered across his tan skin and in his black eyes. He places one boot on Kohn’s hand where he’s trying to stop the bleeding and presses down slowly, making the man cry out in pain.

“You don’t need a hospital,” Jax growls thunderously, “you need a goddamned miracle.”

Juice yanks the man to his feet as Jax barrels across the room, the shift taking over his form as he tears into the man that’s dared attack a woman that, while he may no longer love her in the way she wants him to, he still cares for her deeply as a friend, if not family.

In the corner, Tara starts screaming.

* 

The overhead light is too bright, so Stiles clicks the dimmer so they fade from harsh to a more mellow glow. He sits on the chair across from the traumatized doctor and helps her guide a glass of lukewarm water to her mouth. Her own are shaking so badly that some of the liquid sloshes out and down her neck to soak into the collar of the shirt she’s wearing.

The shirt had begun it’s life as John’s and proudly declares itself property of the Beacon County Sheriff’s Department. It’s been living in Stiles’ closet for the last seven years. Now it’s worn soft and faded and wrapped around a woman who has not only been thoroughly traumatized, but had her world view altered all in one night.

“I’m sorry,” Tara whispers. Her eyes are still a little vacant, but the pallor of her skin is returning to normal.

“Nothing to be sorry for,” Stiles says, waving the apology away. “I totally get it. It’s not every day you find out about all this.”

“I – I’m not sure I understand.”
“Do you want to?”

“No. I don’t think I do.”

“Then don’t think about it. Drink your water and get some sleep and in the morning this will all have been a bad dream.”

Twila, glamour firmly in place, hops up into Tara’s lap, purring madly. She butts her head up under Tara’s chin to prompt her into petting her and settles into the woman’s lap when she does so. Tara blinks at Stiles, then raises the glass and finishes the water.

*

There really isn’t much left of Joshua Kohn. A few inedible bits and bobs that Juice chucks into the Tween with nary a thought, not knowing where they’ll pop out at and not really caring. He swallows heavily as Happy rolls a finger bone around his mouth, making it rattle across his pointed, needle-like teeth.

In the doorway, Peter tsks. “No time for sitting around. We’ve got to clean this place up and get rid of all of Kohn’s things.”

Happy belches, then rises out of his crouch. His arms and legs are elongated, his face pointed and nearly bat-like. His bones shift and pop as he settles back into his human guise. A final crunch and the rest of Joshua Kohn is gone, never to be seen again.

“I,” Juice says faintly, “Never want to see that again.”

Happy chuckles deeply, a satisfied roll of sound.

“Keep that in mind next time the two of you decide to rip a law enforcement officer limb from limb,” Peter says, voice drier than a desert. Jax snarls in response, and Peter rumbles a growl at him, eyes flaring red. The newly turned werewolf is cowed into a corner by his Alpha. “This,” Peter adds flatly, “is not what I meant by laying low until the next full moon, Jackson.”

Jax shrugs, either unable or unwilling to vocalize how much he just doesn’t care.

Peter sighs, rubbing a hand down his face. There’s blood everywhere and his newly-turned Second has gone feral. So much for a quiet night in. “Juice, track down the good Agent’s belongings and vehicle and make them vanish, then head to the pack house. Happy, call Tig and get the name of that cleaner he knows. I want this room to look like nothing happened by morning.”

Peter scruffs the back of Jax’s neck and hauls him upright, “Come along pup. It’s time to run.”

Jax growls, but follows after Peter.

*

Tig Trager knows what people think of him. He’s the resident psychopath. He’ll jump at any chance to get into a fight. He’s got a thing for recreational drugs (the weirder the better). He likes beautiful people, doesn’t matter what gender. He’s not opposed to the occasional bout of necrophilia. He’ll kill anyone that crosses him and many that don’t.

It makes him a good attack dog.

But Tig is also smart. He was a special forces marine. He’s got a strageist’s brain and the intelligence
to use it to his own advantage.

It makes him a good Sergeant at Arms.

He knows Clay will go to bat for him; if only to hide his own secrets.

But then, they have a lot of the same secrets.

Tig would never betray a brother; but he isn’t stupid.

The second he steps into the home of Dr. Tara Knowles and lays eyes on the fuming werewolf that is his Vice President he knows. Clay’s time as the king of the castle is about to end, and Tig had better cover his own ass if he doesn’t want to get drug down with him.

He can’t protect his President, but he can protect Gemma.

So that’s what he’s going to do.
Hi Everyone,

There will not be a chapter this week. Due to my current schedule and the Asthma problems I've been dealing with this week, I do not have a completed chapter to post. Hopefully I can finish the chapter early next week in addition to next week's chapter, but don't quote me on that. I promise there will be a chapter next week. My schedule is finally starting to sort itself back into a semblance of normalcy.

Thank you,

moonstalker24
Fight

Chapter Summary

Gemma screams bloody murder.

She screams and she fights.

Chapter Notes

So, I am finally starting to feel better physically. One of the worst things about Asthma is the recovery period after a really bad attack. I was flattened all weekend and into Monday with breathing problems and have spent the rest of the week slowly regaining what I lost.

This is also my first weekend at home in over a month. We're taking a pause on the estate for a break, so I am trying to catch up on as much writing as I can.

Sorry again for not posting last week, but hopefully this one being on time helps make up for it.

Chapter Warning: So, I tried to avoid Gemma's rape from S2, but couldn't. It was a very pivotal turning point in the early show. It led directly to the events of S3 and the beginning of the end for the Sons. It comes way earlier than in the series, but it's been necessary to rearrange the events I've needed to use.

I've tried to handle it with grace, and it is all off-screen, as it were. It is heavily implied, but I'm not about to write that kind of scene.

Rape is a very serious subject that requires more awareness in the world, but this is not the platform for that.

Disclaimer: Octarine as the color of magic belongs to Terry Pratchett and the Discworld. I own nothing SOA or TW.

Twenty:

“Tell Mama all about it
Tell Mama what you need
Ooo, tell Mama
And I’ll make everything alright…”
Gemma watches as Peter Hale entrenches himself in the lives of the people she loves like some kind of fungus. She watches as the Sons slowly turn from Clay to defer to Peter. It’s wrong. So very, very wrong. Oh, none of them do it outright, and she’s not even sure that they’re doing it consciously, but they are. Especially the younger ones.

Juice and Opie have always looked to Jax first to an extent. Results of being the same generation. It’s changed since Hale came however. They look to Jax first for anything club related, but always, always turn to Hale for anything else. Opie has stepped aside as Jax’s right hand and taken up a position at his left, leaving space for Hale to step into a role Gemma has always known was Opie’s.

Opie was always going to be Jax’s VP when he became President.

Now, however, it looks like Peter Hale is going to take on that patch and Opie is going to be something else. And Gemma’s not even sure what, because as much as she loves Opie, the boy hasn’t got it in him to be Sergeant at Arms. He’s got the balls to back every play Jax makes, but not the ones required to back those plays with violence if needed.

She wishes, not for the first time, that JT hadn’t broken with Thomas’ death. That her husband hadn’t become weak and run away from his life to Ireland when he couldn’t take the pain. What had followed had been necessary for survival; and to keep the power to which she had become accustomed. JT was a better man than Clay, and had more charisma to boot.

If JT was still at the helm, a mutiny wouldn’t be in the works.

She can see the tides turning.

She has to stop this. Stop that man from taking everything she’s built and turning it into something she doesn’t recognize. Stop her son from turning away from her. She knows Jax read at least some of that stupid bleeding heart manuscript. Knows he’s talking to Jax from beyond the grave. There’s nothing she can do about that, the damage is done.

But she can sit him down to give him a few hard truths. Make him think with his head and less with his heart.

Her baby’s going to hate her for a while; but she can live with that. He’ll come back to her in the end.

She’s his mother, after all.

* 

Stiles sighs and rolls over onto his back. The cicadas in the trees buzz loudly in the heavy, humid air. It’s hot, but a cool breeze coming in from the west cools them. The blanket under him is soft, and thin enough that the occasional blade of grass makes an attempt at poking him through it. He’s sweating, but he doesn’t care enough to pull away from the sleeping wolf at his side. Willow, the dryad that lives on the property is sitting by his head, weaving leaves and flowers into his hair. Above him, sprawled across a low brand with her wings drooping toward the ground, Twila lets out little whistling sounds as she snores away.

They’ve never really had time to be like this. Wolf and Spark together as they are. Basking in the rightness of being together and sleeping off a hot afternoon.
Stiles likes it.

The hands in his hair pause, making Stiles’ drooping eyelids open fully with curiosity. He looks up at Willow, her willow-bark skin dappled with sun. She’s looking off to the right with wide tree-sap eyes. Her hands start to tremble. Then she wisps away, merging into her tree even as Stiles turns to look at whatever has her so frightened.

Holy. Shit.

Stiles sits bolt upright, disturbing Peter out of his doze. His eyes flare up as he checks the wards around the property.

“Stiles, what are you doing?” Peter demands, disgruntled.

Stiles reaches out and bodily turns Peter’s head to face what’s standing only about fifty or so feet away from them. Peter starts growling.

It’s… a dog? Or, it looks like a dog. It’s about the size of a Clydesdale horse, however. And there’s nothing natural about it. It’s inky black; a swirling mass of shadowy limbs contained into a shape. It has tall, pointed ears like one of those tiny Fennec foxes. It has long limbs, built for running. Huge claws dig furrows into the ground. The shape of its head is more like a hyena’s than anything else. Huge spines come out of its… fur… shiny greenish-black in the glare of the sun.

It’s eyes are poison green, and something is dripping from its fangs to sizzle on the ground.

Peter rucks up against Stiles’ back as he shifts. He stands over Stiles in his Alpha form, dwarfing the boy in size but equaling him in power. The threat in his growl is clear as day as he locks eyes with the creature.

It begins to follow the boundary of the wards then, never taking its eyes off the pair of them. Pacing back and forth along the back stretch of the property.

It makes a noise then. A sort of insect-like chitter of laughter.

It’s one of the worst noises Stiles has ever heard in his life. In the back of his brain, in the part of him that is sectioned off for problem-solving, he takes note of the idea that this thing (whatever it is) is going to feature heavily in his nightmares for years to come.

“It can’t get through the wards,” Stiles whispers, confidently. It can’t, because Stiles believes that it can’t. Nothing can that means harm to himself or those he loves and protects.

One of Peter’s ears twitches his way, indicating that he heard him.

He doesn’t stop growling.

*

Gemma screams bloody murder.

She screams and she fights.

She knows she clocked that stupid blonde chippy right in the nose at least once.

She fights until she’s forced into unconsciousness.

When she wakes up, and they come to her with those masks on and their message, she fights.
She fights through it.

She fights.

*

The phone rings. And rings. And rings.

*

Peter tracks it out into the woods after it leaves. Finds signs of the place it’s denned up, but doesn’t find the den itself. The earth in the places it frequents is churned up and blackened from its passage. There are no living creatures in those places. No birds, not small animals, no bugs. Nothing at all.

One of the places it seems to frequent is the boundary between the start of the home property and the woods beyond. The earth there isn’t as torn up, but green magic of the flower faeries, gnomes and the dryad helping the earth in the area to recover and resist the taint of that… thing.

Peter doesn’t like the amount of trails through the woods (his woods) that he finds. This thing has been here for weeks and he didn’t even notice.

But then, Charming isn’t Beacon Hills.

The monsters here keep to the woods, they don’t venture into town like they do up north.

They know they aren’t welcome in this Alpha’s territory. Know the only place they’re allowed to be is deep in the woods; and only if they harm no human and don’t decimate the wildlife.

This thing seems to be the first to try to test the new Alpha.

Well, whatever it is, Peter is going to find it and kill it.

It couldn’t hide from him even if it had wanted to.

*

*May you live in interesting times* is the most interesting curse in the world. Every sentient being the universe has fallen prey to it at least once in their lives. The very few that don’t, don’t even recognize how blessed they truly are.

Caliana was born on an Octarine day. She knows what from who and when.

Stiles Stilinski is the embodiment of that curse.

Not through any fault of his own, no, but simply by being who he is. He is a personification of change and a representative of chaos. One of these alone is enough to make him the center of a confluence of *interesting times*, more so being both.

“You are the worst artist in the world,” Cali tells him flatly as she looks at his attempt at drawing the creature he and Peter had seen. Blake mews in agreement and Twila twitters laughter into Stiles’ ear from where she’s draped around his neck like a scarf.

Stiles shrugs, unapologetic. “I am many things, this is not one of them.”

Cali rolls her eyes and steps out from behind the corner, “Come on, you better show me what you saw.”
Stiles follows with interest, “Are we going to look into your cauldron and cackle together while stirring counter-clockwise?”

Cali huffs a laugh under her breath, “There will be no stirring.”

“So there is a cauldron?”

“It isn’t a cauldron. It’s a scrying tool.”

She makes sure to get a good look at Stiles’ face when she takes her ‘scrying tool’ off its hook on the workroom wall. She is not disappointed by the absolute delight and sincere humor on his face as she thunks a large copper skillet onto the table.

“That’s not a bowl.”

“No, it’s solid copper.” Cali states as she fills it with clear spring water collected under a full moon.

“Ah,” Stiles nods once and sits on the stool opposite the witch. “So it’s conductive.”

“Very astute, young padawan. You’re learning.”

Stiles nods as Twila hops down onto the counter next to Blake to peer into the skillet curiously. Her true face is reflected back at her and she twitters at how pretty she is and loses the glamour. After a moment of admiring herself, she turns and follows Blake to the corner where his bed is and the two familiars curl up to take a nap in the cozy workroom while their people work.

“What do I do?” Stiles asks, more than ready to try something new.

“Place your hands with palms flat on the either side of the pan. Good. Now, concentrate on what you saw and only what you saw.”

The space between Stiles’ eyebrows crinkles as he concentrates. Ripples move across the water from each of his hands.

“That’s it. Remember, concentrate on only the creature. Don’t think about anyone or anything else. And clear yourself of emotions, it will confuse things.”

The water begins to settle into a mirror-like surface again. Cali leans over the pan, eyes flaring octarine. An image begins to take form, hazy at first, but then sharper as Stiles focuses.

The thing Caliana sees in the water makes her heart stutter in her chest and her blood curdle in her viens.

“Oh, Stiles.” She whispers. She reaches out with trembling hands and places them over Stiles’ on the sides of the skillet. A single tear slides down her cheek and drips into the water, disrupting the image.

When she meets Stiles’ confused gaze, Cali wishes for a moment that she’s taken up the offer to live in Faerie when her cousins had offered when her mother passed away ten years ago.

“What is it?” Stiles’ voice is soft, unsure of whether or not he wants to know.

“It’s death, Stiles,” Cali tells him, voice cracking slightly, “and it wants to eat you.”

* 

“No!” Gemma struggles to sit up. Every part of her hurts, but she has to. She has to. “We’re not
telling anyone anything. Make something up.”

“Gemma,” Tara sighs. She reaches out toward Gemma, and barely manages not to recoil when the older woman flinches away from her. “We have to tell someone.”

“No,” Gemma says. She’s going to protect her family. “We can’t.”

“Why not?” Tara demands.

“Because this was done to me as a message.”

“What?” Tara asks, aghast. “For who?”

“The Sons,” Gemma finally looks up and meets Tara’s gaze. “It was a message for the Sons. And this will tear my boys up and they need to be ready, not out for revenge.”

Tara sits down on the edge of the hospital bed and takes Gemma’s hand in her own. The damage to her nails and hands are purely defensive wounds. Signs of fending off an attacker. They aren’t as easy to explain away as the black eye and cracked cheekbone. “Okay. Okay, I get that. But Gemma, this is serious, you need to be looked at and treated.”

Gemma looks down at their clasped hands as Donna enters the room with a bundle of clothes in her arms and a look on her face that is too calm. “I know, but the boys can never find out. She looks up at the girl she once thought would become her daughter one day, then over at the one who stuck around through the thick of it.

“And I don’t mean just physically, Gemma,” Tara says, voice still gentle. She and Donna exchange an understanding look between them, and Donna takes up the rest.

“You have to talk to someone about this. If you won’t let us get justice for it, you have to talk about it.” Donna takes Gemma’s other hand. “And I want you to let me call Stiles. He can heal you.”

“No,” Gemma says. “Wayne’s already totaling my car and then he’s going to get Clay and Jax.”

“I’m not talking about your face, Gem,” Donna says gently.

“That little brat isn’t coming – “

“Don’t do that,” Donna snaps, making Tara jump. “Stiles is a good guy, Gemma. He can help you.”

“He and Hale are tearing my family apart.”

Donna and Tara exchange a look across the wounded woman. Donna sighs heavily and Tara speaks, determined. “No he isn’t. He’s helping make it stronger.”

“What would you know?” Gemma demands.

“A lot more than you think,” Tara snaps. “Jax murdered a man for me last week.” Both of the other women in the room look up at her in shock, but she bulls onward, unwilling to stop now. “He was going to rape me, so I shot him and I called Jax. He and Juice ripped him apart and the Peter and a couple of the other Sons got rid of the evidence. Stiles took me to their house and made me shower and feel safe.”

“Stiles helped save my marriage,” Donna chimes in. “Without Stiles, Peter and John I would have left Opie. I’d have taken my kids and left Charming and never looked back. We were falling apart and they gave us the support we needed to get our shit together.”
“They’re not bad people, Gemma.” Tara tacks on at the end.

“They’re undermining Clay. They’re going to rip the club apart.”

“Is that such a bad thing?” Donna asks. When Gemma looks at her with reproach, Donna elaborates.
“Would Jax stepping up as President with all the Sons united at his back be a bad thing? Would Jax running things differently than Clay really ruin the club, or would it make it stronger?”

When a mulish look crosses Gemma’s face, Tara adds her two cents. In for a penny, in for a pound. Gemma needs some hard truths knocked into her head, and she’s vulnerable enough right now that they might actually sink in. “What the club does is dangerous; and it just keeps getting worse. How long will it be before someone dies, Gemma? How long until Clay pisses the wrong person off and brings war to Charming? The club has to change to survive, and you know it.”

There is a long silence while Gemma rolls their words around in his head. While she takes a look at the new structure that is building within the Sons. Looks at the way Jax is growing into the man she always knew he could be. At the strong men gathering at his back. Then she looks at the way Clay is behaving. At the way he clings to his power and has always done everything (no matter what it was) to keep it.

She doesn’t want to lose her husband, but she’s a mother first. Always. Her baby and grandbaby come first. They always will.

“Clay will never step down willingly,” Gemma whispers into the silence.

“Clay dug his own grave and you know it,” Donna says without sympathy. She holds Gemma’s gaze when the older woman looks up at her. “He’s been burying himself bloody for years.”

There is nothing about that statement that is untrue. Gemma says nothing.

*

He flicks the safety off on the rifle, stock set firmly into his shoulder. He’s been waiting for his chance for three days now. He’s not going to waste it. The gilly suit is itchy, and he’s peed on himself three times. He’s hungry as hell because he hasn’t eaten all day, and the heat of the sun is baking him alive.

He doesn’t move.

The sound of motorcycles roars toward him from down the street. He turns to watch the bikes roll up through the scope. Finds his target among them.

Good.

He waits. He is a patient predator.

The motorcycles roll onto the lot at Teller-Morrow Automotive. The park neatly in a row in front of the clubhouse. The men begin to dismount the bikes. His target pauses to stretch his back after the long ride.

Perfect.

He fires.

He never misses.
Chapter Summary

These days, it feels like Charming is holding it’s breath.

The thing about holding your breath is that eventually you have to take another breath.

Chapter Notes

So, the problem with messing with canon, especially when you try to squish two seasons together, is that things get weird. Just please remember that this is AU for SOA, and AU S5 for TW and we'll be okay. Venus Van Dam is coming in early here because I absolutely adore the character and Walton Goggins is my hero for making me adore her when I was predisposed not to.

I know quite a few of you are reading this even though you've never watched SOA, so kudos to you for sticking with it, and I really hope I'm doing characters you don't know justice. For those who know SOA, I hope I'm doing the characters justice.

We're headed into the meat and potatoes of this fic. It's not over by a long shot, but I'd say we've hit the middle.

Disclaimer: Octarine as the color of magic belongs to Terry Pratchett and the Discworld. I own nothing SOA or TW.

Twenty-One:

Tig Trager is having a bad day.

It didn’t originally start out that way, certainly. But ever since he woke up this morning with a hangover, the signs had been there. Oh, the trio of girls he’d spent the night with had certainly made up for the headache and morning-aftertaste in his mouth; but they hadn’t been able to make up for the look on Clay’s face when he’d gotten off the phone.

Gemma had been in a car accident last night, and there is nothing Clay can do about it because they’re on a run under the guise of a charity run. Not that they aren’t actually riding for charity, it’s just not the only thing they’re doing.

And then Bobby had to go and ride that god-forsaken fat boy of his.

Tig’s gonna shoot him.

“Come on!” he howls down the hospital corridor. His leg is mangled. From the pain, quite possibly
broken. “Sons of bitches.”

“Oh, honey,” a cultured southern voice tells him, causing him to turn. There’s a tall woman (and it is a woman, adam’s apple or no) with perfectly coiffed hair and makeup in a dress that reminds Tig of vintage high society. The fact that he even knows what that is is enough to make him think he also hit his head when he was driven off the road. “Screamin’ about it isn’t gonna get you serviced any faster,” she finishes.

“Some painkillers wouldn’t go amiss, beautiful,” he snips her way, mouth twitching at one corner.

She smirks at him, “Honey, with your foul mouth, I doubt they should be giving you anything stronger than baby Tylenol.”

Okay then. Well, his day is looking up.

*

“No, I’ve got her. Don’t worry.” Stiles steps out of the Jeep and heads for the entrance of the hospital. Jax is on the other end of the line losing his mind while Clay howls in the background like a Rottweiler that’s had a juicy steak taken away from it. “I’ll take her to my place and set her up in the guest room. Dad’s around, and so is Jaime. It’s a car accident Jax, no need to cut the trip short for that.”

“She goes no where alone!” Clay barks from his place somewhere in the room.

“Sure. I’ll stay with her.”

“She’s not going to like being confined, Stiles, but get her to do it anyway. I don’t care if you have to magic her to the bed,” Jax sounds as serious as he ever gets.

“Don’t worry. I’ve got this.”

“Right. Yeah. Okay.” Jax heaves in a breath and lets it out in a gusty sigh. “We’ll be back in two days.”

“Gotcha. Keep out of trouble, Teller.” Stiles says, then signs off the call. Sometimes he wishes he wasn’t considered reliable. If only to save himself the occasional headache. Most of the time he doesn’t mind.

Most of the time, it’s a good reminder that he’s not in Beacon Hills. That Scott’s not in charge and shunning him at every turn. That he’s safer here in Charming than he ever was in Beacon Hills. Giant slavering beast and bikers aside.

As he shoves his phone into his pocket, there’s a sharp snapping sound that has his instinctively ducking into the doorway as a bullet ricochets off the shield he’s been wearing since they spotted the dog from hell the other day and bounces off the concrete to his right. He knows the sound of a high-powered rifle firing from a car backfire. A glance down at the ground confirms his suspicion when he spies the new pock-mark in the concrete.

It’s time to get the phone out again. He hits a speed dial number as he scans the nearby rooftops for the glint of a scope.

“Charming Police Department.”

Stiles is amazed at the fact that no one seems to recognize that sound for what it was. He can only
imagine how people would be reacting if the sniper had actually managed to hit him. Wait. Maybe starting a panic is exactly what he needs to do.

“Yeah, hi, there’s a sniper on a roof by St. Thomas. He’s fired once already.”

“Sir – “

Stiles sketches a symbol into the air in front of him, and his faint shield shimmers around him, intact and undamaged. Stiles steps out of his cover.

Three more shots go off in rapid succession, pinging off his shield. The voice on the other end of the phone goes silent, then the phone drops as the officer that picked it up starts yelling about shots fired and a sniper.

Stiles listens with vague interest as he digs down inside himself and uses his magic to trace the trajectory of the bullets. Octarine flares up around him, glowing lines of power following the path the bullets took. Stiles opens his eyes to follow the path, whiskey eyes bright with the orange-purple-green of magic.

He looks up to the building across the street as the sound of sirens shriek through the air as the police department comes charging in. His gaze hits the scope, which jerks. Another shot fires, pinging off his shield. The rifle disappears.

“Oh no you don’t,” Stiles mutters. He reaches along the trace path of the bullets and latches onto the aura of the man on the roof (flat and gray as it is). “You’re not going anywhere.”

And so as he believes it, so it becomes.

* 

Jaime misses his kutte; but not as much as he believes that he should. His place in the Pack is strong as any bond he’s ever had. His new job as liason between the Mayans, the Pack and the Sons is interesting. It lets him visit his former brothers on a regular basis, as well as giving him permission to visit his Mama whenever he wants.

It’s not ideal, but it is what it is. Jaime can live with who and what he is now; his heart is still catching up with his brain. This, he knows, will take time.

It always does.

“We’ve been hearing rumors,” Alvarez is saying, and Jaime looks up at the President. “Rumors about things coming out of Beacon Hills, ese.”

Jaime sighs, “What kinds of things?”

“Hunters,” Alvarez says. He’s never been the kind of man to cushion a blow. If cold, hard facts will get the job done, why soften it with pretty words?

“Mierda,” Jaime cusses on a sigh. He takes a drag off the cigarette in his had. It no longer does anything for him. The nicotine is a moot point with Jaime’s new metabolism, but it’s a habit. A comforting one from his old life, and it’s not like he’s going to get cancer or anything.

Something inside Jaime, to the right of his heart where all of his Pack bonds furl together and latch onto his sternum, tugs. He眨s, and then that tug becomes a pull. He cusses again, and drops his cigarette as one of the bonds yanks.
“You okay?” Alvarez asks.

“Fuck, that hurt,” Jaime mutters, rubbing at his chest. Nearby, Oscar’s eyes go Beta gold in response. Jaime takes a moment to puzzle out which of the baker’s dozen bonds just tried to crack open his chest. Then he cusses again when he realizes it was Stiles. “I’ve got to go.”

“What’s wrong?” Oscar demands, stance fierce.

Jaime has always liked Oscar. He’s always ready for a dust up, doesn’t matter the time of day.

“I think your Hunters are already in Charming,” Jaime says, eyes glowing blue as he heads for his bike.

“Be careful, eh?” Alvarez advises, keeping pace with him. He stands to one side as Jaime fires the bike up and kicks the kickstand up in preparation to leave. “And you let us know if we can help. The Hale Pack are friends.”

Jaime nods, gratefully, then he roars out of the lot and back toward Charming.

He’s a good forty minutes away, but he can cut it down to twenty if he speeds.

*

David Hale tries not to think too hard about the fact that when his team reaches the rooftop, they find the sniper snarling and cussing as he tries to get free from invisible bonds. A couple of the officers with him pause for a moment at the sight, but eventually shake it off and help him get the man into restraints.

He has no doubts that Stiles had something to do with keeping this guy where he is. He tries not to think about it too hard, just like he knows his colleagues are doing. The men and women he works with are smart people who are trained to be observant.

They know there’s something that’s changed in Charming lately. They may not be able to say what that something is the way that David can, but they know; and they look to David and the Chief for answers.

So far, they’ve managed to lead by example. Taking every weird thing into stride like it’s an everyday occurrence. So far. David is waiting for the other shoe to drop. He’s waiting for the day when it’s too big to be brushed under the rug. He’s waiting for the even that brings the entire Charming Police Department into the know on all things supernatural; if not the entire town.

These days, it feels like Charming is holding it’s breath.

The thing about holding your breath is that eventually you have to take another breath.

David begins to recite the sniper’s (hunter’s) rights, and he can’t help but wonder if maybe this moment, right here, is the exhale before the next deep breath.

*

It takes all Peter has not to snap the second he feels Stiles’ end of the bond flare and snap with danger.

He has to trust his soulmate.

And the bond is telling him to stay put. That Stiles has this covered.
He really doesn’t have to like it, but he has to trust in Stiles.

It’s the only way this thing will work.

*

June Stahl does not like Chief Stilinski.

Maybe it’s because he knows something. About her, or about magic, or both. She doesn’t know what he knows, but he knows something. It’s in his eyes, and how she can never escape that serious and observant gaze no matter where she goes.

It’s in how, when she pulled the trigger on Kohn, the man was already gone and the Chief swears he doesn’t know what happened to him, but Stahl is pretty sure he as an idea.

It’s in that son of his. How the boy is maybe eighteen but is engaged to a man nearly twice his age. It’s in how the boy sees too much, and knows too much, and seems to always be watching.

It’s in how Peter Hale isn’t human. At all.

It’s in how, when a sniper shoots at his son, Stilinski is more concerned with wrapping it up quickly because he can tell on sight that despite being shot at, Stiles is fine. It’s how David Hale reports that they got the shooter and when one of her own guys goes up to the rooftop, there’s no signs of a struggle.

June Stahl hates Charming, California.

*

“What happened?” Donna demands as soon as Stiles walks into Gemma’s hospital room.

Stiles flaps a hand at her, “Nothing I couldn’t handle.”

“Stiles,” Donna sighs.

Stiles smiles at her. He’s rather fond of that sigh. It’s a tired, half-exasperated, half-fond sigh. The kind people around Stiles tend to give off when he does something. “Dad’s got it taken care of.”

“Stiles,” Donna says again.

“What?” Stiles asks, ignoring her. He takes in Gemma’s beaten-up frame and wary eyes and he frowns. “Gemma?”

Gemma avoids Stiles’ gaze. He looks from her to Donna to Tara and frowns. A pregnant pause follows before Stiles steps over to the bed, telegraphing his movements as Gemma watches him come toward her with eyes that say she’ll fight him to the death if she feels threatened. Gingerly, he sits down on the edge of the bed and slowly, gently, wraps his arm around her. She stiffens up for a good thirty seconds, and Stiles waits until she very carefully leans into his side.

Subtly, so as not to frighten the mother of the man who may have just replaced Scott as his best friend, Stiles lets the Spark inside him unfurl. Glimmers of octarine shimmer into existence around the room until the place resembles a small slice of the heavens.

In his arms, Gemma begins to shake.

Tara and Donna step closer, each of them taking up one of the matriarch’s hands.
Gently (as gently as he can), Stiles reaches out with those tendrils of pure magic and reach out to Gemma. He believes her wounds healed. The unseen wounds that hide inside her. Physical wounds that soothe themselves away with a warm hum. Wounds of the mind, scarred into the psyche that don’t vanish, but the healing of which are accelerated to a point where, while they still exist, are not going to cause their bearer more harm.

Stiles knows in that moment what happened.

Gemma Teller-Morrow was attacked in broad daylight. Kidnapped and taken to a warehouse on the edge of town where she was raped by three men and given a message. A message that she will not deliver.

He doesn’t know what the message is, but he can guess that there is nothing good in it.

Slowly, the octarine goes out of the room. Stiles holds onto Gemma as she trembles in his arms and begins to cry for the first time since she was taken. Tara and Donna crowd a little closer to the bed until the four of them are knotted up together.

Stiles turns his head just enough to press a kiss into Gemma’s hair, and he makes a silent vow. A vow he knows the others in this room will make and keep also as he meets the fiercely protective gaze of Donna and then the strong healer of Tara.

This will not go unpunished.

“We’ve got you, Mama Gemma,” Stiles tells her.

And, for the first time, Gemma believes him.

*  

John steps into the interrogation room with an air of seriousness that lends itself to inform the tall, scruffy guy handcuffed to the table that he’s in deep shit this time. Luckily for John (but not for Conner Matthews), he’s got some serious contacts and can smell false identification from a mile away.

Also, there’s only one type of person that would aim a sniper rifle at his kid.

David stands in one corner of the room, glowering at Matthews the patented Hale Glare No. 1™. In the observation room, Chis Argent looks like he’s been chewing on glass.

And hadn’t that been a kick in the teeth.

To find Christopher Argent waiting for him in his office when he got back to the station.

John drops two files onto the table in front of Matthews. The first is his false persona. The one that would get him out of this situation if John didn’t have the second one. The second one is his real file. With his real name and true information in it.

It makes him pale a couple of shades as John drags the empty chair out away from the table with a screech of metal against concrete. The Chief sits down in it with a grim expression. He gives Matthews’ exactly one minute to take in how deep the shit he’s in is. Then, he speaks.

“Let’s talk about Gerard Argent, shall we?”

Conner Matthews’, decorated Army Ranger sniper with three tours under his belt followed by ten
years of Hunting, pales rapidly. There’s blood in the water, and he’s surrounded by sharks.
“I’m sure you heard about the shooting at the hospital yesterday,” Stilinski begins.

“Oh, yes,” Ethan returns. “Terrible thing. I’m so glad no one was hurt.”

“Yes. By some miracle, no one was.” Stilinski comes to a stop across the counter from Ethan. He’s suddenly grateful for the obstacle between them if the sharp look in the other man’s eyes is anything to go by. “We caught the shooter, but we’re trying to pin down some of his movements. Going from store to store to see if anyone remembers seeing him.”

Another chapter down. Our beloved Chief wasn’t done being BAMF. Also, Zobelle begins to realize that he may have backed the wrong horse. Oops.

I think I've managed to get back into the swing of the story. I'd lost the plot for a minute there, but it's back.

**Disclaimer:** Octarine as the color of magic belongs to Terry Pratchett and the Discworld. I own nothing SOA or TW.

John Stilinski isn’t an imposing man. Not physically anyway. He’s half an inch shy of six feet tall, with brown hair going rapidly gray to match the crow’s feet by his eyes and the prominent creases in his forehead. Stress induced, all of it, from raising a Stiles. He’s not exceptionally muscular (though he is very fit for his age, thank you); nor does he have the broadest shoulders.

No, John Stilinski is not particularly physically imposing.

It’s all in his eyes. In the set of his mouth and arch of his eyebrows. His bullshit detector is exceptionally accurate (see raising Stiles for reasons why). He’s intelligent, capable and calm in the eye of the storm.

He sits across from Conner Matthews, pencil tap-tap-tapping on the man’s file, wearing the sort of unimpressed expression that makes a person second-guess themselves, and watching Matthews slowly dissolve into a puddle of sheer terror.

The Chief has yet to say a word.
Matthews chews on the inside of his right cheek. Shifts his weight from right to left. Tugs at his restraints with a rattle of metal. His left eyelid twitches for a few seconds. He feels the urge to sneeze.

Eventually, the silence (and the tap-tap-tapping) begins to grate at him.

“W-who’s Gerard Argent?” Matthews wonders, and hides a wince at the crack in his voice. He clears his throat.

Across from him, John Stilinski smiles beatifically at the sniper. It’s an expression most would associate with Stiles; but then, Stiles had to learn it from somewhere. The Chief straightens up in his chair just enough to use the eraser on his pencil to pull a photograph out of one of the files. He turns it around so that it is right-side-up to Matthews and pushes it toward him.

A photograph of Gerard Argent peers up at Matthews accusingly. He swallows noisily.

John’s smile remains congenial, his tone conversational, “Let’s talk about Gerard Argent, and how you fired four shots from a Barrett M95 at my son on his orders, shall we?”

In the corner, Deputy Chief David Hale rises out of his relaxed slouch like an avenging angel of death. His broad shoulders square up and he steps up to the Chief’s left shoulder with his arms crossed and the patented Hale Death Glare on in full force.

Conner Matthews whimpers, “He paid me to shoot a witch. I didn’t get any other specifics and I never met the man.”

John leans forward to place his elbows on the table and when he next speaks, it’s with too many teeth in it for polite society. “Argent only uses agents he feels like he can trust. Try again.”

“He – He said that he was after a werewolf who had magical protection. He hired me to take the witch out. I’ve done jobs for him in the past, none the wiser. This just seemed like another witch to me, just like all the others.”

“How much did he offer you?”

“Three million,” Matthews confesses. “A pretty good payday for a witch, all things considered, but I can smell a grudge from a mile away. Whatever werewolf Argent is after pissed him off something fierce.”

“Does the name Peter Hale mean anything to you?” David rumbles.

Matthews’ already pale complexion goes nearly translucent in the fluorescent lightning. “I. Yes.” He whispers.

“That’s who Argent is after,” John says with a grim tilt to his mouth. “And that witch you were hired to go after isn’t a witch. He’s a Spark, and Hale’s Mate.”

“I’ll tell you whatever you want, just please don’t let them kill me!”

* 

“What the fuck do you mean bounty hunters took him?” Clay growls.

Juice swallows hard and looks at Jax, who nods. “I went to take care of the bikes, and when I got back Tig was gone and this nice lady told me that a couple of bounty hunters had picked him up.”

The woman smiles when Juice gestures at her, “It appears that dear Alexander has an overdue bond
in Washington for indecent exposure. Those gentlemen seemed rather adamant on collecting it.”

‘Alexander?’ Chibs mouths to Bobby incredulously, who shrugs, bewildered.

“Listen Darlin’ – “

She cuts Jax off before he can lose it, “Venus Van Dam, sweetie.”

“Right. Venus.” Jax feels completely baffled by this… woman, but tries to push it aside in favor of getting answers while Clay starts to turn an alarming shade of puce. “You notice anything else? They say something about where they were going?”

“As a matter of fact, I do recall one of them mention something about a motel in order to finish patching Alexander up.”

“Thank you for the help, darlin’.”

“My pleasure sugar,” Venus tells him, then hands him a perfume scented card. “Do have Alexander call me when all this is taken care of, will you?”

Jax’s eyebrows crawl up his forehead as he reads the title on the card, and at his shoulder Juice makes a terrified squeaky noise as he takes in the word *dominatrix*. “Sure thing sweetheart.”

*

Gemma sits on the porch swing with her grandson in her lap. Her little baby is learning to sit up on his own, and she can’t believe how big he’s getting when it seemed like just yesterday that Abel was fighting for his life in the hospital.

Down on the grass of the backyard, Kenny and Ellie are playing fetch with several of the flower faeries that apparently live in the Stilinski rose bed. Stiles is harvesting out of season vegetables to go with dinner tonight while several garden gnomes declare war on a dandelion plant that has taken up residence in the squash bed.

There’s a sort of sheltering peace here that Gemma finds strange. Like the outside world is blocked away down a long tunnel and will never be able to reach her here. She feels… safe. Truly safe for the first time since she was taken. Abel begins to doze, lulled by the rocking of the porch swing and the warmth of the dappled sunlight coming through the trellis of grape vines climbing over the roof of the porch.

The back door opens, and Jaime steps out with a tray of lemonade and glasses in hand. He sets it down on the table and pours a couple of glasses before heading toward her. For some reason, this kid isn’t intimidating. He hands her a glass and she takes it.

Jaime Martel is a former Mayan, which is enough to make her want to hate him. He’s also a werewolf; which she knows should terrify her.

But she can’t find a twenty-something boy in stocking feet that sips lemonade through a garishly striped straw intimidating.

Maybe it’s this place.

Maybe it’s the magic.

“You know, Mama?” Jaime says after a few minutes and half a glass of lemonade. “I think I’m
gonna rip their throats out with my teeth. Peter’s been teaching me how.”

Gemma stares at him. He blinks at her over the rim of his glass. Gemma takes a drink of her own lemonade, notes that it’s a little on the too-sweet side. “I appreciate the thought honey.”

Jaime nods, “I figure, we’re all keepin’ this secret for a reason, yeah? So why not just… take a little vengeance when we find ‘em, you know? So you can sleep at night, si?”

Stiles’ cat jumps up onto the porch railing and then down onto the swing next to Gemma, where she curls up with her head next to Abel’s foot with a rumbling purr. The surreal feeling increases as, for a moment, it almost looks like the cat has wings.

“Sure,” Gemma hears herself say. “So I can sleep at night.”

* *

Piney drives the flatbed into the side of the motel. Jax, Happy and Peter climb in through the debris with weapons aimed as Tig crows about his getaway, even as he hops toward them on one leg. Peter hauls him up onto the truck while Jax yells at Piney to drive. Happy snarls at the bounty hunters as they leave.

In the end, they’re in an out in less than five minutes.

Tig cackles all the way out onto the highway. Then he sobers as the pain kicks in. “Where are the others?” he asks eventually as Peter’s hands go black drain Tig’s pain before he snaps the broken limb into the proper alignment.

“Finishing the run, brother,” Jax says.

Something in his tone is off. Tig takes a minute to contemplate it as his leg is re-bandaged. He believes Jax when he says that the others are finishing the run; but there’s more to it than that. For a few seconds he wonders if maybe Clay didn’t want to come get him at all. Wonders if Clay didn’t care that Tig would’ve probably spent five to ten inside if he’d been hauled all the way to jail.

He shakes it off. Clay is his brother, his best friend. He’d never do that.

“Here!” Jax hands him a little rectangle of cardstock. “The tranny dominatrix wants you to call her!”

Tig looks down at the card with a wild grin. Venus had been sweet as sugar and pretty as pie. He wouldn’t mind getting to know her better. He tucks the card into his kutte.

He really wouldn’t do that.

Would he?

* *

The shop is perfect. The walls are a dark green. The wood of the shelves and tables are polished to a shine. The displays are precise and elegant. He inhales deeply. The scent of high quality tobacco and paper fills his lungs. It’s a heady scent that only a man with a taste for quality can truly appreciate.

The store is officially open for business.

It’s a beautiful California day. Main Street is bustling with activity.

Ethan Zobelle wishes he could enjoy it. He really does. But one of Argent’s people had taken a shot
at the Chief of Police’s son the day before and, for some inexplicable reason, missed. Zobelle is not a fool, he knows that his tenuous connection to Argent will not go unseen. This will interfere with his plans; with the League’s plans.

Which are already in motion.

The bell over the door chimes, and Zobelle turns with a congenial smile on his face that threatens to drop off the second he sees who has entered his establishment. He manages to keep his expression, but it’s a near thing.

“Good morning Chief Stilinski,” he says, hiding his irritation behind his smile. This is exactly why he doesn’t usually work with people outside the League. They always bring unwanted trouble with them.

“Mr. Zobelle,” the Chief of Police says. He then takes a good look around the room, taking in the décor and the stock. “Nice place.”

“Thank you,” Ethan returns. “We’ve been working hard. How can I help you today?”

The Chief smiles in a way that makes Ethan think of several senators he’s had the (unfortunate) joy to work with in the past. It’s perfectly courteous and polite, but it makes the person it’s aimed at think that the man’s got a snake hidden behind his teeth. Behind him, Deputy Chief Hale begins to walk the length of the store, taking the stock with eyes that rarely miss minute details.

“I’m sure you heard about the shooting at the hospital yesterday,” Stilinski begins.

“Oh, yes,” Ethan returns. “Terrible thing. I’m so glad no one was hurt.”

“Yes. By some miracle, no one was.” Stilinski comes to a stop across the counter from Ethan. He’s suddenly grateful for the obstacle between them if the sharp look in the other man’s eyes is anything to go by. “We caught the shooter, but we’re trying to pin down some of his movements. Going from store to store to see if anyone remembers seeing him.”

“Of course,” Ethan’s next smile is a little more genuine as something in his chest loosens. “Today is our grand opening, so we weren’t open yesterday.”

“I know,” Stilinski acknowledges with a slight nod. “But maybe you saw him pass by on the street?”

“I can certainly try, Chief,” Ethan says. He waits until Stilinski produces the photograph and he peers down at the unassuming man in it as a wave of relief courses through him. His answer is perfectly honest when he says, “I’m sorry, I don’t recognize him.”

Stilinski picks up the photograph with a slight shrug, “I figured, but there’s always a chance.”

Ethan nods along, “True. I’m sorry I can’t be of more help.”

Stilinski nods and waves a farewell as he and his Deputy head for the door, “Thank you for your time, Mr. Zobelle. And good luck with the shop.”

Ethan waits until the pair has gotten into the Chief’s SUV and pulled away from the curb before he sags in place for a moment. His grip on the counter is white knuckled as he considers the situation. Making a deal with Gerard Argent no longer seems like it was such a good idea. If the man’s sniper was caught (and hadn’t even managed to take out his target), then Ethan feels very little confidence in whatever else the old man might have planned.
He’d struck the deal so that he wouldn’t have to dip a toe into the supernatural world. It’s always a bad idea to go down that path. Everything (no matter how benign it seems) in that world can be lethal if provoked. Ethan has never wanted (or needed) to piss off something with the ability to rip his throat out in five seconds flat.

Ethan is, if nothing else, a practical man. There is absolutely nothing practical about dabbling in the supernatural world.

“Make sure that there is nothing that will tie us to Gerard Argent,” Ethan orders with Weston comes up at his elbow. “Nothing and no one.”

Weston nods once. “The message was delivered,” he reports.

Ethan nods, “Good. Let’s hope that Morrow and Teller understand how serious we are.”

*

When he was little, Stiles was the kind of kid who always asked why. It had absolutely exasperated his Dad, because no matter what kind of answer he gave him, Stiles always had a follow-up question. His Mom had loved that he was so inquisitive. She’d always been willing to sit with Stiles and answer every one of his questions.

That’s what he remembers the most about his Mom. Hours and hours spent snuggled into her side as they looked at books and watched documentaries and learned things together because Stiles needed to know why and how.

Gemma Teller-Morrow doesn’t strike Stiles as the kind of Mom who ever had that kind of patience.

Stiles figures he was probably pretty lucky in the Mom department; even if he only had Claudia for eleven years. Those eleven years had been pretty awesome in his opinion. And then he’d had Melissa McCall. She wasn’t his Mom, not really, but she was the Mom of his best friend and she had stepped up admirably in the face of Claudia’s death.

Scott’s not Stiles’ best friend anymore, and the guy who is becoming that to Stiles has a crazy lady for a mother. She’s a no-bullshit, my-way-or-the-highway kind of woman; and she’s sort of terrifying. She expects all of them to follow her instructions in letter and in spirit, and fire and brimstone to those who don’t.

She refuses to tell Clay and Jax about the rape. Which Stiles gets after he forces the message she was told to deliver as part of the whole ordeal. He refuses not to tell Peter, though.

And that’s how this whole situation has come about. Stiles sitting at his own kitchen table missing his mother while Gemma rants at him while slamming about in the kitchen because she thinks she can command Stiles to not tell Peter about what really happened to her. Donna’s already taken the kids home, and Jaime had retreated up the stairs with Abel as soon as Gemma started shouting.

He wishes the guys weren’t on a run, because being confined to this house with a furious Gemma is not an appealing option.

“Gemma,” Stiles cuts through her fury with a single word punched up to eleven with power. He wants her to listen to him, so she’s going to damn well listen. She turns to look at him, a skillet in one hand and her eyes snapping with righteous indignation. “We have to tell Peter.”

Gemma snarls silently, making Stiles grateful (not for the first time) that she’s not a werewolf. She’s honestly terrifying. “Why?” she demands. “He’ll tell Clay and Jax, and they’ll tear off looking for
vengeance – “

“No,” Stiles cuts her off. It’s just more of the same reasoning she’s used for the last thirty-six hours since the incident. “Not if I ask him not to. But we have to tell him because I’m going to need his help tracking them down so that I can slowly peel the skin off their bodies.”

Gemma sets the skillet down. She stares at Stiles, whose eyes are snapping with octarine fire, and has an epiphany. Maybe (just maybe) she was wrong about Stiles and Peter ripping the club apart.

“Do you promise he won’t tell Clay or Jax?”

“Not until after vengeance is had.”

Gemma nods once. She can live with that.
Hunt

Chapter Summary

Stiles crosses to the warehouse door and a spark of magic has the lock giving out. The metal opens with a protest of hinges, and Stiles holds it open for the wolf to pass through. He follows Peter into the room. A twiddle of his fingers and a thought causes pale orange globules of light to flicker into the existence. There are four of them, and they spread across the room to chase the shadows from the corners.

Chapter Notes

There was a lot of strategy and pre-action prep that had to be done in this chapter, and it made my head hurt. But, it's finished, and next chapter is going to earn us out Graphic Depictions of Violence tag. The Juice/Jax snuck in there, but it made me happy, so yeah.

On another note: We hit 70k words! Whee! We're starting to hit the climax of the fic where all things collide. There's still a lot of fic to go, however. It looks like it might be between another 20-30k possibility. Which means that this monstrosity may end up being longer than Worn Out Shoes. _/O_ I guess we'll see.

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Twenty-Three:

Stiles takes Gemma home the following day. He’s sitting at her kitchen table while she changes her clothes when the sound of several motorcycles coming down the street reaches his ears. Stiles remains where he is as the sound gets closer, pulls into the driveway and then cuts off. It won’t surprise anyone that he’s here. The Sons had all been on the road, and the only people left to stay with Gemma have been club adjacent.

When Clay, Jax and finally Peter enter the house, it’s very clear that both Clay and Jax are upset. Clay has a sort of slow-burning fury about him that make suicide bombers look like pudding cups in comparison. Jax just looks worried. Peter swings in behind him with a carefully blank expression on his face and red glowing like hot coals behind the shade of his aviators.

“You heard.”

A throat ripping growl erupts from the Alpha. Stiles sighs as yelling reaches them from the other room. Clay and Gemma are screaming at each other. Jax emerges from the rear of the house and pins
Stiles with a supernaturally blue glaze.

“Why is my mother lying to me about what happened to her?” he demands. His canines are pointed and he’s flexing his hands as if he can feel the claws just under his skin.

“Because she doesn’t want you to do something stupid.” Stiles tells him flatly. He lets Peter haul him out of his chair and scent along his neck while checking him for injuries.

Jax growls.

He’s a magnificent werewolf. If a measure of magnificent is taken from how pants-wetingly terror inducing he is.

Stiles reaches up with one hand to pat Peter on the cheek as he pulls away from him enough to look Jax in the eyes. “She didn’t crash her car. It was a thousand times worse than it was. She’s trying to protect you and the club. I’m already plotting the evisceration of the culprits.”

Jax’s eyes blaze with fury as the possibilities run through his mind at speed, “She was attacked?”

“Yes.”

“To get to the club?”

“Yes.”

“Tell me.”

“I made a promise that I wouldn’t.”

Jax grips the edge of the table so hard that the wood cracks under the strain. He struggles with his control for a minute, breathing in and out deliberately.

Peter speaks, his tone full of promise, “They will die begging for the end, Jackson.”

Jax looks up, eyes bright and blue as he looks to his Alpha. When he speaks, it is with a rumble in the back of his throat. “Good.”

*

Chris wishes (not for the first time) that he was still in France with Isaac. France was nice. The locals had been friendly, the cuisine amazing, and he hadn’t felt the urge to shoot anything.

But then rumors had started to hit the supernatural side of the dark web. Rumors about power rising up out of northern California like a tide. Of creatures the like of which haven’t been seen in centuries waking up and moving. Stories about ley crossings and wellsprings popping up. Telluric currents in that part of the world turning from streams into rivers.

It was enough to interest any hunter worth the name.

The stories only got wilder from there. Stories about an Alpha who could turn into a wolf the size of a small car. Stories about a Spark bringing people back from the dead. Of faeries seen on this side of the Inbetween.

Chris had known immediately that Beacon Hills was probably at the epicenter of all the weirdness. It always was. But to get there and find that the Stilinskis had left town and had taken Peter Hale with them? That had been a shock. To find that while the Beacon Hills Preserve was rife with magical life
and that the Nemeton was no longer a tree stump had been par for the course… but to find all of that stuff migrating south?

That had been the surprise.

Then his father had gone missing and Chris knew, deep in his bones, that Peter Hale was at the center of all this strangeness.

What he’d found when he’d gotten to Charming had been a complete surprise. Or maybe it wasn’t. Maybe he should have expected Stiles and Peter teaming up. After the Nogitsune, there had been something dark inside Stiles. Something that whispered of shadows and death and a willingness to do absolutely anything to take care of those he considered his.

Chris is less surprised to find that Scott and his pack are no longer counted among those people that he feels like he should be.

Over the last year he’s grown a reputation. A no-tolerance reputation. If you are part of the supernatural community and causing harm to innocents, human or not, and he’ll put a bullet between your eyeballs. Otherwise, it’s live and let live.

It’s what Allison would have wanted.

“We protect those who cannot protect themselves.”

That was what his baby girl had told him. A new family creed to replace the old one.

Chris will do everything he can to make Allison proud of him. Even if it means he has to kill his own father.

Gerard’s got it coming.

*

It hungers. It eats and eats and eats at the power of the wellspring. It is not enough.

It hunts deer. Bear. Rabbit. Anything it can get its claws into (and that is everything). It’s bloodthirst will never be sated by such paltry morsels.

It will eat the Spark, and its protector. Slake its hunger with possible infinity and the blood of an Alpha of the kind it remembers hunting before the world was tamed.

*

“I’m not sure this is a good idea.”

“This has to be done now, Stiles.”

“I know. I know. I just,” Stiles sighs and looks over at his soulmate. His Peter who has already stripped off his shirt and is skinning out of his boots and jeans. “There are hunters gunning for us. And I’m pretty sure that whatever the hell that dog thing was wants to eat us. And then there’s Clay.”

“Clay is the least of our worries right now, beloved.”

“Not if he finds out what really happened to Gemma, he’s not.”
Peter leans across the center console to pull Stiles into a thick, demanding kiss. When he pulls away, Stiles’ pupils are blown with want. He leans back in to nip at his lips before pulling away to lick the taste of the younger man off his own. “We’ll be fine.”

“You can’t know that,” Stiles retorts, and nearly strangles himself with the seatbelt when he tries to get out of the Jeep without unbuckling himself first. His struggle is real, and takes just long enough for Peter to slip out of the vehicle and take a few steps toward the warehouse that Unser had identified as the place he found Gemma after the attack.

Stiles rounds the Jeep to stand next to his naked counterpart, eyes glimmering octarine to help himself see better in the dark. There’s a whisper of movement. A series of sounds that tell of a spine being popped along its length. Stiles reaches out to run his hand through black and silver fur as Peter settles into his Alpha form with a shake of his great head.

“I’ll get the door.”

Stiles crosses to the warehouse door and a spark of magic has the lock giving out. The metal opens with a protest of hinges, and Stiles holds it open for the wolf to pass through. He follows Peter into the room. A twiddle of his fingers and a thought causes pale orange globules of light to flicker into the existence. There are four of them, and they spread across the room to chase the shadows from the corners.

It’s not really a warehouse so much as it is a utility room attached to a warehouse. A chain link fence divides a series of electrical boxes from the rest of the room. Aside from a few empty metal drums and a few tools propped up in a corner, there’s really nothing here.

Peter circles the room, scenting. He’s already got the scents of the men who attacked Gemma. Stiles had managed to get ahold of the clothes she’d been wearing that night. Gemma hadn’t wanted them, and the hospital was just going to dispose of them. Tara had managed to snag them before they went into the trash when Stiles had asked.

Whatever Peter can smell (the men, Gemma, the damage done) causes his hackles to go up and he begins growling. There is nothing nice about that sound. It is the sound of pure menace; and Stiles finds it comforting.

After a few minutes, Peter catches the scent he was looking for. Something he can track. He follows the scent. Stiles walks at his side. There are no obstacles with the Spark there. No locked doors, no walls, no fences.

The two hunters walk into the night on the trail of their prey.

Above them, the moon hangs low and full in the sky, a touch of red to her.

*  

Jax feels like he’s going to vibrate out of his skin. He hates feeling helpless. He was raised to be a man of action. To be decisive and take action. Not sit and wait for someone else to do his job. It rankles, eating away at his control.

He paces.

At the front door, Donna looks up at Juice with concern as he finishes buckling Abel into her backseat. “Is he going to be okay?”

Juice winces as a snarl erupts from the open door to the house. “He will be. He just doesn’t like
having to sit on his hands.”

Donna sighs, “Does he know?”

Juice winces. He’d been told what had happened so that he could try to do his best to control Jax while Stiles and Peter went hunting. The truth of it is worse than Jax is imagining. He shakes his head, “He knows she was attacked, just not… how. I think in his heart he knows the truth. It’s why he’s so mad.”

Donna nods. “I’ll keep Abel as long as you need me to. Opie’ll be back tomorrow if you need help with that.” She waves her hand toward the house. Opie has a cool head, and he’s old hat at talking Jax down.

Juice gets a wry look on his face, “I think I can handle it.”

Donna gives him a tight hug. “Don’t break too many things while you’re fucking.”

Juice groans, his face burning red. She laughs at him and then gets in her car to go pick up Kenny and Ellie at school. Juice waves her off and then turns back to the house. He finds Jax pacing a heated circle around the living room. He’s struggling to hold onto his wolf, which is only making him angrier.

Juice lets go of his tight control, lets the shadows and magic flicker around and through him. “Jax,” he says.

Jax turns, spots him, and is across the room in just a couple of strides. He pins Juice to the wall with a growl and enough strength that Juice knows he won’t be able to escape unless he slips into the Tween. He figures it’s a good thing he doesn’t want to escape as Jax scents at the juncture of his neck, laving at the sensitive place behind Juice’s ear with his tongue.

Jax growls possessively when Juice clutches at the back of his shirt. It bunches up in one of his fists and the other hand scatters a trail of stardust across his lower back. He bites at the column of golden skin bared to him, careful not to break the skin. Juice whimpers and sags against the wall. The wolf inside him practically purrs with satisfaction.

He pulls back just enough to take Juice in. To watch him lose control of his shift. To watch those spiraling horns flicker into being as his eyes go black and star studded from corner to corner. Freckles of silver spatter across Juice’s nose and cheeks. Jax wants to lick them. He wants to know what infinity and stars taste like.

So he does.

Juice tilts his head back as Jax makes his way down the column of his neck, mouthing at the juncture before his hand intertwines with Juice’s and he pulls it up to mouth at the inside of the Tweener’s wrist. Directly over where a mating bite would go.

Juice’s teeth itch, and he wants with a pang so sharp it’s like knives going through him.

If they do this now, with Jax immersed so fully in his instincts, there’s no going back. If Jax bites Juice, Juice is going to bite him back. And you can’t take something like that back. It’s forever. And Juice is half-Fae, he’s going to live for a very long time. And if Jax bites him, and Juice bites him back, Jax will share that lifespan.

Juice pulls away. Nudges at Jax until the wolf lifts his head just enough for electric blue to meet fathomless black.
“Jax.” Juice needs Jax to hear him. To understand. “Jax, if we do this we can’t take it back. You’re stuck with me forever.”

Jax stares at him for a long moment. Seconds that tick by like an eternity to Juice. A slow smirk crosses Jax’s face. A self-satisfied thing that coils around the pair of them like a snake. His eyes go hooded and dark. The expression makes Juice swallow, desire welling up inside him.

“Good,” Jax says, raising their entwined hands and kissing Juice’s wrist again.

Juice feels his fangs drop. His hands turn to talons. The golden caramel of his skin going steely gray as he raises Jax’s wrist to his own mouth to press a possessive kiss of his own to the skin there. Jax’s wolf emerges with a pleased growl as he goes into full Beta shift. Juice cloaks them in shadows, hiding them from unwanted eyes.

They both lean forward, teeth sharp and wanting.

They Bite at the same time.

*D*

Derek pulls the car over to the side of the road and gets out. He tilts his head, listening.

Yes. There it is. The howl of a Wolf. A Wolf who is Hunting.

He recognizes the voice.

Peter.
Chapter Summary

He empties the clip into the monster running at him. Fumbles for a second magazine, but doesn’t have the time to do much more than release the old one before it’s on him. He screams as he hits the ground. Teeth tear into him.

A pair of old converse appear in his line of sight.

They’re the last thing he sees before the world goes dark and he knows no more.

Chapter Notes

Fun Fact: Brother Dege is a phenomenal soundtrack to use when wanting to create sinister/fantastical imagery. Just sayin’. I just set Farmer's Almanac and Tales of the American Longhair to play and went to town. It came out a lot faster than expected. I am trying to be better about my past/present tenses. I forget a lot of the time and have an annoying habit of flipping between the two. Forgive me.

Also, Weston doesn’t get his in this chapter. I’ve decided he gets his own chapter.

Note: I will be going out of town next week. I will be driving all day next Saturday (it's a 16 hour drive), so I will be posting next week's chapter on Friday. The following week I will not be posting a chapter, as I will not have steady access or quiet time to write consistently.

Dedication: This chapter is for Lidil, who has a musical soul. The music definitely guided me this time around, and I thought of you while writing it. <3

Disclaimer: Octarine as the color of magic belongs to Terry Pratchett and the Discworld. I own nothing SOA or TW.

Twenty-Four:

The car doesn’t start on the first attempt.

A terrific thud echoes through his brain and the truck rocks sideways. The passenger door dents inward, crushed under the weight of the nightmare coming for him.

He screams like a twelve-year-old little boy. Flickers of greenish-purple-orange spark into being. They remind him of fireflies floating along the roadside.

A snarl shudders through him, making his blood curdle as the thing steps into the circle of light.
created by the one lamp post in the parking lot of the Hairy Dog. The eyes glow red like hot coals. The fur is blacker than pitch and shimmers a little with the creatures movements.

There is no way that is a wolf. Wolves don’t get that big.

Oh god, it’s growling at him. Those teeth are fucking huge.

He’s not ashamed to admit that the sight makes him pee himself a little bit in terror.

The driver’s side door comes open with a wrenching squeal of twisting metal. It comes off the frame of the truck and lands onto the pavement with an almighty crash.

He screams again.

The man that steps into the circle of light next to the monster is dressed in jeans and a red hooded sweatshirt. The clothes are the only thing that’s normal about him. He’s pale, and his cheekbones are blade-edged. He’s got dark hair and something dark spattered across his skin (oh god, is that blood?). His eyes are bright with something, like miniature suns.

The twist of the man’s lips could be called a smile, if it didn’t look like he was baring fangs to match the monster’s.

“Get out of the truck,” the man tells him in a commanding tone.

Fear freezes him for what feels like an eternity until movement in the corner of his eye makes him turn. The creature perched on the passenger seat mantles its wings at him and hisses. He screams and lunges backward in an effort to get away. He falls out of the truck onto the unforgiving asphalt of the parking lot.

“Good boy,” the man says, reminding him that he is there as he watches the small purple thing climb out of the truck onto the hood and sit primly, wings outstretched and jewel-bright. “Now get up.”

Shakily he gets to his feet. Eyes darting around he wonders if he could make it to the door of the bar before the wolf caught up to him.

“I wouldn’t,” the man (He can’t be human, he just can’t. Humans don’t walk with nightmares like that outside of the movies.) advises. The wolf takes a single step forward, growl ratcheting up a notch.

Eric Sinclair wishes suddenly that he hadn’t been hand-picked to come to Charming. He’d been so proud at the time, but now… He got up. He was shaking so much he was sure that the monsters could hear his knees knocking together. He turned, terror filled, to face the man and his monsters.

“Good. Come here.”

Eric didn’t want to come here. He wanted to go away. He hesitates.

The man raises one hand and snaps his fingers, sparks flying off them as his voice deepens with command, “I said: come here.”

Something hooks into Eric’s torso and yanks him forward, the toes of his boots scraping along the ground until he is dumped unceremoniously in a heap in front of the man. Hysterically he wonders if this is how fish feel when caught on a hook and then hauled out of the water on a line they can’t see. He whimpered.
The wolf exits the light as it begins to circle the two of them.

Tears began to trickle down his face. “Please,” he begs.

“Is that what she said?” the man asks him, voice hard. “Did she beg you to stop with every thrust? Did you hold her down and ignore the terror in her voice? Did you pretend she liked it?”

Eric looks up. The man is crouched in front of him, shedding sparks into the air around them. The man reaches out and trails a finger down the side of his face. He screams in pain. It feels like a hot knife is sliding around under his skin.

“Please,” he sobs, unable to look at the demon that had come for him. His sins began to pile up around him in the back of his mind. “Please.”

“You should not have come here,” the demon tells him, rising to its feet and taking a step back. “You should not have attacked Gemma Teller-Morrow.”

The growling stops and Eric only has a few moments to wonder why before something hits him and he collapses under the weight. Knives rip into him, and he begins to scream as his vision goes black.

The last thing he knows is the sensation of something wet trickling down his face.

*

Jax pants up at the ceiling, dazed and satiated. The carpet under his bare ass is coarse, but softer than the tile under his shoulders. And the lump where the carpet ends in the doorway is doing a weird thing to the small of his back, but he can’t bring himself to care. He raises his left hand and turns his wrist toward the light over the stove. The healed-over scars wink at him with silver.

The wolf in the back of his brain is curled up with satisfaction like he’d gotten the catnip, the cream and all of the goldfish in the bowl. He’s mixing his metaphors, but that is how it feels.

In his chest, in the place behind his heart where his links to the pack are, something hums. He traces the silvery-blue of the one that connects him to Abel. Slips along it to feel each breath the baby takes as he sleeps peacefully in his room. The red of the bonds that connect him to Pack, to family stronger than blood.

The golden rope, thick and strong, that links him to Juice. He tugs at it experimentally, testing it. Something satisfied and amused thrumming back from the other end.

Juice lazily smacks at him from where he lays across the carpet, head propped up on his thigh. “Stop it,” he slurs, tipping his head to look up at him. Deep brown meet crystal blue and Jax feels a spark of desire crawl up his spine.

“You bit me,” he says.

Juice snorts and rolls himself into a sitting position and flashes his own scarred wrist at Jax, “You bit me first.”

The possessive thing that lives in Jax’s chest unfurls a little, “Yes.”

Juice flicks teasingly at their bond, the playfulness reaching Jax and making him sit up with a flex of muscles to wrap himself around Juice’s broad shoulders and back. Juice sighs when Jax sets his chin on one golden, silver flecked shoulder.
“I’m gonna buy you a ring, I think,” Jax says, then scents into the place just behind and below Juice’s ear to breathe him in. “So everybody knows you’re taken.”

Juice huffs, twisting in Jax’s hold so they’re facing each other, “That goes both ways. If I’m wearing a mortal symbol of possession, so are you.”

Jax hums in agreement and begins to suck at the mark he left on Juice’s neck earlier. It’s fading rapidly. Not as rapidly as the ones on Jax had, but still rapidly. Juice makes a noise that Jax has only just discovered that he loves.

“This isn’t gonna help in keeping this from the guys,” Juice says. He’s turning so that he can straddle Jax and pull him closer.

“I’m not hidin’ anythin’ Darlin’.”

Juice growls. It’s a human sound, nothing at all like what a werewolf can produce. He then pulls Jax’s head back by his hair so that he can look the blond in the eyes. Jax peers up at him with eyes that gleam electric. “Call me that again, sweetheart,” Juice says menacingly.

Jax smirks, tightens his grip in Juice so he can’t squirm away and says: “Darlin’,” again before blowing a raspberry into Juice’s collarbone. Juice shrieks and yanks on his hair, making him laugh.

“Oh, you suck,” Juice’s voice is a little breathless.

Something thick and satisfied filters down the bonds from Peter and Stiles and Jax’s eyes spark bright in response. Revenge for his mother is being taken. His Alphas are taking care of the problem. Juice settles his weight against Jax entirely at the feeling and the pair of them sit there in the dark. They’re both gritty with drying sweat and the carpet is digging into Jax’s ass in uncomfortable ways now that he’s supporting all of Juice’s weight.

He can’t bring himself to care.

* 

Derek pulls over when he sees the octarine fireflies dancing in the air. He gets out of the car and crosses the street quickly, breathing in deeply to catch whatever scents might be on the air. Under the thick coppery scent of blood (a lot of blood) are several prominent scents. Magic, something wild and nature-based, Stiles Stilinski and his uncle.

It doesn’t take too long to find the mangled remains of the truck. He circles around it and stops. Spread across ten-foot radius in front of the truck under the lot’s sole light are… parts… of a person. Viscera, blood and other bits are scattered across the pavement like grisly bits of litter.

Whoever this guy was, he’d obviously don’t something to piss off his uncle.

Derek has never seen anything quite like this. He’s seen plenty of dead bodies. Especially ones that his uncle had caused the deaths of that he knows Peter’s signature. Peter doesn’t rip his victims apart, he prefers painful yet distinctive wounds and a body placed somewhere where it would get the best reaction, not this.

Derek circles the space once, then heads back to his car. Whatever is going on, it’s obvious that Peter and Stiles are on the warpath. He could only hope that they got whoever had raised their ire quickly, before any collateral damage is caused.

If that Dryad had been telling him the truth, the pair is absolutely lethal when calm now that they’re
bonded and Stiles can control his Spark. If this is any indication of them angry, Derek doesn’t want to know what else they may have planned.

*

He empties the clip into the monster running at him. Fumbles for a second magazine, but doesn’t have the time to do much more than release the old one before it’s on him. He screams as he hits the ground. Teeth tear into him.

A pair of old converse appear in his line of sight.

They’re the last thing he sees before the world goes dark and he knows no more.

*

“You wanted to see me, sir?”

John sighs as he hangs up the phone. He feels exhausted. “Close the door.”

David does, then comes over to sit in one of the chairs across the desk from his boss. He wants to ask, but he can tell that John needs a moment, so he waits.

John leans back, scrubbing a hand down his face. “Gemma Teller-Morrow was raped a few nights ago.”

David straightens, “I thought that was a car accident?”

“The car crash was a cover-up. Don’t ask me why, I don’t want to know.”

David’s pretty sure it has to do with the Sons. It always has to do with the Sons. If they don’t know, they don’t have to get into it with Clay. “Okay.”

“The boys have taken exception to it,” John explains. “Jax is part of the Pack, and Gemma is his mother, which makes her family to Pack.”

“And Pack looks after their own,” David replies. He may not have been raised into this, with his father’s aversion to all things werewolf, but he knows enough.

John nods. The two of them sit there for a few minutes, each lost in his own thoughts.

“We’re going to get a few phone calls in the next few hours,” John eventually says. “They need to be packed away as animal attacks as neatly and quickly as we can. With Stahl here, and the disappearance of Kohn, this has to be wrapped up quickly.”

David nods in agreement. The last thing they need is Stahl deciding the local PD is incompetent and horning in on local matters. This can’t link back to the Sons or the Pack in any way. “I know a guy. He’s a big game hunter. I can probably get a mountain lion.”

“Do it,” John says with a nod. “The faster we ‘catch’ the thing, the less of a panic it will cause civilians.”

“What are we telling the guys?” David asks with a gesture toward the bullpen. It may be the middle of the night, but there are a few officers on duty. “They’re smart people.”

“We don’t need to tell them anything unless they ask. Like you said, they’re smart people. Most of them are going to decide that so long as we’re on top of it and it’s taken care of, that they don’t want
David remembers that John has done this before. That whatever had happened in Beacon Hills had hit the Sheriff’s Department hard. Every single member of the force there had to have known something, even if it had gone largely unspoken.

“What about,” David waves a hand in a vague gesture toward the town map that is hanging on John’s wall. John heaves a sigh, “For the most part, Beacon Hills chose to be willfully ignorant. I’m not sure that’s going to fly here. Not with the history the town has with what the Sons actually do.”

“What about what?”

John shakes his head, “Until it happens, it’s not our problem. And when it does, it’s Peter’s. We just have to reassure people that the town is protected and that it doesn’t matter what is responsible for a crime we’re going to do our job regardless.”

“That should be easy enough.”

“Let’s get the Hunters out of town first.” John knows it’s a feather in the cap of his reputation as a new Chief that they caught the sniper, but if it happens again there’s no telling how the locals will feel. A Police Department is only effective so far as the people they’re meant to serve will trust them. They have to maintain that trust. If they don’t, people will start turning to people like Clay Morrow to deal with their problems.

The last thing that Charming or John need is Clay Morrow deciding that he’s the only authority in their little burg.

“I’ll nightshade Stahl. She’s been flirting with me pretty hard.”

“Please tell me you haven’t been sleeping with that bucket of crazy?”

David shakes his head, “No. I like my balls attached, thanks.”

John snorts. “Right. Let’s get to work.”

Specks of ocatrine softly touch the ground. Sleepily, the earth beneath Charming consumes each speck. Sips at each one with delighted hunger. Filaments of wakefulness reach out across the city from the Sons of Anarchy Clubhouse. Connections spread, touching on the Wellspring and flowing into the current. The Ley Lines flicker, strengthen as the land begins to know that which treads upon it.

All across town, flowering bushes and plants birth new flower Faeries into being.

In Charming’s Botanical Gardens, several trees come into wakeful awareness. Blinking open sleepy eyes. One of them decides it doesn’t like where it’s planted, as it’s being crowded by several bushes and a rather determined shrub. It uproots itself and moves several inches to its right to get some extra space, then digs its roots back in.

At Caliana’s, all the mineral crystals on the shelves glow dimly as they filter power through them with a hum. Blake comes awake, shedding nebulous star stuff across the counter as Caliana hums and begins to pet him.

“We really do live in interesting times, don’t we Blake?”
Blake mews in agreement.
Dying

Chapter Summary

“Who hired you?” Derek demands, ignoring the screaming from below.

“G – G – G – Argent!” Orson yelps, feet scrabbling for purchase as the collar of his shirt threatens to choke him.

Derek rumbles an even more terrifying sound at the name, making Orson whimper. “Where is he?”

“He’s staying at the Holdiay Inn on the other side of town!” Orson yelps, scrabbling at the hands squeezing at his neck. “Please don’t kill me!”

Derek shakes the hunter, then drops him on the ground. Orson scrambles away toward the ladder. “If I were you I’d get out of town ASAP. And don’t ever come back here.”

Chapter Notes

As promised, a chapter a day early as I head out of town tomorrow. Writing a racist asshole's POV is hard because I wanted to slap myself every time I got into that mindset; because the world has enough problems without getting stupid over the color of people's skin. I won't go on a tangent about it, as this is not the platform for it.

Reminder: There will be no chapter next week, as I will be out of town and starting the 16 hour drive home when I usually post.

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Twenty-Five:

“Give up, give back all that was taken
Return, relax
This feeling is not here to stay…”

- Blossom, Noah Gundersen

For more than forty years, the town of Charming, California has had an unspoken agreement with the Sons of Anarchy Motorcycle Club. The Sons base their illegal operations out of the town, going
largely unquestioned. In return the Sons keep drug and sex trafficking out of Charming through the merits of their reputation and what they’re willing to do to those who bring those things into town.

The Sons prefer to have a quiet burg, with low crime statistics and very little reason for local law enforcement to come knocking at their doors. The citizens of Charming appreciate lower crime statistics and the safety that having fewer unsavory characters among them affords.

There have been times, in the past, when the town has begun to wonder if turning blind eyes to Clay Morrow and his ilk is worth it. Usually when the Sons’ dealings bring violence to their little burg.

Clay is fully aware of the fact that his carefully balanced life rests on the goodwill of his neighbors. It’s why he always supports Gemma’s charitable works, and he and his remain prominent in town. Their participation in town events is a visible reminder to folks that he’s still here, still doing his thing. Still keeping them safe.

Over the years plenty of people have come to Clay instead of going to Wayne Unser for justice of a kind. It’s been long known that their Police Chief was in Clay’s pocket. The trouble is, that this new one isn’t. Oh, he should be; what with Peter Hale accepting a patch and his kid so closely associated due to his relationship with the man.

And yet.

John Stilinski has the gall to look down on Clay from his high horse.

The worst bit is that Clay can’t find anything to use against the man.

“Hey baby,” he greets Gemma as he enters the dining room in search of the coffee pot. Her accident had shaken her up badly, and Clay is willing to admit (if only to himself) that he’s worried about her. She hums at him over the edge of her mug, her attention riveted on the television in the living room that can be seen from where she’s sitting.

Clay turns to look at what has her so riveted, and nearly burns his fingers as he accidentally overflows his mug.

On the screen, John Stilinski and several officers stand in the parking lot of the Hairy Dog. A large area has been cordoned off with yellow police tape. There is an old blue ford truck inside the cordon with one of its doors laying on the ground a few feet away. A lot of plastic tarpaulin is being used to cover what must be body parts if the amount of blood Clay can see is any indication.

The news crawler at the bottom of the screen informs him that Animal attack at local bar claims life of local man.

Something cold slides down Clay’s spine. The scene is grisly, and his recent experience tells him that this isn’t an animal attack. This is someone pissing off Peter (or that Mayan idiot he turned).

Next to him, Gemma sips at her coffee, a curl of satisfaction at the corner of her mouth.

* * *

When AJ Weston sees the news that morning, he knows he’s living on borrowed time. He has always known that one day his work for the League would come home to roost. He has always been willing to accept those consequences. That doesn’t mean he’s going to lay down and take it like a bitch, though. No, he’s going to fight with everything he’s got.

That doesn’t mean that he is willing to underestimate his opponent.
He’s had his house in order for years.

He takes his boys out for breakfast. Then he drives them to school where he reminds them that he loves them and that everything he does is for them. He drives for a while before stopping for gas. While he’s filling up his truck he catches sight of one of the wolves watching him from across the street.

The Mexican one.

The stupid wetback has the balls to meet Weston’s gaze with a smirk and a nod, eyes flashing brightly blue. Weston gets back in the car and drives away, fully aware as the werewolf follows him on a shiny green Harley.

He drives out toward the edge of town. There’s an old set of warehouses out by the lumber mill that will do nicely for what is about to happen. He takes his time, going over his strategy as he does so. He makes sure his gun is loaded with wolfsbane bullets. If nothing else, he intends to take his brown-skinned tail with him.

He takes the Bronco around the toward the back and parks it between two warehouses. Plenty of space and a good amount of cover. The biker follows him at a leisurely pace. When he steps out of the vehicle, the biker has dismounted his steel horse and is tucking his sunglasses into the neck of his shirt. Weston pulls the hammer back on his .45, ready to raise it and fire.

“Thank you, Jaime. We’ll take it from here.”

The voice comes from behind Weston, making him turn. Standing a good twenty feet away from him, in clear view, is the scrawny son of the Police Chief. He’s wearing a red sweater that is flecked with something that is much darker, and a smattering of red decorates the right side of his neck. He doesn’t seem to notice.

Behind Weston, the motorcycle roars to life, but he doesn’t dare take his eyes off the boy to look as the rumble of the engine pulls away.

The boy’s eyes are glowing an unnatural color, bright like the sun.

“Tell me, Mr. Weston,” he says conversationally, “who was she?”

Weston steels himself. He’s dealt with some of the scariest motherfucker’s this side of the Atlantic. He can deal with one teenage boy. “Who?” he asks, keeping his voice mild but implacable.

The teenager tilts his head to one side like a curious puppy, “The woman that helped you abduct Gemma Teller-Morrow.”

AJ sneers. He won’t betray Zobelle or the cause. He raises his gun and fires several times.

There’s a flicker in the air around Stilinski. Almost like a desert heat haze. Motes of octarine light flicker into existence in little firework bursts as each of the bullets hit the haze and come to a halt. Weston hesitates. The bullets clatter to the ground with a tinging sound on the pavement. For the first time, AJ feels a coil of real fear clench at his gut.

“That wasn’t very nice,” Stilinski tells him, still in that conversational tone.

A low rumble starts up behind him, and Weston turns to the side so that he can keep Stilinski in view and take in the new threat. A black wolf the size of a four-door sedan is standing where the Mexican’s motorcycle was only a minute ago. Its head is lowered, its ears at attention and its eyes are
glowing a bright ruby.

Hale.

“Now, I’m going to ask you again. You are going to tell me what I want to know, it’s up to you how much pain you feel before you do.”

Hale starts a low growl that is deep enough that Weston can almost feel it rattling his bones. He goes to raise his gun, but an unseen force yanks it from his hand.

“I’ll be taking that, thank you.”

Hale starts to circle closer to Weston. Stilinski stays where he is.

“Who was the woman that helped you abduct Gemma Teller-Morrow?”

AJ knows he’s going to die. He refuses to do so on his knees. He says nothing.

Nearly a minute goes by before Stilinski speaks again, a tone of faux-disappointment in his voice as he says, “Well okay then, the hard way it is.”

Hale snarls, and AJ turns to meet the wolf head on.

* 

Orson Call ducks down behind the lip of the roof he’s stationed on. He feels the bile crawl up the back of his throat and lunges to one side to heave up his meager breakfast and bad coffee. He wipes his mouth on the sleeve of his shirt and rolls away from the puddle of sick.

Down below, the screaming continues.

He had thought he’d gotten lucky this morning when he’d spotted Hale’s Beta tailing a big brown and white Ford Bronco across town. He’d thought he’d gotten even luckier when he’d managed to tail the wolf without him noticing. He’d even been lucky to find a ladder leading onto this roof, because it has great sightlines on nearly the entire lot.

Now, not so much.

He feels real pity for the iron-haired neo-nazi fuck that had managed to gain the ire of the Alpha. The guy must have really hurt that Gemma lady if what the Pair is doing to him is any indication. Orson has heard of lots of types of torture in his line of work. He’s even experienced a few himself from his time in the service. He’d never imagined anything like this, though.

Another scream erupts from below, and Orson hunches his head down between his shoulders and presses his hands to his ears in an attempt to block out the sound as he fights back another wave of nausea.

He’s so focused on trying to block out the screams of a man being slowly eviscerated that he doesn’t notice that he’s not alone until it’s far too late.

The hand that grabs him makes him shriek shrilly in alarm as he’s hauled up and slammed against the wall by Derek Hale, who has his wolf eyes out in full force. A rumbling growl vibrates into Orson, and he knows instantly that if wants to live, he’s going to have to tell this guy whatever he wants to know.

“Who hired you?” Derek demands, ignoring the screaming from below.
“G – G – G – Argent!” Orson yelps, feet scrabbling for purchase as the collar of his shirt threatens to choke him.

Derek rumbles an even more terrifying sound at the name, making Orson whimper. “Where is he?”

“He’s staying at the Holiday Inn on the other side of town!” Orson yelps, scrabbling at the hands squeezing at his neck. “Please don’t kill me!”

Derek shakes the hunter, then drops him on the ground. Orson scrambles away toward the ladder. “If I were you I’d get out of town ASAP. And don’t ever come back here.”

Orson scrambles for the ladder and vanishes over the lip of the roof, leaving behind his gear, including the hunting rifle that Derek can smell the aconite on. He strides across the roof, carefully avoiding the puddle of vomit left behind by the hapless hunter who had managed to get himself in way over his head.

He takes a look over the edge down at the mess below.

“You might as well come down from there, nephew,” his uncle’s voice says conversationally. Peter is wearing his human skin again, naked as the day he was born and crouched lowly over the half-skinned and partially disemboweled form of AJ Weston.

Derek hops over the edge of the roof, landing in a crouch on the ground before heading in the direction of Stiles and Peter. He wades through an ankle deep mist of hazy octarine magic and sparks of pure power.

“Hey Sourwolf,” Stiles tells him and Derek nods in acknowledgement.

“Did they deserve it?” he asks. He needs to know if he’s walking into more murder, death and insanity. He can’t do that again.

“They abducted and raped the mother of my Second,” Peter says casually, licking blood off the corner of his mouth while the torture victim lays panting and fully aware of the pain on the pavement below him. Peter is bloody from feet to knees, fingertips to elbows and a goodly portion of his neck and lower face.

Derek pauses, looking over to Stiles for confirmation. When he nods, Derek breathes in heavily with a singular nod. He came here looking for this. He makes his choice when he crouches down on the other side of Weston and catches the man’s gaze with a grim look. “You’d best tell them what they want to know before Stiles gets involved in making you talk.”

Stiles, for his part, smiles a smile that puts the Nogitsune strongly into the forefront of Derek’s brain.

A few moments of silence pass. The only sound the labored breathing of the man slowly bleeding out in the back of a warehouse lot on the edge of Charming, California.

And then he speaks: ‘P – Polly Zobelle.’

Peter leans forward and cradles Weston’s head between his hands and smiles at the man congenially. “Thank you,” he tells him, and then abruptly snaps the man’s neck.

The three of them stand there silently for a minute before the silence is broken. Peter accepts the sweatshirt when Stiles offers it in order to scrub off some of the blood. “I’m going to call Happy to help with this,” he says with a gesture at Weston. “I don’t think this is one John can explain away as an animal attack.”
Stiles makes an agreeing noise, “I’m going to the cigar shop.” He turns to Derek and raises his eyebrows at him. “Want to come?”

Derek gives a gallic shrug, then says, “Only if I get to drive.”

“Deal,” Stiles says cheerfully. “We walked.”

Derek heaves a long suffering sigh and exchanges a speaking glance with his uncle. He watches with no small amount of disgust as Stiles proceeds to make out with Peter for a minute as a goodbye, then turns to follow the Spark toward the street where he’d left his SUV. Peter’s voice follows after him, suffusing him with a sense of warmth.

“Welcome home, Nephew.”

Derek can’t help but to smile as a series of Pack Bonds snap into place inside his chest in the black place where his family used to be. Where Erica, Boyd and Isaac used to be. He may be surprised at the number of bonds there are, but it feels nice. Wolves aren’t built to be alone.

He decides he made the right choice in coming here.

*

The town of Charming, California gives a sleepy murmur of satisfaction that only those who are familiar with Eathspeak would be able to hear. Slowly it absorbed the miasma of power scattered across town as if wrapping itself up in a warm blanket. It was awake enough to sense that it was being taken care of by a strong Power. Strong and young and it belongs to Charming now.

From the North, reaching down toward it, an ancient power stretches its roots toward the Power.

Charming assesses this power. Finds it curious that such an old and powerful tree would seek to translocate itself so thoroughly. Slowly, sleepily, Charming grants the Nemeton permission to find a place to take root in its woods. It will take time, perhaps years.

But both are ancient and have learned patience in a way that only good earth and trees can know.
Earthspeaker

Chapter Summary

Ethan had begun to nod rapidly in agreement as soon as he heard the words ‘leave town’. “I – “ he bit down on his tongue for a moment, swallowing his denial about the rest of the instructions he was being given. “What do I tell my superiors in the League?”

Stiles’ eyes flare into the bright burn of miniature suns, and when he smiles it is with raw power pouring out through the gaps between his teeth. “You are going to tell them that the Hale Pack does not take kindly to intruders in its territory. You tell them that this is their only warning. If they choose not to heed you, I suggest you run.”

Chapter Notes

This chapter sort of wrote itself. I chose to end the Zobelle arc the way I have because I believe that Stiles has enough foresight to know that just outright killing a powerful member of the League would spell more trouble than he's worth for the Pack.

Also, Opie wanted in on all the action. The idea of our favorite giant being this verse's version of an Earthbender made me happy, and so it is. :)

I haven't forgotten about Gerard, Stahl or Clay. Or the monster dog-thing. One thing at a time. We've still got a ways to go.

On another note, my vacation was good for me. I came home feeling emotionally better than I have been the last few months. My sister tends to have that effect on me. Also, I got to help weigh and measure a large amount of fluffy rabbits, including more than a dozen baby Mini Rexes and a handful of baby New Zealands. It made me miss my own Mini Rex Ajax the Conquerer, who turned one on the 30th. You really can't be unhappy when covered in baby bunnies.

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Twenty-Six:

Ethan Zobelle once believed in the cause of the League. Had once been one of its staunchest supporters. It had led him to where he is now. A powerful man, with connections to the higher echelons of the League. He has men that look to him for leadership, and he is trusted to further the cause of the League without exposing its illegal doings to the authorities.

But he had grown tired. Tired of the lies and the games. Tired of watching good people get caught up in the crossfire of the war the League was waging against most of the world’s population. And
then Polly. His sweet girl, who he would do anything for. So ignorant in her inbred racism and bigotry.

If he wasn’t careful, then his Polly would end up caught in the crossfire just as his wife had been when Polly was small. He had lied to her about her death. Claimed it was a car accident that had taken the life of Mary Zobelle and not a stray bullet from a shootout between League lackeys and a local gang.

His sins flocked to him like birds. Great black ravens that circled overhead waiting for the moment he would falter.

Ethan had made a choice. A dangerous one. The kind that guaranteed him a shallow grave and a missing persons report. It was a choice that could not be rescinded. It could not be changed.

He had turned States Evidence. Become a confidential informant for the FBI on the inner workings of the League. His agreement was for Polly’s safety, and some leniency for himself (though not much). One day soon his part in all of this would come to an end, and he would do his time while his daughter lived a free life.

Polly had not understood at first. Why would her father, a man so loyal to the cause, turn on the League? Why would he risk their lives like that? Eventually she had started to look beyond the nonsense she had been raised around. Beyond the ideals of white people versus everyone else. She had started to see the possibilities of what a future free of the machinations of the League could mean for her.

It had been a struggle, but the pair of them had come out of it closer than they had been before.

He doesn’t know why he thinks of it when the son of the Chief of Police steps casually into the cigar shop. He’s eighteen now, and legally allowed to buy cigarettes or cigars, but he doesn’t strike Ethan as the type. He’s flanked by a sturdy, broodingly handsome man with a scruff of well-maintained beard and glowing eyebrows.

Ethan knows what the boy runs with wolves. He had understood what he was condemning the boy to when he’d made the deal with Gerard Argent. It had never occurred to him until now (as the boy approaches him with a deceivingly congenial expression on his face and blazing eyes) that Stiles Stilinski might be dangerous in his own right.

“This is a surprise,” Ethan speaks, keeping his trepidation from his voice as Stiles halts just in front of the sales counter. “How can I help you today, Mr. Stilinski.”

Stiles smiles at him. A flash of white teeth that put in mind a predator bearing its teeth before it strikes. “I’m looking for your daughter, Mr. Zobelle.”

Ethan straightens, “Excuse me?”

The stranger by the door turns the deadbolt on the door and flips the sign in the window to closed before beginning the process of lowering the blinds.

A chill crawls up Ethan’s spine. Fear causes his heartrate to skyrocket.

Stiles, seemingly unaware of the sudden tension in the room, rocks back and forth on his heel for a few seconds. His hands are tucked nonchalantly into the pockets of his jeans. His smile widens a fraction, changing it from unsettling into something sinister and frightening. “I asked you where your daughter is, Mr. Zobelle.”
“Why do you want to know?” Ethan demands defensively.

“Why, because she helped AJ Weston abduct Gemma Teller-Morrow so that he could rape her and have her deliver your message to Clay Morrow, of course.”

Shit. The shop suddenly felt very small. Ethan threw a look around the space. The brooding man’s eyes had begun to glow a supernatural blue with threat.

“Please,” Ethan pleads. He has no scruples about begging for his daughter’s life. “She’s young and still learning about her actions having consequences. If you need to take revenge, take it on me and not her. I gave the order for Weston to deliver the message.”

“Did you order him to rape her, too?”

Ethan shook his head frantically, “No. I left how the message was delivered up to Weston.”

“And your daughter?”

“Polly wouldn’t have helped if she had known what he planned to do. Please!”

Something flickered to life deep in Stiles’ eyes. Like a candle flame flaring to life. It made something inside Ethan scream in terror.

“Tell me, Mr. Zobelle,” Stiles began, voice conversational. “do you care about your daughter?”

“She means everything to me. I’ll do anything for her.”

“Anything?”

“Anything.”

That smile changed into one satisfaction. Stiles leaned forward, placing both palms flat on the counter between the two men. Ethan fought the urge to lean away as octarine flared through the veins on Stiles’ arms, spidering down to his fingertips and across the countertop.

“Good.” Stiles says to him. “That’s very good. Here’s what’s going to happen. You are going to get your daughter and you are going to leave town. Right now. Not later tonight, not tomorrow, right now. You are going to withdraw the League’s activity from Charming, and you are going to make sure that they never try to interfere with the Sons, or with the Hale Pack, every again.”

Ethan had begun to nod rapidly in agreement as soon as he heard the words ‘leave town’. “I – “ he bit down on his tongue for a moment, swallowing his denial about the rest of the instructions he was being given. “What do I tell my superiors in the League?”

Stiles’ eyes flare into the bright burn of miniature suns, and when he smiles it is with raw power pouring out through the gaps between his teeth. “You are going to tell them that the Hale Pack does not take kindly to intruders in its territory. You tell them that this is their only warning. If they choose not to heed you, I suggest you run.”

Ethan nodded again, “I understand.”

“You have one hour to get out of my city, Mr. Zobelle, before my Alpha comes for both you and your daughter.”

Ethan watched with bated breath as Stiles leaned back. With a blink the magical glow emanating from him vanished, and he turned toward the exit. The werewolf unlocked the door and held it open
for Stiles before following him out. As soon as the door clicked closed with a ringing of the bell, Ethan turns and bolts for the safe in his office. He pulls out his phone to call Polly as he inputs the combination and starts shoving the contents into his briefcase.

He has an hour, but he intends to be gone long before his time is up.

*

Opie once had a dream where he’d been lost in the forest. He was ten at the time. He’d dreamed that the trees were endless and he would never find his way out. He would never see his dad or mom again. He would never see Jax again. He would never become a Son.

In the dream, it had remained a dreary twilight the entire time. He remembers being able to smell the damp of the ground and decaying leaves. He remembers being able to hear the wind moving through the trees and feel it on his skin. His feet had been bare and speckled with mud.

He remembers feeling hollow. It was the first time he could every ascribe the feeling of being truly alone to himself. He’d been terrified when he’d woken. His dad was gone on a run, and Mary was one step away from packing her bags and leaving. She’d done it not even a month later. By then, Opie had mostly forgotten the dream.

It came back to him when he’d been inside. It became a recurring thing that he had more nights than not, curled up on his tiny prison bed with his cellmate snoring away below him. He’d spent many nights staring at the pained cinderblock wall of the cell, tracing the bumps in the brick with a sightless, hollow gaze.

Prison had not been good for him.

And then he’d gotten out, and Donna was so mad, and he’d missed so much. Kenny was a baby trying to figure out walking, and Ellie was just starting preschool. He’d missed five years. His son is eight now, and his daughter is ten and they barely know him at all. And Donna was pissed, all the time.

He kept having the dream for a long time after he got out.

Somehow, after all the shit, they had found their way back to each other with the help of the Pack. With Jax at his side and a whole new makeshift family at their side. Things are good now. He loves Donna more than before, and he knows she loves him. And his kids are happy to see him. Ellie likes it when he reads with her before bed, and Kenny has spent a lot of time ‘helping’ him restore the old classic bike he’d gotten his hands on.

He’s been in Vegas nearly a week, feeling out the President of the charter there on whether or not he would back Jax’s play for the throne. They’d chosen Vegas as the starting point because it’s no secret that Luther’s dislike of Clay is borderline murderous. Luther had been an easy sell in the end, and it had been an interesting week of ironing out some details about Jax wanting the club to go legit and how Luther could begin that process in Sin City.

But it had been good.

He doesn’t know what makes him think of the dream on the ride home, but he does on the last leg of the journey. He hits the Welcome to Charming sign and something shifts as he crosses into town. He becomes aware of Charming in a way that he never has before. He knows this place, this town, its people.

And he knows that it knows him somehow.
He shoves the knowledge to the back of his brain for the time being. He can’t do anything about it until he sees Stiles and can ask what happened while he was gone. As he does, the dream that’s been haunting him since he was a kid comes to the forefront of his mind.

For a long time, it’s almost like he’s in two places at once. He’s riding his bike down the streets of Charming, buildings on either side, and he’s wandering through dense forest at the same time. It’s surreal.

As he pulls into his driveway and parks, he becomes aware of something else. Something deep and old and laconic. It brushes up against his awareness like a sleepy cat seeking attention from a human it likes. He doesn’t understand; but somehow he *does* understand.

It’s Charming. The awareness, the sleepy cat. It’s the town itself welcoming one of her favored Sons back. She’s *aware*. And Opie knows that the forest he’s been walking through for years and years is a version of Charming that *was* long before she ever became a town. She’s been dreaming all this time, and he’s been walking with her the whole time.

Opie walks out onto the front lawn of his house and kneels down to place one hand on the ground, digging his fingers into the grass. He *knows* Charming, and he welcomes her the same way she welcomes him. He isn’t scared. He’s been dreaming her dreams long enough that he *can’t* be. He’s also seen enough supernatural stuff being part of Peter’s Pack to not really be surprised that there’s something supernatural about Opie himself.

After a few minutes of communion with Charming, Opie rises and heads into the house to see his family. The flower faeries that had emerged from Donna’s rose bushes scatter back into the safety of the flowers when he turns toward them.

Bemusement fills him, especially when he feels the little ornamental shrub by the front door protest being invaded and eject the faery back out into the open with a sleepy sort of grumble.

He gets the feeling that *a lot* has happened since he left.

The next few days are going to be very interesting.

* 

Gemma looks up when the door to the breakroom opens and emits Peter into the garage’s office. His hair is wet, and he’s obviously just freshly showered. He settles himself into one of the chairs meant for customers to wait in. Gemma watches him carefully as he relaxes and offers her a warm smile.

“’It’s over?’ she asks him eventually. She has to know. She needs to know.

“’It is,’ Peter tells her. ‘Happy is dealing with the body of the ringleader.’”

She doesn’t want to know why the club’s assassin is taking care of cleaning up a murder. She really doesn’t. “’Jax wasn’t involved?’”

“Peter shakes his head, “’No. Juice distracted him.’”

The way he says it causes Gemma to pause. She locks eyes with him calculatingly, searchingly. “’Why Juice?’”

Peter smirks, “’Gemma, you are not a stupid woman. Why do you think?’”

Gemma thinks. Peter waits for the penny to drop. It doesn’t take long for her to analyze the way her
son and the club’s resident goof have been acting around each other since Abel was born. She’d seen the signs, but had willfully ignored them, hoping she was wrong. But Gemma knows her son. She’s always known that Jax has a thing beautiful people no matter their gender.

He’s just never acted on it until now. He knows it isn’t safe.

“They’re mated now,” Peter says, his smile softening with something akin to sympathy. Gemma tries to return it, but doesn’t quite manage it. “Juice being what he is makes their connection soul deep.”

“Aren’t telling me that my son got the supernatural equivalent of married while you were hunting?” Gemma demands.

“Naturally,” Peter tells her, unmoved by the venom and command in her voice. His expression goes serious, “They’re not going to be able to hide it, Gemma. Jax is going to need you, now more than ever before.”

“Clay isn’t going to like this,” Gemma says, more to herself than to the Alpha seated across from her. She’s been able to see which way the wind is blowing for months now. She’s known, deep down, that Clay’s days have been numbered from the moment Peter Hale put on a kutte. She had hoped, blindly (stupidly) for things to remain the same.

“No,” Peter says. “He’s not.”

Gemma looks away from him, looking out onto the lot. She catches sight of Tig and Chibs teasing the prospect. “How many of you are going to back Jax’s play?”

“Only Bobby and Piney are unkowns. Everyone else is for the change of power. Clay isn’t willing to change, and most of the Brothers are tired of living on the edge of a knife.”

The pair is silent for a few minutes while Gemma takes in the knowledge. Peter allows her the time to sort out her own thoughts. She loves Clay, she does; but she loves her son more. She has a lot of sins to account for. Sins that Jax can never know. It would kill her and break him. If protecting her son from her past means throwing Clay to the literal wolves, she’s just going to have to be ready to do it.

“Bobby will be reluctant at first. Clay’s been a good friend to him, but in the end he’ll lean whichever way will mean more stability for his situation. He’s got Precious and the kids to think of. Piney will vote whichever way will piss Clay off the most.”

Peter nods in acknowledgement of the information. He takes the olive branch for what it is. “Opie will be his Vice President, I haven’t got the background for it and I don’t want the job. I’m Alpha, that comes with its own responsibilities.”

Gemma nods, that is as it should be. It’s always been Jax and Opie. It was always meant to be that way. “Tig can’t be Jax’s Sergeant. He’s been tied in with Clay’s bullshit for too many years.”

“No. He can’t.” Peter looks out the window to follow her gaze to the few Sons she can see out the window. “That will fall to either Happy or Jaime.” Gemma turns to look at him in surprise. He smiles grimly. “Best get used to that notion as well. The first thing Jax will do is patch Jaime in. They get along too well, and they run together as Pack.”

“He’s a Mayan!”

“He was a Mayan. Now he’s family.”
Right. Of course. He’d been sweet to her after she was – well, just after. She doesn’t understand this whole Pack business; isn’t sure she wants to, but she knows it means he’s loyal to his new family, not his old club.

“What about you?” she asks, curious.

Peter smiles at her in a way that reminds her that the man before her is a predator first and a man second, “I will remain as I am. An advisor and a Brother.”

Gemma nods. A knot inside her unclenches. She’s safe. The men that attacked her are all dead. Her son has powerful allies. Her grandson is the most beautiful thing she’s seen since her own babies were that small. The only real point of contention in her life is that Donna keeps badgering her about seeing a therapist about the rape. She probably should, but she’s not the kind to rely on people she knows, much less strangers.

Now she just has to reconcile herself with the idea that by this time next year, she might very well be a widow for the second time.

*

Juice takes Jax to this little place he knows. A jeweler in San Francisco that caters to the supernatural. They take their time, but come away with matching blue tungsten rings for the fourth finger of their left hands.

They have dinner on the wharf, and then they go home to Abel and their rest of their Pack.
“David,” Stiles greets Hale with a grin, slinging his arm across Derek’s shoulders. The slightly taller man looks put out about it, but tolerates the intrusion to his personal space. “This is Derek Hale. Derek, this is David Hale. His father is Peter’s Uncle. So I guess that makes you guys cousins once removed or something.”

The two Hales stare at each other, and Stahl supposes she can see a bit of family resemblance. In the wide, stocky shoulders and the resting bitch-face.

David thrusts out a hand, “Hi. It’s nice to meet you, I’ve heard a lot.”

Chapter Notes

Because I am a glutton for punishment, I added another element. *sigh* Not to worry though, it will all hopefully all make sense in the end. This chapter is Family Feels.

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Twenty-Seven:

The Police Department wraps up the two attacks neatly with the capture of a mountain lion. All nice and neat and tied with a bow. June Stahl knows what a supernatural attack looks like. She knows that neither of the two men from out of town were attacked by a mountain lion. The situation actually puts together a few of the missing puzzle pieces for her. Why this town is so strange. How the Sons have managed to slip out of the noose every time she’s thought she had them dead to rights.

The new Chief of Police may not be in Clay Morrow’s pocket like the old one, but he is in the know. Just how much Stilinski knows is a mystery, but it’s obvious from the neatly wrapped police reports and the quaintness of the local news report that the man is old hat at covering for the unexplainable.

He’s human, she knows that much. She’d be able to smell it on him.

So is Deputy Chief Hale. She figures he probably had some kind of experience in the past, probably when he was a patrol officer fresh from the academy. It gave the Chief someone to work with on it when it came rolling in.

She wants to re-open the case. Find the real culprit and drag them screaming to prison for murder. She wants to, but she can’t. Not without explaining her reason for doing it to her boss, who believes in faeries in the way where he believes that other people believe in faeries and that makes them do the crazy. He’s an excellent supervisor, and fantastic investigator and generally a good man.
He’s *not* the kind of guy you bring in on the supernatural. He’s a bit too shoot first ask questions later for it.

Stahl can’t decide if Hale is the only inhuman Son. She’s pretty sure that the ex-Mayan the Stilinski’s took in is probably a werewolf, and a new one by all indications. She thinks that maybe Ortiz has some kind of creature in his bloodline, even if he himself is human. She’s pretty sure that Happy Lowman isn’t human, but she hasn’t been able to find anything to prove it, and she’s never smelled his kind before. If he is a creature, he’s very good at hiding it and she’s pretty sure none of his brothers know.

Clay Morrow is showing signs of the kind of wear and tear of a man trying desperately to hold onto his power. He’s on his way out, and the Sons are rallying behind Jax.

“Hey Dad! Look who I found!”

Stahl pokes her head out of the office she had commandeered when she arrived in curiosity. Stiles Stilinski is human as far as she can tell, but he smells like ozone far too often to not be some kind of caster. She’s not sure what kind, probably some kind of self-taught hedge-witch type.

He’s standing just outside Stilinski’s office, leaning in with a wide grin on his face and a dour looking man at his shoulder. He’s handsome, in a younger, twenty-something kind of way. The kind of dangerous handsome that would have had June panting after him for a ride when she was in college. She’s thankfully gotten over that phase.

“Derek!” Stilinski steps out into the corridor to pull the newly named ‘Derek’ into a signature Stilinski style bear hug. He stiffens up for a moment, but eventually relents and returns it. Stilinski pushes him away to arm’s length to get a good look at him. “You look good. How have you been?”

A tiny smile curves the corners of Derek’s lips, and Stahl can see that if he put off that dour, brooding aire he’d be devastatingly handsome. “I’m doing okay. I figured it was time to come home. Then I found out home had moved while I was gone.”

Stilinski chuckles, “Yes, sorry about that. We’ve been pretty busy these last few months, and you haven’t exactly been the easiest to reach.”

Derek shrugs, seemingly unrepentant.

Hale appears then, escorting a skinny, rat-like man into a nearby interrogation room with a look on his face like he’s smelled something foul. He leaves his suspect to stew for a few minutes and wanders over to the small group just outside Stilinski’s office.

Stahl is beginning to wish she had some popcorn. She retreats to her desk, but leaves the door open so that she can still see and hear the group. You never know what kind of juicy tidbits might accidentally be dropped in passing conversation.

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The two Hales stare at each other, and Stahl supposes she can see a bit of family resemblance. In the wide, stocky shoulders and the resting bitch-face.

David thrusts out a hand, “Hi. It’s nice to meet you, I’ve heard a lot.”
Derek stares at the hand like it might bite him. Then he grunts when Stiles elbows him none-too-gently in the side and shakes the offered hand. “Hi. I can honestly say I’ve never heard of you before.”

David nods, “Yeah… My father didn’t particularly care for his siblings. Something about an ongoing argument when they were kids.”

“Um,” Derek says, unsure what to say.

Stiles needs no prompting, “Yeah, your Grandma was David’s Dad’s sister. At least, that’s what Peter said.”

Something like recognition flickers onto Derek’s face, “Mom used to talk about an Uncle Adrian?”

“That would be him,” David says. “I believe your uncle had the opportunity to meet him when he was younger, before our grandmother passed. Well, your Great Grandmother.”

“I – never met her.”

David shook his head, “I never had the chance either. Feel like getting lunch? I’d like a chance to get to know you.”

Derek’s eyebrows scrunch inward like angry caterpillars. He looks a little constipated, but this is obviously his thinking face. “Okay. Yeah.”

“Great!” David says with a grin, then he turns to his boss. “Markham’s in room one. He needs a shower and possibly a punch to the gut.”

Stilinski ignores the way his kid snickers at that and nods. “I’ll get Lewis and Geoffries to ‘help’ him out before I sit down with him. You’ve got an hour, be back for the interrogation.”

“Yes Sir.”

Stahl sits back in her chair with a Cheshire grin as the little gathering in the hallway. Now that is a juicy little tidbit. Another Hale in town. Peter’s nephew by the conversation. And a direct familial link between Charming’s favorite family and these new Hales that run with criminals. Fascinating. It confirms her suspicions that the shiny Deputy Chief is in the know about the supernatural. After all, you can have a werewolf as a cousin and not know.

She’d bet a hundred bucks that this new Hale is probably a werewolf too.

It does, after all, run in families.

* 

“Well, that was easy.”

John snorts, but refrains from commenting as he dictates Lewis and Geoffries to help their new friend in room one into the shower. Then he follows his kid into his office and settles into his chair before Stiles can.

“Why are you really here?”

Stiles’ smile is without guile when he turns it on John, “What, I’m not allowed to visit my beloved parent at his workplace?”
John just stares at Stiles, face implacable.

Eventually Stiles sighs and flings himself into a chair. He studiously ignores his father’s knowing gaze as he fidgets. Then he gets up and closes the door for privacy. John continues to wait him out while he settles back down in the chair. Twila appears with a chirrup as soon as the door closes, her innate ability to turn herself invisible fading. John leans back just enough to give her enough room to jump up into his lap and settle down into being petted by one of her people.

“Peter and I want to Bond.” Stiles eventually says, studiously watching Twila spread her wings so that John can gently reorganize her feathers for her. “I’m tired of waiting.”

John watches his kid for a few minutes, letting him squirm. He’d honestly expected to have this conversation as soon as Stiles turned eighteen, not several months later. Either way, John has had plenty of time to reconcile, even gladly accept, what all of this means for his kid. He knows that Claudia would have approved, if only because Stiles is so damnably happy with Peter.

John likes his kid happy.

“Are we talking, like a wedding ceremony kind of thing? Because I was hoping to avoid the mess that comes with all that frilly nonsense because of your Bond.”

When Stiles laughs, it’s edged with relieved hysteria. “We were thinking a little thing in the back yard. I went up to the reservation and asked the Shaman there if he’d perform a ceremony for us. He’s licensed in the State of California.”

“So, legally married and supernaturally married?” John asked.

“Yeah. We’re thinking about asking Jax and Juice if they want to do the legal thing too, since they bonded already and everything.”

John manages to hide his surprise at this knowledge, but barely. He’d figured the two Sons would still be dancing around each other this time next year. “When did that happen?”

Stiles smirks, “While Peter and I were Hunting. Juice provided a distraction for Jax so that he wouldn’t go feral on us.”

“Some distraction.”

“It worked.”

“When?”

“Friday night. Then Peter I and are gonna take the weekend.”

“Right. Well, I’m not wearing a suit.”

“I’m not expecting you to.”

“Good.”

Stiles grins at his Dad, and John grins back. After a few seconds, they break it up, both of them suddenly grateful that the door was closed for this particular conversation.

“Go away,” John says with a grin.

Stiles hops up to follow the direction with a lackadaisical salute and a happy moue.
John shakes his head at his kid’s antics, then turns to get back to work.

*

Piney Winston is not a stupid man. He’s old, crotchety and perpetually grumpy. He’s a functioning alcoholic who failed his wife and son and really mostly stopped living his life when Mary left him. He’s only ever really been good at being a Son. At backing up his Brothers. He’s very aware of his failings.

He wishes (not for the first time) that Opie thought he could talk to his Dad. But that ship sailed a long time ago. Piney’s just grateful that Opie appreciates the effort Piney puts into having a good relationship with his grandkids. The kind of relationship that Opie never got to have.

Piney is an old man.

He rarely goes on real runs, and hasn’t had much to do with the daily goings on of the Sons for years.

But Piney can still ride, so he still gets a vote.

And Piney, in his forgotten glory, sees a lot more than anyone ever gives him credit for.

It took him a while to get to like Peter Hale. But he does. Hale is good for the club. He’d brought a sense of real brotherhood back into the Sons that had been sorely lacking since John Teller died.

Since Clay killed Piney’s best friend.

Piney will be the first to admit that he’s a racist, bigoted asshole.

But he’ll also be the first to admit when he’s wrong.

Stiles Stilinski is a good kid. He’s good for Opie and Donna. Piney isn’t blind to how Stiles has helped them put the pieces back together. How they’re better than they were before Opie went inside. His grandkids love him. They’ve even started calling the new Chief Grandpa John. It bothered Piney at first, until he figured out that the kids weren’t trying to replace him. The family had just… grown.

He’s not unaware of how much change Peter and Stiles have heralded. Bringing shit like werewolves out into the open. He hasn’t dealt with any of that crap since ‘Nam, and he doesn’t plan to now.

He’s an old man. He’s set in his ways.

But he knows that it was Stiles that healed his lungs enough for him to not need oxygen all day anymore, only at night. He knows that Peter has rallied the younger generation to Jax’s banner. He can see the older Sons choosing sides in the inevitable confrontation that is now bearing down on them swiftly.

He wants Clay Morrow dead, and it looks like he might actually get to see it, now.

He figures it doesn’t matter if Stiles and Peter are gay for each other. They don’t shove it down everyone’s throats like the few he met in the seventies and eighties. He can live with it if it means that things change so his kid doesn’t have that snake at his back.
Piney Winston is not a stupid man.

He’s sees it when Juice and Jax walk into the clubhouse with matching scars on their wrists and matching rings. He sees how it doesn’t change a damn thing in the day-to-day of the Sons. Sees how they don’t hide it but don’t announce their private shit either.

He can live with it, because now he knows.

Jax isn’t any more human now than Juice, Peter or Happy.

Piney smiles into his glass of whiskey.

Clay Morrow’s going to die, and Piney isn’t going to have to do anything to make it happen.

*Iarrthóir Robin slips into Charming through the only Faerie Ring in Chigger Woods. Robin doesn’t like the mortal realm. He never has. Mortals are infinitely boorish creatures. They build and build without thought to the consequences of what they do. Every year the wild places shrink, and the earth turns to slumber to try to replenish what is taken.

Another reason not to like the mortal realm is the sheer amount of iron humans put into things. It is dangerous to walk among them for that reason. Not like they’ll ever be able to tell what Robin is by sight.

Mortals are stupid creatures with very little insight.

He is surprised when he steps out of the Ring and breathes in deep. The air of these woods is deep and wild. Crisp and fresh. Magic runs a river below his feet, wide and deep. He can sense a Wellspring nearby, a large one, or Robin is not iarrthóir.

He blinks as something brushes against his senses, and he can’t help the smile that crosses his fine, elfin features. The earth here is woken. It welcomes one of the Fae with caution, but without hostility. It feels good here. Like the old magic is returning to the place.

This must be what She had sent him to investigate. A Change such as this, so significant and with such wide consequences would be seen by Her. A return to the Old Ways could be in the getting. The Court may have a path to the surface once again.

He must find the source of the Wakening; and determine if it is friend or foe.

Iarrthóir Robin begins to walk through the trees. He will peer into the Wellspring. It will know which path he must tread to find his quarry.

Around him the trees whisper to each other of the Fae that walks beneath their boughs. The wind willingly carries a warning with it when asked. It carries knowledge of the new presence in the woods, the seeker, who looks for the Guardians. It carries it to a young willow tree that roots deep next to a small pond beneath strong shields.

Willow listens to the warning. Her head tilts into the wind, her wide sap-amber eyes watch the border of the property with caution. She is a Dryad, and she knows of the Fae, though she is too young herself to have ever met one. She listens to the wind, her willow-hair swaying in the wind as it speaks.

A warning must be carried to the Spark or the Alpha.
Willow does something a Dryad must never do. She leaves her tree.

Her tree is safe under the Shield. It will not be destroyed in her absence.

She must deliver the Wind’s message.
Warning

Chapter Summary

Willow trembles, terrified at the distance between herself and her tree. “A Seeker comes from Faerie,” she says, voice trembling.

Derek stiffens. His eyes bleed blue as he takes in a deep breath. Willow scents as worried, but not afraid. “Do you know which Court?”

Willow shakes her head apologetically, “The wind does not know the difference.”

Chapter Notes

This chapter came out in bits and pieces that had to be reorganized in order for me to feel satisfied with it. It's the first one that's done that. Ah, the joys of writing. I think my brain got derailed when I binge listened to all of the first season of Unobscured. But hey, I learned a lot I didn't know about the Salem Witch Trials, so there's that. I highly recommend that podcast if you have any interest in the subject at all.

Disclaimer: Octarine as the color of magic belongs to Terry Pratchett and the Discworld. I own nothing SOA or TW.

Twenty-Eight:

The world inside of him spins a lazy circle.

The air is heavy with humidity. It will rain later.


Heat alongside him. Not unlike fire; but then not like fire at all.

It does not burn him.

It will never burn him.

Sunbeams encroach on their privacy. Refracting off jewel bright violet scales and feathers edged in gold. It casts a shimmer into the air, a few fractals of rainbows spinning lazily across the walls.

He likes it here.

Their room is quiet, the only sounds the breathing of his Bonded and the whisper of the wind through the open window.
He likes the quiet. The comfort.

It soothes an ache deep inside him that he rarely acknowledges but is always aware of.

A rumble. Like rocks tumbling together.

He turns in strong arms and curls in closer. He is pulled closer for his efforts.

He raises his left arm, his fingers laced together with those of his Bonded’s own left hand.

Scars glitter at him in the dim light of early morning. Silvery with apparent age, but bright and never-fading.

Inside his chest something satiated and satisfied curls up behind his heart. His Bond is a thick golden cord glowing with power and light so strong it nearly appears white. Satisfaction, love, contentment and a tiny curl of desire flow down the Bond from his sleeping mate.

A rush of affection fills him, and he does not prevent it filtering down the Bond, though he knows it wake the other.

The arm around him tightens.

He turns in the circle of arms to face hooded blue eyes and a canary smile.

He leans in to kiss the smile away.

The other lets him, pulling him closer until they are pressed together so tightly it is hard to see where one begins and the other ends.

He hums, tucks his head down into the crook of his mate’s neck and breathes in the scents there. Salt and skin. Heat and something earthy and wild. Like forest after rain. A hit of good cologne. Past the wearing, faint and fading.

He wants to spend eternity like this. Wrapped in these arms, warm and safe from the world.

Beloved.

He wants it to never end.

The air in the room sparks alive with motes of magic. Octarine fireflies that drift through the sunbeams like glittery dust, winking in an out of existence.

Blue eyes go bright ruby with the haze of familiar power that settles over the pair of them.

Peter watches the specks of magic settle over their skin and seep into it. He feels something inside him stretch and he knows that something has happened, but not exactly what. It causes the new scars on his wrist to gleam with octarine. The Bond, already steeped in magic becomes positively saturated and he realizes what’s been done.

His mate, sleepy content and satisfaction wants something. Wants it to never end, never to fade.

The possessive beast that lives inside him rumbles awake and wraps itself around the Bond, acknowledging and accepting the magic as it strengthens and lengthens the cord.

He will have this for a very long time, and he can only be happy with the information.
Stiles recognizes what he’s done, but not in time to stop it. Not that he wants to stop it. He wants an eternity with Peter. One lifetime doesn’t feel like enough, but infinity seems like too long to walk the world. They’re tied together now. Where one goes, so goes the other. They’ll walk until they’re both tired, and then they’ll lay down together.

As it should be.

* 

Derek and Jaime get along fairly well for two taciturn men grunting good mornings at each other. Their meeting had been anti-climactic. They’d eyed each other up, felt each other out and had sorted themselves out by the time dinner was over. They’re both at the same rank in the Pack, and neither minds sharing the duties of Enforcer. Both are perfectly content to not have to shoulder the title of Second.

That belongs to Jax, who wears it proudly like a kingly mantle.

Jaime has never wanted to be in charge. Even less so now that he’s a werewolf. He’s got enough on his plate trying to sort himself out, much less helping Peter sort everyone else. He’s been in Charming for nearly six months and has only recently been deemed in control of himself enough to go out and find something to do with himself.

Acting as the Pack’s liaison to the Mayans is all well and good, but it certainly doesn’t keep him very busy. Alvarez is perfectly content with the status quo of live and let live. Any interaction the Mayans have with the Sons is business as usual save for the healthy new respect they have for certain members.

Caution exercised around certain Sons that had not been beforehand.

That’s probably Jaime’s fault. It’s hard to shake off the threads of an old life.

Not that Peter gives a shit. The more Alvarez knows about the Pack, the less likely he is to take advantage of the situation when the time comes to dethrone Clay Morrow.

For Derek, it’s not about usefulness or idleness. It’s about the bone deep knowledge that he carries that says he makes the worst Alpha. He’d let the power go to his head. He’d been out of his depth, unprepared and full of himself. It had gotten two of his Betas killed. He doesn’t want that weight. Peter can keep it.

He makes good muscle and a decent scout.

His time on the road first with Cora and then with Braeden had taught him his limits. He’s capable of shifting into a real wolf; has been since Mexico. It had come with true acceptance of who and what he is. He’s at peace with himself in a way he never has been. He’d been a teenager when Kate Argent had used him to kill his family. Then he and Laura had spent the intervening years on the run.

There had hardly been time to learn who he was.

Spending time with Cora had taught him about himself as a wolf. As a brother. He’d learned acceptance of what had happened. That the fire wasn’t his fault. He’d been a victim just as much as the rest of his family. Spending time with Braeden on the road, hunting the things that go bump in the night when they started killing innocents had taught him about who he wanted to be.

Now he’s here, and he’s never felt like he belongs more than he does right now.
He’d been able to witness the wedding of Peter to Stiles and Jax to Juice with pride at being invited. At being made privy to the bond shared between the two couples. He’d been able to stand next to the Chief and allow himself to be hugged when they both got a little watery eyed.

And now he’s made a friend and he isn’t sure how. It just simply is.

He lets himself believe that Erica and Boyd would have loved it here. That wherever werewolves go when they die, they’re happy for him.

So the two of them sit in the silence of the Stilinski-Hale kitchen sipping at huge mugs of coffee and breathing in the cool morning air coming through the open back door. It’s going to be hot soon, but the mornings are starting to cool off. The rains that herald the end of summer should be here soon.

A breeze blows through the room with the sound of leaves shifting in the trees. And then there’s a small female standing before them with tree-sap eyes and greenish hued skin. She’s clad in willow bark and her hair is heavy with willow leaves. She looks worried.

Jaime feels unsettled, though he doesn’t know why. Willow has never left the yard before. She’s never been more than ten feet away from her tree. “Willow?” he asks, setting down his coffee. He inhales deeply, but can’t scent anything unusual in the air. “What’s wrong?”

Willow trembles, terrified at the distance between herself and her tree. “A Seeker comes from Faerie,” she says, voice trembling.

Derek stiffens. His eyes bleed blue as he takes in a deep breath. Willow scents as worried, but not afraid. “Do you know which Court?”

Willow shakes her head apologetically, “The wind does not know the difference.”

“Thank you, Willow. We’ll tell the Pair,” Derek tells her seriously. Her shoulders slump in relief, and in a trice she’s out the door and back to her tree.

Jaime waits until the dryad is out of earshot before he speaks. “What the fuck does that all mean?”

Derek swallows around the lump in his throat. He doesn’t have much experience with Faerie. The more powerful Sidhe keep to their realms of magic and wild. They don’t venture aboveground all that often. The lesser fae that live in the world mostly keep to themselves.

“It means,” he tells his fellow Enforcer, “that someone really powerful has sensed the changes Stiles has been making.” When he sees Jaime’s WTF face, he elaborates. “Stiles is a Spark. They’re very rare. They also have the tendency to change the very reality around them just by existing. Stiles has done just enough believing that he and Peter are bringing a lot of wild magic into being.”

“Is this good or bad?” Jaime knows about the things that Stiles can do. He’s been the subject of his focus before.

Derek shrugs, “Depends on who sent the Seeker and what they want.”

“What’s a Seeker?”

“They’re like Hunters, only a hundred times more dangerous.”

* Jax and Juice had accepted Stiles’ offer to share his wedding ceremony with them. It had caused
some bemusement on Jax’s part and no small amount of happiness on Juice’s side. Juice isn’t built for unhappiness. He’s nearing his second century and he’s long been able to tell the difference between the fleetingness of amusement and constancy of affection.

Jax loves him. It doesn’t matter when it happened, or why, it just is. He likes it. Likes that he’s got something he doesn’t feel like he’s got to share with anyone. Not even the Club.

Juice will always choose Jax.

When he had been with Tara, Jax had always felt like he was scrambling to prove something to her. That he was good enough, or nice enough, or strong enough. With Wendy he always came second to her next high. Was always a runner up to finding her next hit. With his mother he’s always carried her expectations (doubled after Tommy died). The Club carries the weight of his Brothers, of his future as President. Of leadership.

But Juice just wants him to be around him and provide simple things like kisses and companionship.

Juice doesn’t expect things, just happily accepts anything Jax is willing to give and doesn’t question what he doesn’t.

He gets it. Juice understands the cinderblocks of responsibility weighing his new husband down.

In fact, he’s taken on some of the burden. Jax has never felt lighter.

They get married in a civil ceremony in the Stilinski’s back yard surrounded by Pack and standing next to Stiles and Peter. Gemma comes, though it’s obvious she doesn’t like that her son is settling down with another man. Especially that that man is Juan Carlos Ortiz. To Gemma, Juice will always be the spastic twenty-something that came tripping into town and into the club. He’s never really going to be Juan Carlos, the hundred and eighty-two year old half-Fae that knows more about living in a hateful world than any of them ever will.

But she supports them because she can see that they’re happy together and she doesn’t want to lose her connection to her son and grandson.

Juice had been perfectly happy to just be Bonded, but Jax is still new to not being human. The human concept of marriage still holds weight for him. So Juice had been happy to make the rings they bought represent their union more than just symbolically.

When Jax decides to do something, he commits. He’s never been afraid of applying himself to something he wants or loves. Once he does, he plants his feet and refuses to move. He’s in it for the duration.

Tara had loved it, but only on her terms.

Wendy had hated it, feeling stifled.

It had served him well with the Sons.

Juice returns it with equal commitment.

So they get married in a double ceremony in Stiles’ backyard and don’t feel ashamed at what they’ve found. Oh, they know they’re going to catch shit. But they’ve been wandering around with matching rings for a week now. The Sons whose opinions matter don’t give a shit that they’re both men (Opie just wants his friend to be happy, and Happy doesn’t care if he can’t eat it). The ones who matter but don’t matter (Tig, Chibs, Bobby, Piney, the Prospect) seem to be willing to let it be. Tig has made
some off-color jokes, but he’s been on three dates with a transvestite dominatrix so he can’t go around throwing stones.

Clay, thankfully, hasn’t noticed. Clay never notices anything unless it affects him directly.

Oh, he’ll notice… eventually. And when he does there’ll be hell to pay.

On Monday, after a quiet weekend at home with Abel where they officially moved Juice in, they shadowalk to the office of a lawyer that Juice has known and used for over a century. Max Beecham of Beecham, Beecham and Court is not the great great grandson of one of the founders of the practice, he is one of the founders of the practice. And it shows in his manners and intelligence.

He’s spent nearly four hundred years helping the denizens of the supernatural realm navigate mortal laws. He’s affable and brisk, but not unkind.

Jax likes him immediately.

Max is a bit short, and a bit round. He’s got a mustache that makes Jax think of a push broom and looks like he stepped out of a Sherlock Holmes novel for the bespoke suit and bowler hat he prefers. He congratulates them on their bond, and their mortal marriage. He offers them tea (which Juice accepts because he actually likes tea) and then chit-chats with them while the pair makes themselves comfortable in his New York office.

He then walks them through what they’ve come for.

There’s a lot of paperwork involved in tying two lives together. Doubly so when doing it once in the mortal world and then again in Faerie.

Juice happily sheds the name Ortiz for Teller when they discuss it. He’s never been overly attached to his father’s name. He’d never even met the man save for the once when he’d been young and curious.

Jax is added to Juice’s accounts. He nearly goes into shock when he finds out just what kinds of assets Juice has left lying around over the years. He’s had nearly two centuries to accrue things and then forget he owns them. Juice’s self-disparaging has always stemmed from being a Tweener. From not really belonging anywhere. Not from his ability to take care of himself.

Juice is organized to the point of OCD, and according to Max leads an exceptionally frugal lifestyle.

It’s a kind way of saying that Juice has spent the last two-hundred years couch-surfing, bumming rides off friends, wearing second-hand clothes and buying all his groceries at the dollar store. He’s won and lost entire fortunes in high stakes games of poker, but is content to subsist on bad beer and hot pockets.

It’s not that surprising to Jax, considering what he knows of Juice. Juice barely takes care of himself, always distracted by something shiny.

And then he learns what being loved by Juice actually means.

It means that Juice loves him. That he loves Abel. That he takes care of what he loves.

The mortgage on Jax’s house is paid off almost immediately. A trust fund for Abel’s schooling and medical needs is set up that has a staggering amount of zeroes attached to it. Jax is issued a black card that doubles as a debit and credit card (no limit) with the name of a bank on it that Jax has never heard of.
He’s still perusing the portfolio of properties that Juice (and now he) owns while he and his son are added to Juice’s health and life insurance plans.

Juice has an actual-facts title. He’s a baronet of some place in some small Eastern European country that Jax has never heard of. He’s also the son of a Countess in the Summer Court, where titles still hold weight and meaning. He’s Viscount Juan Carlos Teller now, making Jax himself a Lord by marriage.

It’s surreal.

Compared to the head-spinning list of assets and the weight of just who he married, asking Max to file the paperwork for Juice to legally adopt Abel as his son is as easy as breathing. The radiant smile he gets from Juice makes him breathless.

Max politely ignores the miniature argument they have over just how filthy rich Juice is (weight is added to Jax’s argument when he realizes that Juice forgot that he owns a goddamn chateau in France) and how he has no excuse for the way he lives his life like a homeless drifter. He also pretends he’s gone deaf when Juice resorts to blowing a raspberry at Jax every time the blond tries to restart the argument.

By the time lunch rolls around, Jax is debt-free, the co-owner of a farm in Kentucky that raises race horses and has been gifted Juice’s shares in Harley Davidson Motorcycles as wedding present.

By the time they’re settling in at a table at a small Fae-Only Bistro, Jax has decided that it doesn’t matter what Juice has or hasn’t told him about the life he’s lived. Juice doesn’t care about money or things, and Jax is used to doing without. This doesn’t have to come between them if he doesn’t want it to.

He’s just going to have to teach Juice about the joys of buying his groceries from an actual supermarket and how nice a new pair of jeans can feel is all. He may start secretly planning a tropical getaway for the three of them when all the shit in Charming is dealt with.

They decide to swing by the New York Charter of the Sons to speak with the president there before heading back to Charming. Jax needs the support of as many charters as he can possibly get before he makes a move on Clay or his bid for the gavel will be over before it begins.

* 

Gerard lets himself into his hotel room. He’s lost several men. Some to the police and a couple to fear. The fools have allowed themselves to get all caught up in the mystery surrounding the Charming Pack. Gerard knows everything he needs to. A Hale is Alpha, and he won’t rest until every last Hale is six feet under. Every Hale and every person that even thinks to associate with one.

His men need to learn to shoot first and ask questions never.

It’s hard to find good help these days.

He tosses his keys on the dresser and stops to get a bottle out of the mini-fridge. His hands shake violently as he fumbles for the bottle of pills in his pocket. A tickle at the back of his throat heralds a coughing fit that has him lunging for his handkerchief and sitting heavily on the bed. By the time the fit is over, the handkerchief is soaked with black and the scent of rot permeates the room.

Gerard wheezes, taking in great gulps of air as he shoves two pills into his mouth and washes them (and the taste of decay) down with the water he’d retrieved.
A breeze from the window cools the sweat on his neck, and he instinctively turns toward the window. He freezes when he spots the man sitting in the armchair by the little balcony’s door. After a moment of staring into his son’s blue eyes he finishes his water. Christopher waits, lounging in his seat without a care in the world, his hand wrapped around the grip of a .45 that is pointed in Gerard’s direction.

He looks… old. The thick beard he’s sporting is peppered liberally with gray, and the wrinkles around his eyes are prominent with either worry or not enough sleep. His clothes are tidy and clean, but hard wearing. Hunter’s clothes.

“Hi Dad,” Chris says, voice congenial and completely devoid of familial warmth. “We need to talk.”
Gerard

Chapter Summary

Gerard bares his teeth at his son in a facsimile of a smile. It’s a rictus of how he feels about his only living child. Chris (to his credit) remains stoic and unmoved.

What a waste of potential.

Chapter Notes

Another chapter gone and still no end in sight. I deal with one thing, and another crops up because of the magical world-building I've been doing.

Disclaimer: Octarine as the color of magic belongs to Terry Pratchett and the Discworld. I own nothing SOA or TW.

Twenty-Nine:

Humans are such strange creatures.

They surround themselves with stone, steel and iron with seemingly no care whatever for the green and growing things of the natural world. They spend their days pursuing material objects and their insatiable want for more with no vision for the future. They surround themselves with riches, and yet are poorer for it.

It’s a ghastly practice. One that Robin finds distasteful.

Finding the little garden in the middle of this town in a brief reprieve, he decides as he slips into the Charming Botanical Gardens and away from the bustle of the short lived beings that dominate aboveground. The noise and smell of tar fades, though it lingers in the back of his throat.

This is a nice place, he decides.

Robin wanders among the greenery for a while before he begins to notice things. Strange things. Things that haven’t really happened since the humans began to dominate the earth and take the wild out of the world. Out of the corners of his eyes he can see the flickering of faeries. When he turns his head to look, he catches glimpses of flower faeries darting in and out of the flower beds and shrubberies without a care in the world. A particularly prolific patch of lemon thyme appears to be encroaching on the neighboring bed, crowing out the ornamental shrubberies therein.

The tree in the bed protests vehemently, and before Robin’s eyes, the tree’s great bulk uproots itself and moves over nearly a foot to gain itself some personal space.

As he rounds a corner the Fae stops, fading into the shadows to observe a woman with pale pink hair
as she steps off the path and into a patch of bushes where a few wild herbs have been planted. She pulls out a pair of scissors to trim some for her own use. To his sight, the woman fairly glows with *other*. She has the Sight at the very least.

Then the familiar appears. The void cat sits primly on the path near his mistress. Robin must admit that his glamour is very good. It would have fooled him if he didn’t have true sight. As it is, the little creature that sheds stardust with every step is a curious companion for a Seer, so she must be a practitioner of some power as well.

Robin considers revealing himself to her. Practitioners can be useful. Her knowledge of the area and who lives in the territory would be a boon. In return he could offer her trifles for her insight. Things that are hard to get one’s hands on aboveground.

“What do you think, Blake,” the witch asks her familiar, turning her head to look at the cat. The cat mews at her and she nods in understanding. “Maybe. Do you think our visitor will like it?”

Blake meows at her, standing to stretch before he pads over to inspect her harvest. He butts his head against her upper arm, leaving behind a smear of dust across her arm. Robin watches in fascination as her skin absorbs the stuff.

“You never know,” she tells the cat. She then bundles her harvest up in a tidy bundle in a basket at her side before she rises to head home. “We might see him before the Alpha does, and we should be prepared just in case.”

Blake mews in agreement, following his mistress faithfully.

Robin turns to follow her with interest. An Alpha in the territory? Interesting. There aren’t many Alphas left in the world that can garner the respect of the creatures that live in their territory that aren’t in their Pack. By the tone in the witch’s voice, she respects this Alpha.

Robin wonders if garnering the help of this Alpha to track his quarry is a good idea.

If nothing else, this practitioner may prove useful where information is concerned.

* Stiles visits Berkley again, this time as a registering student and with the last name of Stilinski-Hale. He thinks it’s kind of insane how much his world has changed since the Stilinski (and one Hale) men had packed up their lives in Beacon Hills and moved to Charming. Stiles feels truly valued by the people he’s chosen to surround himself with. His Dad is his Dad, he’s got Peter (his actual facts husband!), and he’s got a dozen pack members that value him for what he brings to the table.

No one looks at him and makes him feel like a burden.

It’s a beautiful feeling.

Registration is hectic, and Stiles can only imagine how those of his fellow students who are actually moving into a dorm or into town feel. His commute will be fairly long, but that’s cool with Stiles. He doesn’t mind the drive, it gives him time to listen to podcasts and meditate.

The commute is the only thing Twila likes about the experience. She doesn’t like how crowded the campus is. College kids smell funny. Too many girls come at her cooing and trying to pet her while flirting with her Stiles. They think it’s adorable that he brought his cat with him; and isn’t it precious that she’s so well trained he doesn’t have to worry about her wandering off?
After the fifth girl doesn’t take no for an answer (and gets bitten for her trouble) Twila spends the rest of the day riding in Stiles’ bag with her head poking out the top.

Danny is the only exception to this new horrible situation. He treats Twila with respect, waits for her to come to him for petting, and shares the turkey in his sandwich at lunch. She decides he’s a delight somewhere between the sandwich and his deliberate turning of a blind eye to her pilfering of the grapes from his fruit salad.

“So what is she, really?” Danny asks as they compare notes on the day so far.

Stiles grins and looks around to make sure they aren’t being watched before he gives Twila a nod. She lets her glamour drop as she sits primly in front of Danny; mantling her wings to show them off to great effect. He coos at her, and scoops her up into his arms to play with the feathers where her wings meet her shoulders. She melts into him with a cooing noise of appreciation.

“She’s gorgeous,” Danny says. “I was expecting a little demony thing, to be honest.”

Stiles snorts, “With what runs around Beacon Hills, I’m not surprised.”

Danny shrugs and offers Twila more turkey. He’s willfully overlooked the crazy in Beacon Hills since Jackson spun out of control in their sophomore year. Partially for his own safety and partially for his sanity. Jackson is his best friend, and he’d dated Ethan for a while. You can’t do either of those things without noticing the weird around you.

The two young men sit on the grass under a tree in small park near Danny’s new dorm. Danny will readily admit to a certain amount of relief at being away from Beacon Hills. His parents had decided to move back to Hawaii this summer, and he’s at Berkley now. Jackson’s still in London where he’ll be going to Cambridge in the fall.

Danny doesn’t have to worry about Beacon Hills anymore.

“Is that why you left?” he wonders aloud. He doesn’t ask if it’s because of Scott. That’s a given as far as Danny is concerned. “All the crazy.”

“Sort of, but not really? I mean, we left because if we had stayed I think we would have had to bury someone. Whether it was gonna be me or my dad is up for debate.”

“And now you’re married,” Danny nods at Stiles’ left hand, where a wedding band rests on the fourth finger. “To a Hale. It’s not Derek is it?”

Stiles snickers, “No. Peter.”

Danny’s eyebrows crawl up his forehead in surprise, but decides it’s none of his business. If the Sheriff didn’t object, then Danny’s got no room to. “Okay. That’s good, Derek’s issues have issues.”

Stiles outright laughs at that, “He’s working on it.”

Danny grins back, “Congrats on being happy, man.”

“Thanks!”

*

“I used to believe in the cause. In the Code.”

Gerard watches his son. Chris has a grim look on his face, like he’d come to a decision that he didn’t
like, but was determined to see through to the end. This is not the boy he’d raised. That boy had wanted nothing more than his father’s approval. He’d done everything he could, followed every order, just to gain a mote of approval. The kind of approval Kate had never needed to earn.

But Christopher had had the misfortune of being born a boy.

The Argents were a Matriarchal sect of Hunters. Men were soldiers. Necessary but disposable.

Kate was the glory Gerard had wanted his firstborn to be. A golden haired girl with a ruthless streak that carried her far and set her up to be the next Matriarch. Until that bastard Hale had slashed her open from throat to navel. His beautiful bright girl gone in the blinking of an eye.

Victoria was from an old Hunting family, but she had married into the Argent family and therefore hadn’t qualified to become Matriarch. But Allison was an Argent by blood, and so Gerard had named Victoria Matriarch by Proxy until Allison could be trained up.

If only the girl hadn’t turned out to be such a disappointment. Like her father.

“The Code is the Law, boy,” Gerard sneers at his son.

Christopher sighs heavily, “No. It really isn’t. Besides, I’ve got a new Code now. Dictated to me by the Argent Matriarch before her death.”

“Oh?” Gerard asks. He can feel the sick coating his fingers as it soaks through the handkerchief.

“Nous protégeons ceux qui ne peuvent pas se protéger eux-mêmes.” The French rolls off Chris’ tongue with a fluid roll. The seriousness in his face and demeanor makes Gerard want to roll his eyes. “How noble,” he says spitefully. “I think so,” Chris says. His gun feels heavy in his hand as he raises it to point it at his father, sighting it to put two in the man’s head if he tries anything. “Give me a reason. Please.” Gerard smiles. There is not anything nice about the expression. The black of his sickness has stained his teeth as if he’s eaten too much black licorice. The two diseases in his blood fighting for dominance, regulated into a slow crawl by the mountain ash in his bloodstream. A slow and painful way to die. Werewolfism and cancer battling it out as he coughs up his lungs slowly. The irony of it isn’t lost on him.

By trying to stop his machinations, Scott McCall had condemned him to death.

“If you wanted to kill me you’d have done it by now.”

Chris is adult enough to admit that he doesn’t want to kill his own father. At this point, however, there seems to be little choice. “No, but I will.”

“And what would you rather do?”

“Sit here and wait for the Chief of Police to arrive and arrest you for conspiracy to commit murder.”

Gerard’s eyes narrow, “And what makes you think he can make the charges stick?”

It’s Chris’ turn to smirk. It’s an ugly expression, unsuitable to his face. “Oh believe me, Stilinski can make it stick just long enough for you to be taken out by criminal elements in prison. I hear the Sons of Anarchy take care of their own.”

* 

Jacob doesn’t understand why his brother can’t just fall in line. If he’s warned him once he’s warned
him a thousand times to stay away from their cousins. It’s like he’s being willfully ignorant of their father’s wishes. A horrifying thought. David has always been stubborn. So moral and black and white in his view of right and wrong. Why did he have to choose now of all times to start seeing in shades of gray.

Why did he have to decide to defy their father and reach out to the cousins?

Why did he have to decide he likes working for the new Police Chief?

He knows that David agrees that Charming has to move into the twenty-first century. They can’t remain in the seventies and survive the march of time. They have to bring in commerce, jobs, new blood to sustain their little town. That’s all Jacob is trying to do.

Why can’t he see that?

The man sitting across from his brother in the diner is dark with broad shoulders and enough scruff that he looks more like he should be having his mug shot taken than sitting across from a police officer in the brightly lit space that is Dinah’s. The two are having a quiet conversation, and both a relaxed enough that they’ve obviously met before.

Jacob hopes the brooding man isn’t associated with the Sons. Or their cousin. He really does.

“David!” Jacob greets him with his best congenial smile plastered on his face.

“Jake,” David replies in that serious way of his. “How are you?”

“I’m doing well,” Jacob replies. That’s a lie, he isn’t doing well. The deal he’d had with Ethan Zobelle as an investor in the housing project he’d been counting on had fallen through when the man left town unexpectedly. Jacob’s been scrambling to find a replacement ever since. But he’s not going to tell his little goody-goody of a brother that. Besides, Jacob’s a very good liar. It comes hand-in-hand with being in politics. “Who’s your friend?”

David gets this look in his eye and a little smirk tugs at one corner of his mouth. Jacob recognizes this expression as one David has worn since they were kids and he thought he’d gotten one over on his older sibling. “Jake, this is Derek. Derek, my brother Jacob.”

“Nice to meet you,” Jacob offers the stranger his hand. Derek says nothing, just stares at his outstretched hand like he’s smelled something foul. Jacob retracts his hand after a few awkward moments of it hanging between them.

“Derek,” David says after he’s finished enjoying the moment, “is our cousin, Jake. He’s Talia’s oldest boy and Peter’s nephew.”

Jacob manages to hide his flinch of surprise. “Oh, well.”

Derek smiles at him then, and it reminds Jacob of a wolf baring its teeth. The hair on the back of his neck rises at the perceived threat that smile makes him feel. When he speaks, it’s with a deep voice devoid of any real emotion. “Nice to meet you, too.”

Jacob decides to excuse himself quickly, stating that he’s meeting with a potential backer and hurries to his usual booth at the back of the restaurant. As he settles into the booth and begins to prepare himself to sell his project, he tries to shake off the sense of foreboding that Derek’s presence has caused him.

His father isn’t going to like this. Not at all.
Gerard lets the Chief of Police take him into custody. He can’t shoot like he used to, and he’d be unable to get Chris first. Not with his son already prepared with weapon in hand. The two Argent men stare at each other as Gerard is handcuffed and read his rights.

They both know there is no coming back from this.

Christopher is condemning his father to death without remorse. Either slowly by his illness or swiftly by execution in prison by the Sons of Anarchy. A gang that Chris will have called his marker in on.

Gerard bares his teeth at his son in a facsimile of a smile. It’s a rictus of how he feels about his only living child. Chris (to his credit) remains stoic and unmoved.

What a waste of potential.
Robin

Chapter Summary

Robin is Fae. He is millennia old. He has hunted creatures that have long gone to slumber in the waning of the world. He has little to no reason to fear anything or anyone save his Queen. He feels it now. A faint flicker of fear in the pit of his stomach. This Alpha is mated to a Spark. Together they have woken the earth of this town and brought the Wild back to the human realm. If they don’t like his words, there may very well be nothing left of him to find.

Chapter Notes

So fun fact: I see Jaime as being played by Manuel Garcia-Rulfo, Caliana by Elle Fanning, and Robin being played by DB Woodside. Just food for thought when you picture them. Anywho, this week's chapter is brought to you by a package of pistachio oreo thins cookies.

Next week's chapter will come out on Friday, as I will be spending Saturday with my mother for her birthday.

Disclaimer: Octarine as the color of magic belongs to Terry Pratchett and the Discworld. I own nothing SOA or TW.

Thirty:

“I'll taste the devil's tears
Drink from his soul,
But I'll never give up you…”

- The Devil’s Tears, Angus & Julia Stone

Peter honestly believes that in a past life he’d been cursed to live in interesting times.

It’s the only explanation he can think of that accounts for everything that’s happened to him in his admittedly rather short life. He’s thirty-four this year and in many ways still feels like the twenty-something he was when his injuries from the fire forced him into a six-year coma. His body may have aged, but his mind hadn’t. He’s gone from psychotically vengeful to manipulatively evil and then back to unsteady on his feet with no one and nothing to anchor him.
Being adrift is not a good thing for a wolf of any kind.

But now he’s married to someone he wants to spend every waking waking moment with.

If that means living a cursed life, he’ll take every hit that comes.

He gets off his bike in front of Caliana’s with practiced ease. Around him, main street bustles with weekend shoppers. Down the street he can see the closed sign in the window of the cigar shop. People around town have been speculating as to why the owner left town so abruptly, and whether or not he’s going to come back. Peter knows that he’s not coming back, but listening to gossip around town is amusing, so he keeps doing it.

Next to him, Opie and Happy step up onto the sidewalk with him. They’re all wearing their kuttes, which cause people to carefully detour around the three men. Opie for sheer size, Happy for the deadly aura he exudes, and Peter for the fact that he looks comfortable with the other two.

He will admit that he enjoys the respectful fear the populace has for the Sons.

Opie slides his sunglasses up onto his beanie on his forehead and squints at the calligraphied sign of the magic shop while he takes off his gloves. Happy lights a cigarette and stares down two teenaged girls that are staring at them across the street.

“You sure this chick’s gonna have answers for me?” Opie asks in his deep, rumbly voice.

“More than I have,” Peter replies. “Stiles swears by her. She’s been useful in the past.”

The trio steps toward the door of the shop. Happy precedes his Alpha into the store and Opie holds the door open so that the bells attached to it only ring the once. He gives a sideways look to the potted trees on either side of the door. Peter doesn’t bother hiding his amusement at the expression on the giant man’s face.

“Don’t ask,” Opie says when he spots Peter’s expression.

The Alpha plasters on an innocent expression and the trio enter the magic shop.

The place smells earthy. The air thick with herbs and sandalwood incense. The things that sell well dominate the front of the store. New Agey crystals, candles and jewelry. Wind chimes and mineral beads mixed in with tarot decks and how-to guides for novice wiccans. Peter and Happy can smell the power in the air. This place is old and steeped in magic.

There’s a tall black man in the back of the store perusing the bookcases there. Caliana has cleverly placed notice-me-not charms on books that a mortal shouldn’t mess with. The man isn’t a mortal, if the way he’s ignoring the charms is any indication. Peter’s never seen him before, but he hasn’t met every person in Charming. He’s also deliberately allowed Stiles to be the face of their Pairing. He’s far easier to deal with for most people.

Happy peels off to play with the crystal ball display as they approach the counter. Caliana closes the gigantic magical tome she’d been pretending to read while keeping an eye on her singular customer. She smiles at the two Sons that approach her with welcome.

“Peter!” she exclaims with genuine pleasure. She’s never met him, but she’s heard enough from Stiles and has been able to sense him about town to know him by sight. “Welcome!”

Peter smiles charmingly back at the little witch that has helped Stiles with his studies. “Hello Cali. How are you?”
“Oh, you know,” Cali waves her hand as Blake appears and weaves himself around Opie’s legs until the man bends down to scoop him up. “Busy busy. There’s a new hive of bees in the Botanical Gardens.”

“Oh really?” Peter asks. He has no interest in bees, but she’s probably mentioning them because they’re magic bees.

Cali hums in agreement as Blake melts into Opie’s arms and begins a loud purring, his glamour dropping. “They’ve taken up residence in one of the Awakened Trees.”

Peter knows nothing about any awakened flora, but takes it in his stride. He can’t really be surprised. Stiles has woken the Earth in Charming. He’s noticed the abundance of flower faeries and brownies in town, it’s no surprise to him that local plant life has also decided to waken as well.

“Mmm,” Cali hums. “There’s a new family of garden gnomes living out by the new housing development as well.”

“Interesting,” Peter says. “I’ll have to go out there and say hello.”

With the construction out there, and the legal trouble Jacob Hale has been having over development permits and construction, it’s not the safest place for gnomes to set up shop.

“How can I help you today?” Cali asks now that the pleasantries are out of the way.

Peter gestures expansively at Opie, who smiles at the witch through his beard. He’s handsome in an extremely rugged mountain man / biker way. He’s also putting off a vibe like rocks rolling downhill. She blinks to gaze at him with her second sight, then blinks again in shock at the aura she sees around him. She’s only ever read about Earthspeakers, and now here one sits and he’s so closely tied to Charming that the earth beneath him rises up to meet his every footstep.

“Well,” she says faintly. “That’s something I never thought I’d see in my lifetime.”

Opie frowns, “So you can’t help?”

Cali shakes her head, “Not personally. I do have a few books you might find helpful.”


Cali offers him a sympathetic expression as she rounds the counter to lead the two men toward the bookshelves. They all pretend to ignore the man who looks like he’s skimming a volume of Our Friend the Cactus. Judging by the age the volume and the leather binding, it’s probably a book on magical cactus. The man hasn’t turned a page since the trio of Sons entered the shop. Cali scans the shelves with practiced ease, pulling out several volumes which Peter takes since Opie’s hands are filled with familiar.

Earthspeaking: A Practical Guide, How to Reason With Unreasonable Plants and Deciphering Rocky Rumblings all fill him with vague amusement at the titles. Cali also hands him a folded pamphlet that amuses him enough to read the title aloud, “Sinkholes: 15 Practical Way to Prevent and Maintain Surly Soil.”

Happy snickers as he walks past a display of feathers and joins them. He places himself between his Alpha and the stranger as Opie heaves a heavy, put upon sigh. Peter pats him on the arm consolingly.

“I think that should do it,” Cali says thoughtfully. She meets Peter’s gaze, her eyes flicking from the
stranger and back as she leads the trio back to the counter. He raises a single eyebrow at the worry in her eyes and nods very slightly. Opie sets Blake down on the counter to dig out his wallet as she rings up his purchase. “That’ll be $163.15.”

Happy whistles lowly at the price. Opie winces and goes to dig out the cash, but Peter shakes his head, “Put it on our account please, Cali.” He gives Opie a sharp look when the man looks like he’s going to protest.

“Sure!” Cali says and does so. Technically the ‘account’ is just a credit card she has on file for the new Stilinski-Hales, but she’s not going to complain and she’s never not been paid. Stiles is one of her best customers. “Oh, I’ve got an order for your Mate. Would you be willing to take it, Alpha?”

In the corner, the stranger fumbles his book. Peter grins, a little bit of fang showing as his eyes flash briefly red. “Absolutely.”

“Great!” Cali excuses herself to the back to retrieve Stiles’ package, leaving the three Sons, Blake and the stranger alone in the shop proper.

The stranger in the corner puts his book back on the shelf and turns toward the Sons. He’ll have to pass the three of them in order to leave the shop. Blake mews at them. Peter turns burning ruby eyes on the man as he steps toward them. Happy goes still after rolling up onto the balls of his feet. His lips are pressed together to conceal the needle-like teeth of his shift and his eyes are pitch black. Opie stands there, his weight settling into his legs as his feet firm up on steady ground.

Iarrthóir Robin allows his glamour to drop. His cheekbones sharpen, his ears lengthening and coming to a point. His long, dark hair carefully pulled away from his face. He sweeps into a perfunctory bow as he introduces himself, “I am Iarrthóir Robin of the Seelie Court.”

Peter doesn’t let anything show. He’s grateful for the Willow’s warning. Glad that Derek had spoken to him this morning before he left for the day. Facing a full Fae without a heads up could be a disaster. As it is, he’s much better prepared to face down a Seeker than he would be otherwise. “Alpha Peter Hale,” he replies. Then he gestures to the two men with him. “My Packmates, Earthspeaker Opie and Happy.”

He doesn’t give Happy a formal title, and this Robin notices. When the Fae turns to look at Happy, the Unholy One smiles at him with all his teeth on display. A scent of unease envelopes the Fae. In his experience things with teeth like that are dangerous.

“May we speak, Alpha Hale?” Robin asks, voice carefully neutral.

Peter tilts his head to one side in consideration, “Of course.”

He leaves it at that as the Fae gives a bow of the head, his glamour melting back into place. He carefully crosses his arms in a resting position at his back, prepared to wait for his turn with the Alpha of the territory. This hunt may go better than he had originally thought with an established Pack on board.

“I thank you,” he says formally, keeping Happy in sight.

Happy lets his teeth fade human as he lounges back against the counter and starts fiddling with the mood ring display. Opie’s shoulders relax, though his stance remains unmovign. Robin eyes him curiously, but says nothing. Earthspeakers are rare and not to be trifled with. It’s always best to not get on the bad side of a person that can convince the very earth to open up and swallow you whole.

Caliana returns from the back with a cheerful smile. “Here we are.” She hands Peter a brown paper
wrapped box approximately the size of a shoebox that smells strongly of earth and herbs. “I checked everything for quality, but please remind Stiles that it needs to be stored in a cool, dry and preferably dark place.”

“I’ll tell him,” Peter assures her. “Thank you Cali.”

She waves the four men out of the shop with a smile. Blake looks up at her from his place on the counter where Opie had deposited him with a questioning mew. She waits until the door is closed before she speaks, “That was excellent timing, Blake.”

Blake mews in agreement. They weren’t sure when they’d picked up a Fae, but having one hanging out in her shop for thirty minutes had been long enough to last a lifetime.

“I’m so glad we’re not responsible for whatever he’s here for.”

* Robin has seen many places in his centuries of life. He’s walked the world thrice-over and been across the Underground more often than not. The only place he knows of that has wards as strong as the ones encompassing this property are the ones around his Queen’s palace. Those had been laid thousands of years before he was born; and would stand for thousands of years past his death.

In comparison, these wards are rather small. Their size does nothing to lessen the impression they give.

The wards are an egg-shaped dome over a three-acre plot of land. They encompass a small pond looked over by a willow tree, a large box garden, a rather impressive series of rose bushes lining a two-story white and blue house, and a new Wellspring directly below. New but large and strong. It feeds directly into the Current.

Fascinating.

He pauses at the edge of the wards. A look at his escort shows the three men getting off their transports and chatting among themselves. The Alpha and the Earthspeaker head for the front door, the other one turns to watch Robin where he stands at the bottom of the driveway with calculating eyes.

Robin is once again reminded of some nasty thing waiting for him to show a weakness so that it can eat him. He takes in a deep breath and steps forward, determined to not show weakness to this Happy; whatever he is.

A ping flickers through Robin’s head. He’s frozen in place for a second, and the wards flicker octarine to his true sight for a second. His measure is taken, and then the wards release him. He doesn’t let how unsettling that feeling was show as he walks up the path.

The wards themselves had judged his intentions. Whoever set them is powerful indeed.

He follows Happy into the house. It is benignly mundane. Thick carpeting and shelves lined with a collection of books that could only be called eclectic. He doesn’t get much chance to get a really good look around before he’s whisked through a doorway into the heart of the house. The kitchen.

A young man, tall and lithe with dark hair and pale skin dotted with moles stands at the counter carefully unwrapping the brown paper box. He’s got a fox’s smile, Robin thinks. There’s an edge of cleverness to it that makes him feel wary. The Alpha is present, digging through a cold storage device that Robin believes is called a refrigerator.
Sitting at the table to Robin’s immediate left is a tall man with dark hair, darker eyes and a complexion deeply tanned than makes Robin think of the deep heat of a desert or jungle. He is unshaven and tapping away at a device set on the table in front of him.

The Earthspeaker is nowhere to be found.

“This is Robin, he’s a Fae,” the Alpha says as soon as Robin has entered the room.

The boy with the fox-face looks up. Robin feels pinned in place as he is studied by amber eyes that flicker with octarine. He feels… judged somehow. Like this mortal is taking his measure and not necessarily finding him worthy. He is millennia old, he maintains his poise and nods gravely in the boy’s direction.

“Robin, this is my mate, Stiles.” The Alpha sets his hand on the boy’s shoulder for a moment. A show of proprietary ownership. Werewolves are prone to such displays.

Stiles grins and holds out his hand, “Nice to meet you!”

If he recalls correctly, the shaking of hands is a traditional greeting amongst mortals. Robin steps forward and claps Stiles’ hand in his own. Power slams into him. It is nearly enough to bring him to his knees. As it is the glamour he wears flickers and dies as he stares at the creature across from him. So powerful that with Robin’s true sight his aura glows a bright white-gold. His eyes are molten octarine, and those moles dotted across his skin radiate octarine light.

A Spark.

The boy is a Spark.

A low, deep growl pulls Robin from the moment. A hand settles on one of the Fae’s shoulders and he is yanked away from Stiles. He blinks heavily for a moment, shaking away the glimps of pure power he’d just seen. When he looks back up, the Alpha is watching him from the Spark’s side with glowing ruby eyes. The Mexican man from the table stands between the Pair and Robin, eyes preternatural blue and fangs descended.

Happy, whatever he is, watches him from the doorway behind him with black eyes that remind him of a shark’s.

“I think,” Stiles says into the silence, “you had better explain yourself.”

Robin straightens. He collects his poise around himself, his glamour settling back into place as he does so. “I was sent by my Queen to investigate the changes coming out of this town. I am to report my findings and whether the source of the power is friend or foe.”

Stiles twiddles his fingers at Robin in a little wave, “ Yeah, hi. That’s me. And him.” He jabs his thumb in Peter’s direction.

Taking that as his cue, Peter speaks. “You had best watch your words carefully, Iarrthóir Robin of the Seelie Court. I will know if you are lying, and you won’t like the consequences if you do.”

Robin is Fae. He is millennia old. He has hunted creatures that have long gone to slumber in the waning of the world. He has little to no reason to fear anything or anyone save his Queen. He feels it now. A faint flicker of fear in the pit of his stomach. This Alpha is mated to a Spark. Together they have woken the earth of this town and brought the Wild back to the human realm. If they don’t like his words, there may very well be nothing left of him to find.
He is suddenly grateful for the fact that his orders for this mission were simple.

Observe and report.

*

With each drop that drips from the beast’s fangs, the decaying leaf matter below it sizzles with the caustic nature of the substance. Faintly acidic, definitely poisonous. The beast leaves behind it paw prints of blackened earth. It has caught a scent. A scent it recognizes.

It is hungry. Nothing has been able to sate its need. It has fed on everything it can get its claws into. Beast, human and other. It has sipped at the wellspring, draining power from the Spark that raised the wards around it.

It is not enough. It will never be enough.

But Fae is a rare delicacy. One that the beast enjoys.

This new scent belongs to a Fae. Not young, but not old. The perfect age to be a tender meal rich with magic and time.

It is time to hunt. To rend and tear.

To feast on tender flesh.

To grow more powerful.

The world will remember that it exists. That things like the beast stalk in the shadows. The world will remember, and it will tremble in fear of the beast’s might.

Fear, after all, is like ambrosia.
Punch

Chapter Summary

A pinched expression appears around Donna’s eyes, creating a crease between her eyebrows. It’s enough for Gemma to decide not to stay out of it after all. She starts forward, but she doesn’t move quickly enough as Donna carefully puts her purse in the front seat of the car, strides over to Stahl, hauls back and socks her in the face.

Chapter Notes

A day early, as promised, as I am making a day trip tomorrow and won’t have time to post.

This chapter was brought to you by my head cold and the days where I hate that I work in IT because it mean’s I am, by default, my mother's personal IT guru. If any of it is disjointed, I apologize, we can all blame it on the fact that my mother didn't just click on the pop-up.... no, she clicked on it three times just to make sure. -_-.

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Thirty-One:

“Mrs. Winston?”

Donna looks up and immediately scowls at Agent Stahl where the tall blonde stands on the sidewalk in the shade. “I’m not talking to you,” Donna says immediately. She then turns and closes the back of her car. A glance through the window shows that Ellie has noticed the strange woman talking to her mother, but Kenny is intent on his Gameboy.

“Now, that’s not a very polite way to talk to a law enforcement officer, is it?” Stahl asks, her voice deceptively kind.

Donna scowls at her, unmoved by the cordiality. Once upon a time WitSec might have seemed to Donna like a dream come true. A way to get her family out of the shit. To get Opie out of the Club. She knows better now. There is no out. Opie can only ever be in. If he isn’t in he’s dead. That’s the rule of law that Clay had laid down; and until Jax is ready to make his move, it’s the way it’s gotta be.

“Try this on for size,” Donna suggests. “Fuck off.”

Stahl’s eyebrows crawl upwards in surprise as the vitriol in Donna’s voice. “Well. That wasn’t very nice. All I want to do is talk, Donna.”
Behind the ATF agent, Gemma pauses on her walk down the street. She tips her sunglasses down her face to get a real good look at the two women having it out in front of the local market. When she catches Donna’s eye she raises an eyebrow in question. Donna shakes her head in the negative. Only once, but that’s all that’s needed.

Gemma isn’t the only bystander, so the matriarch folds herself into the crowd to stay unnoticed by Stahl. She makes her way over so that she can step up if Donna needs backup or someone to take the kids if she gets arrested.

“Yeah? Well I don’t want to talk to you. So you can take your platitudes and your sagging boobs and shove them up your ass.”

She knows it’s a bad idea the second the words come out of her mouth, but Donna Winston has been spoiling for a fight for nearly six years. Her husband left her with two small kids to go to prison. Now, just when things are getting back on track, this woman comes along and threatens to take Opie away again. She and Opie have only just gotten back to themselves (with no little amount of help from the Pack). She’s not about to let herself be used to take it away.

“Careful,” Stahl says with a smile on her face that is more satisfied smirk than anything else. “You wouldn’t want to get arrested for attacking a federal officer would you?”

A pinched expression appears around Donna’s eyes, creating a crease between her eyebrows. It’s enough for Gemma to decide not to stay out of it after all. She starts forward, but she doesn’t move quickly enough as Donna carefully puts her purse in the front seat of the car, strides over to Stahl, hauls back and socks her in the face.

Stahl’s head snaps back with the impact. Her partner quickly forces Donna face first into the side of her car where both of her children watch with wide eyes as their mother is put into handcuffs.

Stahl carefully feels the place where she was struck. It’s going to bruise heavily, but not nearly as badly as it would if she was entirely human. She smiles as her partner forces Donna around to face her. The shorter woman has a glare on her face that could put most to shame.


Donna’s eyes meet Gemma’s. She tilts her head toward her kids and the older woman nods. Donna smiles and looks Stahl dead in the eyes, “Better than being thought a rat.”

Stahl stares at her for a long moment, face unreadable. Eventually she tells Donahue to put her in the car. Gemma steps forward when she turns to address the two children in the back seat of the car. The biker queen plants both feet between Stahl and the kids and raises her eyebrows.

“You might want to put some ice on that bruise, sweetheart.” She suggests mildly.

Stahl sneers at her before turning to get in the passenger seat of the sedan she and her partner have been using since they got into town. Gemma waits until the car begins to back out of its space before she turns and ducks into the car. She smiles reassuringly at Kenny and Ellie, who both look a bit frightened.

“Well,” she says, “that was something. What say we get you kids and these groceries home?”

* 

If someone had asked Adrian Hale where he’d thought he’d be at age of sixty-two he would have told them running for Presidential Election. Instead he’s sitting as a judge on the California Superior
Court and watching his son prepare to run for Mayor. He could, he knows, run for Senate. He has the credentials.

But he won’t. His closet is full of skeletons that hide werewolves behind them.

It’s no little thing, running for a powerful public office like Senator. People tend to sling mud at each other during political campaigns, and Adrian can’t afford for some trumped up journalist major trying to make a name for themselves to find out about werewolves. He had been quietly relieved when he’d learned that Talia’s family had been killed in that fire. The only apparent survivor had been in a coma with no sign of waking. Adrian had been almost certain that he could run during the next election.

Then Peter had had to go a ruin it all by waking up.

Adrian sighs and sits back in his chair. It’s an old antique thing, upholstered with green velvet. The oak of the frame carved in a classical revolutionary war era style and polished to a gleam. It has a high back and a matching ottoman. The upholstery isn’t original to the piece, but Adrian had made sure to use appropriate material when having it recovered.

The snifter of brandy in is hand gleams in the light from the fireplace. He lifts it and takes a deep sip. He rolls the liquid across his palate, appreciating the fifty-year-old alcohol. He inhales the heady aroma and waits patiently, dark eyes glittering in the light as his son settles in across from him.

Jacob is a good boy. A good son. Intelligent, savvy and dedicated.

He’s also an idiot.

For all that ambition Jacob carries around with him, he’s got no sense of anything beyond his happy little political and business spheres. He knows nothing at all about the kind of town that Charming really is. He isn’t willing to admit that Clay Morrow and the Sons of Anarchy are as big a threat as they are. Clay Morrow is a dug-in stubborn tick that has given Charming lyme disease.

They have to root out the cause of the infection before they can begin to treat it.

As it is, it may be too little, too late.

“So one of Talia’s little hellspawn has shown up in town has he?”

Jacob nods stiffly, “I saw David having lunch with him.”

Ah, David. He’d had such high hopes for David.

He takes another drink. “Your brother is disappointing. Leave him to me. Concentrate on the development and your campaign.”

“Yes, sir.”

* 

Abel doesn’t like the cold of the exam table. He protests being placed upon it in naught but his diaper vehemently with an ear-splitting wail. Jax attempts to hold him still as he squirms in an attempt to get away. He arches his back and scrunches up his face and begins to cry in earnest when he isn’t immediately picked up.

“Sorry Doc,” Jax says with a wince. Hearing Abel cry like this sucks, but in this case it’s necessary.
Dr. Turner Kilpatrick just grins at Jax. He’s fifty-seven years old and screaming babies are old hat to the experienced pediatrician. “He’s not the first to protest this process,” Kilpatrick says lightly as he prepares to give Abel the first of his shots. “And I doubt he’ll be the last.”

Sitting in the corner, Juice is sitting on his hands. He’s been married for maybe a week, and mated for nearly three. Ever since they’d gotten back from New York Juice has taken on a very active role in parenting with Jax. He wants to be over there with his mate, their kid, and the doctor, but he’d just get in the nurse’s way.

So he sits on his hands and tries not to laugh at Jax’s distress.

“This isn’t the first time we’ve done this, Jax.” Juice reminds the werewolf. Jax flashes him blue werewolf eyes. “And it’s not going to be the last. Just breathe.”

Jax snorts. Dr. Kilpatrick kindly ignores the display.

Abel is nearly seven months old now. On the growth chart he’s at about five months old, but he’d been born two months early, and those first weeks had been a struggle just to survive, much less grow. He no longer has to see the specialist or Tara at St. Thomas, but he still has regular visits with the pediatrician for immunizations (like now) and follow-up after the hole in his heart had been fixed.

Dr. Kilpatrick had been vetted by not only Jax, but by Gemma who did her research and John who did the background check. So far the Tellers have decided they like the man. He’s managed to remain completely unflappable in the face of the Sons, Jax’s same-sex marriage, and Gemma Teller-Morrow.

Thankfully, today only requires four shots, so it’s handled quickly and soon enough the baby is being scooped up into Jax’s arms and held close. He’s been poked, prodded, weighed, measured and given immunization shots. Juice stands to help Jax get Abel back into his Harley-Davidson footie pajamas. He kicks up a bit of a fuss, but quiets down when he’s handed his elephant and given back his pacifier.

“Well,” Dr. Kilpatrick says cheerfully once he’s taken off his gloves and the nurse has taken the tray to dispose of the detritus. He picks up Abel’s chart and makes a few notes. “You’ll be happy to know that Abel is perfectly healthy. He’s still a little small for a baby his age, but he’s putting weight on just like he should be. He should start teething here pretty quick, and that’s usually accompanied by a low grade fever and a lot of drool.”

“Yeah, my Mom was telling me about that. She bought a bunch of things for him when she was at the store the other day.” Jax says on a sigh. It’s been hard for him. To deal with Gemma, to let her be so involved after reading his Dad’s manuscript. After her reaction to Jax and Juice.

She’s trying. He’ll give her that. But Gemma Teller-Morrow does not like change.

“Well, it sounds like you’re prepared,” Dr. Kilpatrick says cheerfully. He accompanies the trio out of the exam room. “See Marlene about your next appointment, and I’ll see you guys next month.”

“Thanks Doc,” Juice says with a grin, shaking the man’s head.

The waiting room of the small doctor’s office has a table with toddler games on it and a row of hard plastic chairs. The three mothers waiting for their appointments with their kids (of varying ages) eyeball the pair of men when they appear in the room. Jax immediately goes to the front desk to make their next appointment. Juice takes Abel and sets about getting the wiggly kid into his car seat.

Juice garners a lot of attention just by being who he is. Here (in a perfectly mundane place) his
differences are even more prominent. He’s wearing big black boots, jeans with a wallet chain hanging off them, and the black leather kutte that marks him as a member of the Sons of Anarchy Motorcycle Club, Redwood Original Charter. If that wasn’t enough, he’s got a Mohawk and two large tribal tattoos on either side of his skull.

He’s absolutely terrifying to these white-collar mamas with their white-bread husbands. The fact that he’s got a pastel blue diaper bag over one shoulder and is wrestling an infant into a car seat? Yeah, just makes it stranger.

Juice ignores the women, though he is very much aware of the stares, as he runs the tip of Abel’s stuffed elephant’s trunk down Abel’s forehead and nose, making the baby stop fussing and let out a burst of surprised laughter. Juice can’t help but grin back at the wide, toothless smile he gets as Abel grabs at the elephant. A plushie ear makes its way unerringly into Abel’s mouth.

“Good job, kiddo,” Juice tells him. He digs out Abel’s Sons beanie and pulls it over his head.

“Here,” Jax says. He hands Juice an appointment reminder card, and the half-fae dutifully tucks it into his wallet. “Let’s get out of here.”

Juice refrains from commenting as Jax picks up the car seat and chivvies Juice out of the office. He does give the women a wide, dimpled smile and a wink on the way. Jax is looking a little wild around the edges as he secures the car seat into the back of the silver SUV they’d bought for just this purpose.

“Yes. Okay. No.” Juice says, rounding his husband and snatching the keys. “You are way too keyed up, man.”

Jax blows out a heavy breath, his cheeks puffing out for a second. “I know. I just. I don’t like it when he’s upset. It doesn’t smell right.”


Jax heaves a heavy sigh but nods once and turns to go. He pauses, then turns back and presses Juice back against the side of the vehicle. He crowds into the tweener’s space and kisses him heatedly for a few seconds. When he pulls away, his wolf is glowing through his eyes and Juice’s reflect the stars back at him.

“I’ll be back tonight.”

“No rush,” Juice says, a little breathless.

Jax grins wolfishly, then turns and jogs down the sidewalk. Juice watches him go until the blond turns the corner. Then he turns to check on Abel, not pausing for the woman standing on the sidewalk with her arms crossed and a smirk on her face.

“Hey little man,” Juice tells Abel, checking that he’s strapped in properly and has his elephant. “It’s gonna be a long day. You wanna go see grandpa?”

“Mr. Ortiz,” June Stahl says, her voice full of satisfaction. Like she thinks she’s just discovered the holy grail. “Does Clay Morrow know about your little relationship with his son?”

Juice shuts the door of the car softly and turns to Stahl. He knows he looks like he just got
thoroughly kissed. He doesn’t care. He gives her a self-satisfied smile in response and says, “Agent Stahl, I know you’re not a stupid woman. Let’s both pretend that you know that I can’t keep a secret to save my life and assume that everyone knows about Jax and I.”

Stahl narrows her eyes, “Okay. Well, if you’ll come with me, I’d like to have a few words with you.”

“Am I under arrest?”

“No. Not right now.”

Juice nods, then gestures to the car at his side. “Then I think I can drive myself to the station, thanks.”

“And how do I know you’ll show up? After all, Mr. Ortiz, you do have a habit of vanishing.”

Juice bares his teeth at her in a facsimile of an innocent grin, “You’re welcome to ride shotgun, Agent Stahl.”

She smiles back in kind, “I think I will.”

*

Opie’s phone rings, interrupting the tense stare down going on the Stilinski kitchen. He glances at it, but frowns at the caller ID saying it’s the police station. He looks up at Peter, who raises an eyebrow in question at the sudden tension in the big man’s shoulders.

“Hello?” Opie presses the phone to his ear and his grip on the little machine goes white-knuckled at the voice on the other end. The device creaks ominously in his grip. “Yeah. I’m on my way.”

“Opie?” Stiles is the one that cuts the tension.

Opie looks up at the Pair, fury written all over his face. “Donna’s been arrested. By Stahl.”

“She’s playing her hand,” Peter says, voice even.

“The kids?” Stiles asks.

Opie shakes her head, “Gemma’s got ‘em.”

Stiles envelops Opie in a brief hug. A comfort tactic that worked better on tactile werewolves than humans, but Opie appreciated the effort. When the young man pulls away he tells him, “I’ll go help.”

“Let’s go,” Peter says. He flicks his eyes to Robin. “You can wait for us to get back or you can come. If you come, stay out of the way.”

*

John Stilinski is pissed when he has to put Donna in lockup because she punched a fed. He doesn’t like it. He hates Stahl’s holier-than-thou attitude. The woman thinks she’s got the Sons dead to rights. That she’ll be able to work the families of the Sons and get one of the boys to turn States Evidence. She thinks she can take them all down through RICO.

It might have worked. If the Stilinski’s hadn’t come to Charming.

If Peter hadn’t taken the kutte when it was offered.
He lets Donna call Opie despite the fact that Stahl doesn’t want to let her. It’s her right, and he’ll push for it. Then he calls and makes sure the kids are okay before he takes dinner in to her. She’s been stewing for a couple of hours by that point, and she’s grateful for the report.

He doesn’t like it, but Stahl is pressing charges for assault and there were plenty of witnesses.

And then the blonde witch escorts Juice into the station. Juice, who has Abel’s car seat hanging from one hand.

From his office across the way, David looks alarmed.

John reaches for his office phone and dial’s Clay Morrow’s officially listed phone number from memory.

“What?”

“Stahl arrested Donna Winston this morning, and she just escorted Juice into my station house. He’s got your grandson with him.”

Morrow doesn’t reply. John doesn’t need him to. He hangs up the phone and goes out into the hallway with a blank expression on his face.

“Juice?”

Juice smiles at him. It’s a cheerful smile, and John would almost believe it was real except for the tiny bit of other showing through in his eyes.

“Hi!” Juice exclaims. He immediately sets the car seat on the chair by Officer Ruiz’s desk and bends to unbuckle Abel. “Look Abel! It’s grandpa!” He straightens with the infant in his arms. “Agent Stahl wants to have a chat with me. Do you mind?”

“Sure,” John says, and takes the baby. Abel offers him his elephant and John smiles down at the boy. “Thank you, but that’s yours. He needs to stay with you.”

“Call Clay,” Juice says in an undertone. “And Jax.”

“Already done,” John says. He looks around at Stahl and gives her a stern look.

“We’re just having a chat,” she says innocently.

Juice beams a grin at her, “Not without my lawyer present.” Then he breezes past her into the interview room.

He completely misses the irate expression that crosses her face.

John doesn’t.

He hides his smile by bending to pick up the diaper bag and haul Abel into his office.
Teeth

Chapter Summary

“Why am I only hearing about this now?” Clay demands.

“Because until now it’s been a Pack issue.” They all know how Clay feels about Pack business interfering with his organized and relatively simple (in comparison) gun-running operation. “Stiles and I can handle it.”

“So go handle it.”

Chapter Notes

This chapter is very much a transition chapter into the next bout of action. Necessary, but a little draggy. Still good though.

Note: There will be no chapter next weekend. I am spending the long weekend wandering the Air & Space and Natural History Smithsonians and won't have time to write. I will try to get a chapter out by Thursday, but life is chaotic right now and I can't promise that.

Disclaimer: Octarine as the color of magic belongs to Terry Pratchett and the Discworld. I own nothing SOA or TW.

Thirty-Two:

Clay thunders into the station like the wrath of god. He is flanked by Tig and Chibs. Before Alex Donahue can do anything more than notify Stahl of their appearance, Peter Hale sweeps into the building. If Clay is like the wrath of god, Peter reminds Donahue of a predator stalking its prey. He is flanked by Opie, Happy and a tall Mexican man Donahue recognizes as Jaime Martel, formerly of the Mayans MC.

A large, silent black man follows. He’s distanced himself from any of the Sons, but it’s obvious that he came here with them.

“Find out who that is,” Stahl orders softly as she straightens her suit jacket and firmly closes the door to the interview room containing Juice Ortiz. Or Teller, now. Donahue hands Stahl the sheet he’s just finished printing out. A copy of Jax Teller and Juice Ortiz’s (Teller) marriage certificate. She looks at it with some surprise. “That’s interesting.”

Clay blusters at desk sergeant, trying to blast his way through to where he can see Stahl and Donahue standing. Donahue isn’t an idiot, he’s thankful for the recent changes to the office rules the Chief has been putting into place. He doesn’t feel much like having Clay Morrow trying to make him
pee his pants up close and personal.

Peter, Happy, Martel and the unknown black man take seats in the waiting area by the front desk. They all seem content to just sit and remind the two ATF agents that they’re there. Donahue wonders if they know about RICO, or just suspect.

Opie Winston rocks up to stand next to Clay Morrow.

Donahue feels bad for the desk sergeant.

Clay is an intimidating man. He’s tall, with broad shoulders. He has a lot of presence, and has grown accustomed to using his build as leverage toward intimidation. He’s bluster and threats. The biggest thing about him is that people *know* that he’ll follow through with any threat he makes. In spades.

Opie has several inches on Clay. He also has the added bonus of that lumberjack beard and the physique of a much younger man. He’s also terrifyingly *present*. There is nothing about Opie Winston that will allow anyone to forget that he’s in the room. He’s solid, present and immovable. He’s a man of few words, but he doesn’t need to speak to make someone think twice before they speak.

“Sergeant James,” Opie says into the lull when Clay stops threatening the man. His voice in quiet, even and implacable. “Where is my wife?”

Richard James grew up with Opie and Jax. They’d been in most of the same classes throughout school. Rich had been a sports guy. He’d played on the high school baseball and basketball teams. They had run in different groups, but had always been aware of each other. They’ve never had a problem between them save for the fact that when Rich got back from his stint in the Marines he’d joined the Charming PD.

“In holding,” Rich says evenly. He’s choosing to ignore Clay for his own well-being. He’s a big enough boy to admit that the Sons of Anarchy President scares the ever-loving shit out of him.

“Agent Stahl is pressing charges for assault.”

Opie snorts, “Bail?”

Rich shakes his head, “She’s still being processed, but yeah, probably.”

“I’ll wait,” Opie says flatly. His eyes come up to look around the Sergeant to lock in Stahl and Donahue. There is no question on just who Opie is addressing when he next speaks. The intensity in his gaze and the banked rage in his voice make several people inch away from the pair instinctively.

“My wife is not to be in a room with *anyone* until our lawyer gets here.”

He about faces and pulls out his phone to call someone. There’s no question as to whom. Jax is the only person he would call.

Donahue returns to the desk he’s been using to try and get some kind of ID for the unknown man with Peter Hale.

No one notices the little man that appears in the room nearly five minutes later until after he’s signed himself in and spoken with the desk Sergeant. When he appears in between Stahl and the interview room where she’s stashed Juice. He’s shorter than her, but he has a certain presence around him. When he smiles, his mustache nearly hides his lips, but the corners of his eyes crinkle.

“Agent Stahl? Max Beecham from Beecham, Beecham and Court. I’m Mister Teller’s lawyer.”
Stahl stares at him like she’s wondering where he appeared from. From the set of her shoulders she obviously recognizes the name of the law firm. Donahue certainly has; and he’s only been on the job for a couple years.

Beecham steamrolls over Stahl when she opens her mouth to speak. “I’ll also be representing Donna Winston.”

No one in the bullpen notices the Chief’s door close in the wake of this announcement.

Everyone does their best to ignore the way that Clay goes still and watchful.

* * *

“We have to get rid of the ATF.”

John sighs heavily and gives his only child a very deadpan look. “What we need is a goddamn break,” he says flatly, and then sits Abel up on his knee with a burp rag draped over his forearm to burp the kid with a few expert pats on the back.

Abel looks exceptionally surprised at himself when he belches loudly. Thankfully he doesn’t spit up, and John will take any reprieve he can get.

Stiles slumps into one of the chairs across from John’s desk with a sigh. “I’m pretty sure this is all my fault.”

“Probably,” John agrees.

Stiles glares at him. “You’re supposed to be on my side.”

“I am on your side.” John replies mildly. “But cause and effect is a real thing. Also, I think we might be cursed.”

Stiles hums an agreeing noise. He watches John settle Abel back down into the crook of his elbow to let the kid finish his bottle. Abel kicks his feet and gamely holds onto the bottle with both hands.

“We kind of asked for things to be interesting when we took this job.” John eventually reminds Stiles. “We knew things were going to be pretty chaotic when we came here. You know, with the motorcycle club and the other stuff.”

“We didn’t expect White Pride to set up shop.”

“True. Though I’m pretty sure we all figured that Hunters would follow Peter here eventually.”

“Fucking Gerard Argent. How’s that going by the way?”

“I got Judge Sanderson to deny bail. He’s being held until trial. He’ll probably spend what’s left of his life in Chino.”

“Couldn’t happen to a nicer guy.”

The Stilinski’s sit in companionable silence for a minute. The only sound in the room is the ticking of the wall clock and the sucking sounds of Abel drinking his bottle.

“There’s a Fae in the waiting room,” Stiles eventually says.

A crease appears between John’s eyebrows, “That have anything to do with that dog thing that’s
roaming around town?"

Stiles shifts in his seat. “Not really. They are related, though.”

“Explain.”

“Well, you know I’ve been doing a lot of magic.” John snorts at the understatement. The sheer amount of wacky that Stiles has influenced into being has caused several in-depth debates on Pack Nights. Also, there are enough magical things going on around town that dispatch has gotten used to relaying faeries causing mischief over the radio and his officers have stopped finding it weird.

Never mind that three nights ago half the force had been chasing a pack of pixies all over town. John still isn’t sure how they kept that one from Agent Stahl. It had been enough evidence for anyone with doubts about the supernatural to get over it. The entire department has been exposed to the dual side of Charming. Every single one of them has taken it in stride.

John loves these cops. They’re like the ones in Beacon Hills. They don’t need explanations; they just need to know how to deal with a problem. They trust John to know what he’s doing.

“I’m pretty sure the dog thing is here because it wants to eat my magic and possibly the rest of me. The Fae came because I made the wellspring under the house.”

John sighs. He’s not going to mention what else might be under his house. He doesn’t care what he’s seen the garden gnomes using as makeshift tools. If he ignores it, then he can sleep at night and have plausible deniability to the illegal firearms being stored in his back garden.

“Clay’s going to be a problem soon,” John says.

Stiles nods in agreement, “He’s been sensing something’s coming for a while now. Also, I’m pretty sure he’s about to find out that Jax and Juice are a thing.”

“Well, crap.”

“Yep.” Stiles pops his ‘p’ just because he can, then adds, “We really need to get rid of the ATF.”

“We’re working on it.”

*

June Stahl’s day does not go the way she planned. Not even the fact that Luann Delaney and Gemma Teller-Morrow are escorted in on her orders less than half an hour after the arrival of Juice Teller into the interview room. Opie Winston has been allowed to go back and visit Donna, so at least he’s no longer looming like the bogeyman just outside the room.

Beecham, Beecham and Court is the kind of law firm that makes the blood curdle at the mere thought of them. They specialize mostly in corporate law with a good dose of international law to round themselves out; but it doesn’t stop them from representing their clients in every capacity. Case in point: Juan Carlos Teller. In the mortal world it is probably the oldest law firm in existence, making it prestigious. In the supernatural community, Beecham, Beecham and Court is the only firm that crosses over into both worlds.

It wouldn’t surprise Stahl at all if Max Beecham is one of the original Beecham’s to found the firm. Not with the ageless way presents himself. She personally tends to avoid lawyers on principal. She prefers prosecutors over defense lawyers; and the human kind over supernatural.
None of this is helping her mood.

The only upside is that Donahue confirmed that Clay overheard her calling Juice ‘Mister Teller’, and it’s obvious that he didn’t know his VP is in a gay relationship with his intelligence officer. That makes the cockles of her cold, black heart warm at the thought of the chaos she’s bringing down on the Sons.

She makes Juice and his lawyer wait for her. She’s always believed in certain forms of justice being best served petty. She’s a cat, she’s as petty as it gets.

She sits down across from the pair and offers them a smile, “Now, Mister Teller, let’s talk about Jax.”

* 

“Talk.” Clay demands, voice level and menacing.

Peter would find Clay intimidating if he hadn’t once ripped a nogitsune out of his mate with his wits and judicious application of his claws. The only thing Peter finds intimidating are flames bigger than what can be produced by the gas stove at home. He’s been burned alive twice, there will not be a third.

Also, his teeth are bigger.

“As you know, Stiles and I got married three weeks ago.” Clay nods tersely. He’d been made aware in chapel a few days later when Peter complained about having his honeymoon interrupted to debate about moving the guns from his back garden to somewhere they could be assembled and sold. The warehouse may have blown up close to six months ago, but it’s going to be at least another three before a permanent place is constructed. “It was a double wedding.”

“My son isn’t gay,” Clay states lowly.

Peter inclines his head, “True. He’s bi. Also, it’s Juice.”

The tips of Clay’s ears go red. It’s the only real sign of how angry the man is. It’s quite obvious that the man wants to yell at him, but won’t because of their current location. He’s well aware that no one in the station house is in his pocket anymore. Stilinski has made it perfectly clear that he’s willing to operate on a basis of out-of-sight out-of-mind. It could be worse, he could decide to actively investigate the Sons.

If asked, the Chief would express his opinion on this. Loudly, and with gusto. He’s not the kind to borrow trouble. The Sons have yet to bring him any trouble that they themselves started.

The door to the Chief’s office opens and Stiles exits the room with Abel snuggled up in his arms while the baby tries to fight off the nap encroaching on his awareness. He’s warm, safe, he’s got his favorite pacifier, and his belly is full. It’s a losing battle. Stiles meanders around the bullpen the long way, saying hello to a few of the officers on the way. Then he steps out into the waiting area where the Sons are waiting.

“Was that Gemma and Luann I saw?” he asks.

Tig nods, “Yeah. Gemma said Nita’s got the kids.”

Stiles nods. Good. Nita’s great. Abel loves her, and Opie’s kids really don’t mind her. It probably helps that she smells like cookies most of the time. She’s completely human, but her grandmama on
her mother’s side was a voodoo queen, and her grandpere on her father’s side was a witchdoctor. She’s also from New Orleans, and you can’t have roots in that city and not have some inkling about the supernatural.

“Call Rosen,” Clay orders. Chibs moves to do so, more than willing to exit the tension in the room for a few minutes. Clay doesn’t know Max Beecham from a hole in the ground, so his want of his own lawyer (tried and test and approved) is understandable. Peter lets it go, rising to meet Stiles when he steps through to where the Sons wait.

“Dad called Agent McCall while I was in there;” Stiles says softly. His voice is loud enough for the gathered Sons to hear, but not enough to carry to Agent Donhue’s eagle ears as he works from his commandeered desk by Stahl’s office door.

Peter makes a face, “Was that really necessary?”

Stiles shrugs and begins to sway in place. The sway is the one that all adults seem to instinctively know as soon as an infant is given into their care. It’s a comforting side to side motion that lulls the unsuspecting into a quiet, comfortably meditative state. It’s favored by parents everywhere for it’s ability to both calm and induce into sleep. Abel quickly loses his fight with sleep.

Peter sighs and sits back in his seat. “I hate to say it, but we may have bigger problems.”

Stiles says nothing, but the Alpha has certainly caught the attention of everyone around him. Peter digs out his phone and unlocks it before handing it over to his mate to show him the text he’d gotten from Derek on the way to the station.

Stiles reads it, “Well shit.”

Peter makes a humming noise of agreement and takes the phone when it’s offered to him. He looks around to check for eavesdroppers, determines that Donahue is far enough away that he won’t overhear and speaks to Clay in a tone that imparts how serious he is. “There’s something in town. It’s… old. Far beyond my experience. It’s been content to mostly stick to the woods, but it’s scented something it like the smell of.”

He very carefully does not look at Robin as he speaks. There is no need to draw attention to the stranger in their midst, and those who know about the Fae understand what he leaves unspoke. Clay doesn’t need to know until there is no other option.

Clay intones a string of epithets that make his usual foul-mouthed ways seem like a Sunday picnic. “Where’s it headed?”

Peter answers the question he knows Clay is really asking. “This way. It’s not a small beastie by any means, and it’ll cut a swathe through anything that gets between it and its target.”

“Why am I only hearing about this now?” Clay demands.

“Because until now it’s been a Pack issue.” They all know how Clay feels about Pack business interfering with his organized and relatively simple (in comparison) gun-running operation. “Stiles and I can handle it.”

“So go handle it.”

Peter tilts his head to one side, “I need Juice. And Opie.”

Juice is currently trapped in an interview room with the ATF agent from hell, and Opie still hasn’t
returned from visiting his wife in lockup.”

Clay growls. It’s impressive for a man who isn’t also a wolf.

Before he can say anything else, Jax bursts into the station with a wild look in his eyes and fury on his face.

*

Derek doesn’t need to be a genius to know that he’s in over his head. He knows for a fact that the only reason why he can track the beast is because it isn’t bothering to hide its movements. The smell coming off this thing is potent. A horrifying mix of decay, acid, sulfur and hunger that makes the wolf inside him want to run yelping in the other direction.

He stays further behind it than he probably should, but he doesn’t know the range of its senses and doesn’t want to be turned into an appetizer. Those are the scariest teeth he’s ever seen and the sight of the beast alone makes him want to pee himself a little in fear.

Derek isn’t a coward.

But he’s not an idiot. He’s outclassed, outmatched, and much smaller than his target.

And then the thing goes invisible and Derek knows they’re screwed.

*

“You’ve got nothing.”

“I don’t call a storied history of gun running, extortion, menacing and assault nothing.”

“You’ve got nothing you can pin on us.”

“Don’t I? What about Bluebird Feed Company?”

“Isn’t that that warehouse that blew up a few months back?”

“Yes. It was also a shell company.”

“Wow. Sounds serious.”

“Mister Teller, if you don’t talk to me, I can’t help you. You and your pretty little family will all go down and that pretty baby will end up in foster care.”

“Agent Stahl, please desist from threatening my client.”

“Abel won’t go into foster care even if both Jax and I go to jail. Pull the other one.”

“How about this one: I know what you are.”

“Do you? Please enlighten me.”

“You’re a werewolf. A half-black werewolf. I’m pretty sure that Clay Morrow won’t like either of those things.”

“Ha! Even if I was a werewolf, Clay wouldn’t care. Most of us have a little bit of somethin’ somethin’ goin’ on these days. As for the half-black thing, prove it. Also, racist much?”
“I’m not the racist here. Clay Morrow is, historically. He and Piney Winston.”

“Piney’s a stubborn old goat, but he’s not a fool.”

“Tell me about the guns Juice.”

“What guns? I thought you were accusing me of being a werewolf.”

“Tell me about the guns. About the real IRA.”

“Aren’t those guys Irish. I’m Puerto Rican, lady. Never been to Ireland.”

“So you’re telling me you don’t know where the guns you sell to gangsters and murderers come from?”

“Lady, I don’t sell anything other than my skills as a mechanic and occasionally my body. But that’s only to Jax and only when he asks me nicely.”

“Is that supposed to disgust me?”

“No. It’s hot though. I can see you picturing it in your head.”

“The Sons are going down, Juice. It’s just a matter of time. Tell me about the IRA and I can work out a deal on your behalf.”

“Sorry. Can’t help you.”

“Well, I can tell you that I will be quite happy to put you in cuffs when the time comes. You and your hot biker husband.”

“Oh honey, if you wanted to watch you just had to ask.”

“Agent Stahl, please stop goading my client.”

“It’s either me and the law, Juice, or Hunters and a wolfsbane bullet between the eyes. I hear they like Charming.”

Juice smiles. He rises from his chair, planting both palms on the table as he leans forward menacingly. His eyes bleed black as he lets go of his glamour. Agent Stahl leans back in surprise as the tweener’s true form comes to the fore, horns and all. His smile is slick, slow and sure.

“Agent Stahl,” he says, voice sibilant and low. “I think you need to rethink your strategy and reconsider all those little things you consider to be fact.”

Beside him, Max Beecham collects his things. “If you approach my client without a warrant again Agent Stahl, I’ll bury you in paperwork so deep you’ll never see the light of day again. If the Alpha doesn’t get to you first.”

Juice kindly holds the door open for the lawyer, still fully tween. He turns fathomless eyes on the ATF agent. When he speaks, his voice is not unkind. “You really need to decide if this particular bowl of cream is worth your life, Miss Kitty. ‘Cause that’s where you’re headed.”

Stahl sits staring after the pair for a long time after they leave.
Vacation was fantastic. I really needed it, even though injuries were involved. Also, if you have never had the opportunity to witness a 6'3", 300lb man in his mid sixties ride one of those little motorized scooters I highly recommend it. They're all over the National Mall and my Dad decided to try it. It was hilarious.

This chapter is a bit of a cliff-hanger. I meant to keep it going, but sometimes you just hit that place where the chapter must end because it's a perfect place. Luckily I have no further travel plans for this year (except Christmas at my sister's), so the weekly posting schedule should not be interrupted.

**Disclaimer:** Octarine as the color of magic belongs to Terry Pratchett and the Discworld. I own nothing SOA or TW.

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**Thirty-Three:**

The snarl of rage on Jax’s face actually manages to make Clay pause. It’s an expression he’s seen before. Usually in the mirror before he kills someone. He remembers seeing that expression the day before JT let himself be taken out by that semi. He remembers seeing it the day he had to bury Lowell Senior in a shallow grave with two no-name Mayans for being a turncoat.

“Son,” Clay says, voice even. “Not here.”

Jax sends him such a poisonous look that Clay’s heart seizes in his chest for a moment. Are the boy’s eyes glowing? No. It has to be a trick of the light. It has to be.

Peter rises with a kind of laconic grace and a bored expression. Not for the first time, the President feels a curl of dread deep in his gut. Voting Peter in was a mistake. Oh sure, having a werewolf in the charter has caused several of their rivals to back off. Hell, they have virtual peace with Alvarez and the Mayans now. All of it due to Peter.

Peter is a rising meteor among the sons. He’s stationed himself at Jax’s right hand and rallied the troops around him. Happy has started looking to Peter (and by extension Jax) for direction before looking to Clay. Opie has planted himself at Jax’s left with a stubborn tilt that reminds him of his father. Piney has always been a stubborn ass. Bobby has flat out stated that he’s remaining neutral. His vote goes whichever way leads to stability and profit for the club as a whole. Chibs is watchful. He looks more and more like the wary, jumpy, traumatized man that came over from Belfast so many years ago. He’s watching for the chips to fall before picking a side.

Tig at least still supports him. For now. Clay knows his Sergeant at Arms. Down to his bones he knows what kind of man Alexander Trager is. The only things Tig cares about are his kids and his next high. And the club. The club is Tig’s lifeblood. For now, their motives still align, but Tig will turn on him if it looks like Clay stepping down is in the Club’s best interest; or to save his own skin.
He doesn’t like this. Doesn’t like not knowing Jax’s mind. Hates that he can’t read the boy like he used to. Wendy had been good. She’d shoved Jax further into the club just by existing. Then the bitch had had to go and get pregnant. Don’t get Clay wrong, he loves his grandson and wouldn’t trade him for anything. But Jax no longer looks to Clay first.

Now he’s got Abel, and he’s got Juice twisted up into him. Juice. The loyal little puppy that used to be eager and willing to do anything Clay told him to, even if it would get him hurt. Now he’s apparently gone and married Clay’s kid. It’s apparent that Juice isn’t the pushover he pretended to be for so long. He’s got guts and brains in spades. Maybe too much.

He’s going to have to fight to keep the gavel. He can see that now.

Jax bypasses his brothers entirely to step up to the desk to demand to know where Juice and his kid are when the door to the interview room swings open and Juice steps out. Clay blinks in shock at the sight of him. His skin has gone a silvery-gray and his has great smokey horns in the shape of his skull tattoos spiraling off his head. Several of the officers in the bullpen put hands to their weapons warily.

Juice’s eyes reflect the overhead lights. As he strides out of the room to let his lawyer pass him. Max looks like a chubby Charlie Chaplin. He’s entirely out of place next to Juice in his black jeans, leather kutte and silver speckled skin.

Jax makes a noise and hops over the barrier between the little waiting area and the bullpen to stride toward Juice with his eyes glowing brightly blue. His back is to the other Sons, but the officers see his eyes. Several of them look torn over who to aim their weapons at.

“Stand down.”

The voice is absolutely level. Calm and authoritative. Instinctively, the officers relax, hands moving away from their weapons as Jax and Juice clash in the middle of the room in a kiss that none of them can look away from. It is raw, passionate and relieved; and entirely monstrous considering the men sharing it and how they look.

John Stilinski ignores the Tellers kissing in his station entirely. He gives several people very hard looks. All of his men (and women) back down, though a few are still wary. It’s one thing to chase pixies all over town, and another entirely to witness two dangerous beings come together in front of them. His deputy helpfully forces Agent Donahue back into his chair when it looks like he’s not going to acknowledge John’s order.

By the time the pair separates a few moments later, both have put away their otherness and now look like regular humans.

“I’m fine,” Juice says lowly. “She’s an idiot.”

Jax snorts.

John continues to ignore it all as he gets his people back to their regular business.

This is Stahl’s mess to clean up. She brought it down on herself. John’s hands are tied until he hears back from Agent McCall.

Until then, he’s got a town to protect.

*
Robin is fascinated. To find another Fae Above is quite extraordinary. To find one that is mated to a werewolf is entirely unprecedented. Oh, he can see by the look of him that he’s only a half-blood; but the boy’s Fae blood had obviously won out in his genetics. A Shadow Fae, and one touched by the moonpaths.

This town is absolutely fascinating.

His queen will be pleased with the information he will bring back with him. The fascinating collection of beings that this Alpha and his Spark have gathered around them is enough to make anyone with a head for power to salivate. Robin has his suspicions over just what kind of Alpha Peter Hale is. He’ll have to wait and see, but the idea of bringing news to his Queen of the rise of an Alpha of the Old Kin would see him greatly rewarded.

An Old Kin Alpha was even greater news than the rumors of a True Alpha making noise a couple of years ago. True Alphas were a dime a dozen versus the Old Kin. The giant wolves of old are, after all, supposed to be extinct. Run to death by Hunters in ages long past.

To see one, here, now, would be a feat. But to then have that Alpha soul bonded to a Spark.

The earth beneath his feet gives a sleepy murmur, like a great cat rolling over. It arches, pleased against the places where members of the Stilinski-Hale Pack’s feet touch its surface.

If Robin never Hunts again, this will have been worth it.

*

“You shouldn’t have let her get to you.”

Donna snorts and gives her husband a wry look. He’s got his arms crossed and his feet are a shoulder width apart. He’s looking at her with a serious expression, but she can see the tiny smile he’s hiding in his beard. “She’s been asking for it since she got into town, Op.”

“Maybe, but she’s a fed, Donna.”

Donna gets up and walks the two paces to the bars and leans on them. “It was gonna be me or Gemma who finally snapped. You think I should have kept my cool and let it be Gemma?”

Opie heaves a heavy sigh, “Not after what happened, no. But this is shit, Donna. That skinny bitch is going to do everything she can to get you locked up for assault.”

Donna shakes her head, “No. She’ll drop the charges. There were too many witnesses that heard the shit she was saying. No, she’s using this to try and get me to turn rat again.”

Opie snorts again, then steps forward to reach through the bars and drift his knuckles down her cheek, “You’re a hothead, Mama.”

“You love me.”

“Yeah.”

The Winstons stand there for a few minutes in silence. Donna has learned to appreciate the silence that is inherent in her husband. He speaks few words, but he feels deeply. She knows he lies to her by omission. What he does for the club is beyond what she wants to know. The gulf between them is smaller since they became part of the Stilinski-Hale Pack, but club business is club business.
“How did your talk with Stiles go?”

“Okay.” He shifts to lean on the bars next to her. “It’s called Earthspeaking, I’m not going nuts.”

“That’s good, right?”

He heaves a gallic shrug with one shoulder, “He sent me to that new age store on Vine with Peter for some books.”

“Good. You can do your homework with the kids,” she teases. He chuckles lowly, more felt than heard.

After a few more minutes have passed and the officer keeping watch has started to hum in his boredom, the door to the holding cells opens and a short, round little man in a bowler hat enters the room. Stiles follows behind, a sleeping Abel in his arms.

“Hi guys,” Stiles says. “This is Max Beecham. He’s the family lawyer. Max, this is Donna Winston and her husband, Earthspeaker Opie Winston. Donna’s our Pack Mom, but she’s entirely human.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet both of you, despite the circumstances,” Max greets the pair. He turns to the officer, making the man straighten from his slouch against the wall. “Officer Neves, I would like to speak with my clients privately, please.”

Neves nods rapidly and steps forward. It’s the work of just a few minutes to have Opie, Donna, Max and (upon invitation) Stiles ensconced in one of the interview rooms. Max goes about making himself comfortable by making Officer Neves go on a coffee run and unpacking a legal notepad and a beautifully engraved fountain pen from his briefcase.

“Now,” Max says after the coffee has been delivered. “Why don’t you tell me what happened?”

* 

“Hey, what’s up?”

“That big monster dog thing’s on the move.”

“Where?” Peter raises his hand to stall the questions he can see forming. He strains his hearing. It sounds like Derek is running.

“Headed southeast down Beech. Just crossed the intersection at – “ There’s a pause as Derek grunts. The denting of metal and someone yelling at him. “Wickwire. There’s a car accident. I don’t think anyone is injured.”

Peter raises his hand to catch John’s attention and waves him over. “Accident at Beech and Wickwire. Fender bender I think, but the cause is headed in this general direction.”

John quickly orders a couple of officers to head to the accident. When David appears he’s ordered to arm whoever is left in the station. He turns to do as ordered, but is stalled by Agent Stahl blocking the hallway to the armory.

“Don’t get too close, but keep it in sight.” Peter orders his nephew, who grunts in acknowledgement. He looks over at Jaime, who stands with glowing eyes. “Get Stiles. And Opie.”

Jaime hops the barrier toward the back of the station easily and lopes toward the interview rooms.

Peter turns to look at the unobtrusive Fae sitting in one of the hard plastic waiting room chairs.
“Iarrthóir Robin of the Summer Court; I, Peter Stilinski-Hale, Alpha of this Territory, invite thee to join my Pack on a Hunt for a Creature of Old.”

Robin rises at the formal language. He sketches a short bow and smiles sharply, “It would by my honor to represent my Queen on this Hunt, Alpha Stilinski-Hale.”

Peter nods once; sharply. “Juice, get me a bird’s eye view. I want to know where we can intercept it.”

Juice nods and steps into the tween with a whisper of shadows as Stiles and Opie appear. Stiles delivers Abel into Half-Sack’s arms when the prospect stands up in anticipation of being able to do more than try not to get noticed by Clay. He’s handed the diaper bag by Jax, who says, “Take him to my Mom. You don’t stop, you don’t look back. My kid gets so much as a hangnail on your watch Prospect and I’ll feed you your own liver.”

Half-Sack nods rapidly and accepts the keys to Stiles’ jeep. Jax scents his son for a fleeting moment. “Go out the back door.”

“Turning onto Abernathy,” Derek’s tinny voice says from the phone in Peter’s hand. “Shit. I think this thing is headed right for you.”

David takes the initiative to move Stahl out of his way by grasping both her shoulders and shunting her to one side. John starts barking orders into his radio for units to block the streets leading into the creature’s path and for a few people to get out onto the street and start clearing civilians out of the way. By the time David comes back and he and the officers that went with him start distributing weapons and ammunition, the Sons and Pack have circled up.

“Call it, Alpha,” Jax says.

Juice ghosts back into the room with a grim look on his face, “I’m pretty sure it’s got a target. It’s completely ignoring the edibles on the street, no matter how much they scream.”

Peter nods once and squeezes Stiles’ had when his Bonded weaves their fingers together. “John, David, you and yours need to keep a perimeter. We’ve got to keep as many innocents out of the way as we can, and guns are only going to piss this thing off.”

John nods and barks at his men to get moving. The station quickly empties, leaving only Stahl and Donahue as the only law enforcement officials in the building.

“Happy, you circle around to the rear and meet up with Derek. It does not get to retreat.”

“You got it,” Happy gravels out and lopes out the door as his features elongate and his teeth sharpen.

“Jax, Jaime, Juice back up the cops. It goes for any soft targets you turn it back.” Peter looks over at Opie, “Think you can do anything?”

Opie shrugs, “I could maybe call up a minor earthquake if I had to, but at this point it’s not likely.”

“Right. You and the others can help the cops keep the area clear.”

Clay immediately protests being sidelined, “Now, you know we’re a damn sight better than out boys in tan and you know it.”

Peter flashes his eyes at Clay, “Far and beyond, but like I said, guns are only going to piss it off. Unless you want to get eaten, then be my guest.”
Clay subsides, but certainly isn’t happy about it. This will definitely be brought up in church.

“Robin, you’ll stand with Stiles and I. I get the feeling your arrival here may have triggered this.”

Robin inclines his head, “Such things have happened before. I will do as you say.”

Peter turns to Stiles, whose eyes are beginning to glow with flickers of octarine. The Spark smiles. It isn’t a nice smile. It reminds Peter of the kind of smile that used to cross that face when the Nogitsune was riding Stiles’ body like an ill-fitting suit. His own eyes flicker and flare up ruby in response. Stiles reaches up and cups the side of Peter’s neck with his hand, the scars from their Mating pressing into the older man’s neck. Peter returns the embrace, tilting his head to press their foreheads together.

“We are unchallenged,” Stiles begins, his voice laden with power. “This is our territory. Let’s go kick this thing’s monster ass back to the stone age.”

Peter grins, baring fangs too big to fit in his mouth as Stiles’ eyes flare up like miniature suns. The Alpha steps away from his soulmate and shrugs out of his clothes without a care for who might be watching. As soon as he’s down to his skin he turns to the door and strides toward it, Stiles and Robin taking position at his sides instinctively. His bones creak and crack, skin darkening as the shift crawls along his form.

He hits the ground in front of the station on all four paws, big as a small car with silver shimmering through his inky black coat. His eyes glow like burning coals.

His Spark steps up next to him, his veins lighting up with octarine as he sheds motes of power into the air around himself.

The Alpha of Charming tilts his head back; and then he howls.
Battle

Chapter Notes

This entire chapter fell out of me late on Wednesday night and I really had to fight myself not to post it right then and there. I’m glad I did, because it had more grammatical errors in it than usual and reading through it this morning was a good idea. Still not a guarantee that I got everything, however.

Additionally, I decided a long time ago not to bring Darby and the Nords into this fic. For those of you who have not watched SOA, Ernest Darby is a drug dealer and pimp from the series that tries to bring his business into Charming without Sons permission and suffers for it. I don't like the character, but I have adored Mitch Pileggi since his early X-Files days so my mention of Darby here is a nod to a fantastic actor.

We broke 100k words with this chapter! Yay! When I started this, I had no idea that there were that many words to this story and then some. We are winding up for the final push however. The only thing left to deal with is Clay.

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Thirty-Four:

The day that a monster is killed in front of Charming Police Department is a day that (for most of the citizens) will be the day that the town’s collective supernatural blinders were forcibly removed. It is also the day that John Stilinski cements himself as beloved in the hearts of the townsfolk. The police force (under his command) not only protect innocent bystanders that day, but it is noted by Alice Horresford of the Charming Gazette that they had been prepared.

For most, the giant dog with rabies that attacked one of the Sons on his way out of the station is nothing more than that: a giant black dog with rabies. For eyewitnesses, the knowledge that their local police and even the Sons are prepared to protect them from nightmare monsters is comforting in the face of it. For some, the inconvenience of road construction to resurface the intersection in front of the station is more newsworthy than the cops doing their job.

For Agent June Stahl of the ATF, it’s a deep look into the maw of the creature that she’s attempting to take down. A clear and frightening message that in this particular case she has bitten off more than she can chew. She will never admit that if it wasn’t for the Sons of Anarchy she would have been dead several times over that day. She will live the rest of her life in denial of the fact that a Son of all people is directly responsible for the fact that she survived the day.

For Clay Morrow there is a moment of surreal realization. It happens as he’s yanking the ATF bitch out of the line of fire. The realization tells him several things. First, that his son and heir has willingly become a werewolf. Second, that his brothers now instinctively follow Jax’s orders; and by proxy Peter and Stiles’. Thirdly, the change that has been wrought in his town and in his club are too big to fight. He must adapt or be dethroned.
Several other decisions are made that day:

- Ernest Darby decides that he was perhaps a bit hasty in deciding to move his operations into Charming.
- Jaime Martel will be voted in as a Son. Unanimously.
- Stiles Stilinski is the scariest one of them all. Giant Alpha Werewolf’s got nothing on him.
- Wayne Unser decides that he’s glad this shit show is no longer his problem.

The rest of it fades into urban legend. The proprietress of Caliana’s Magic Shop on Vine makes sure of it.

*

Robin stays a step behind the Alpha Pair as the wolf throws his head back and howls a challenge. The howl they receive in answer is more of a barking sort of roar than a true howl. It’s the kind of noise that sends a shiver of terror down the spine and all the hair on Robin’s arms raising in alarm. He hasn’t heard a sound like that in over two-thousand years.

Sparks of octarine float around Stiles in an ever-increasing radius. Robin takes the opportunity to snatch a few out of the air and channel the bits of pure magic into his armor as his glamour fades away. His true nature shows in the points of his ears, the sharpness of his cheekbones and the faint glow of his eyes. His armor was crafted from the carapace of a giant fire beetle and is an iridescent deep green. The script etched into his weapon begin to glow as he channels the power into it.

Robin may not have any affinity for the casting of spells, but he is still Fae. He is magical by nature, and this allows him to enhance his few natural abilities in the right circumstances.

The guardsmen (called police by the locals) have created a series of roadblocks at the entrances to roads that lead away from the station. They have left the road to the front steps of the station open. Robin can see men and women in uniform mixing with the black kuttes of the Sons of Anarchy. All are armed with weapons. Only those members of the Pack that Peter singled out stand outside of cover.

Behind them, the irritating blonde female steps out of the station with her male companion as she straps on a bulletproof vest.

“Do us a favor, Agent Stahl,” Stiles says, power leaking out from between his teeth as he turns his gaze on her for a second, “and stay out of the way.”

It is not a suggestion. Agent Stahl does not get a chance to answer as their opponent rounds the corner two blocks west of the building.

“Lies na diathan,” Robin hisses. “That is a cù acras. A hound of hunger. They have been thought to be extinct for many centuries.”

“Obviously not,” Stiles says as the creature throws its head back and roars a challenge.

Peter, matched in size by the hound, steps forward with a snarl and answers the challenge.

Robin draws his sword and utters a blessing for fortune in battle.

Stiles’ smile goes sharp-edged as the hound and wolf charge each other. He raises his hands, balls of bright light in his hands as he follows after his mate.

Robin does his best to keep up.
In full shift Happy isn’t much bigger than he usually is. He’s just… not human in any way. He’s a deep ashy gray with elongated arms and legs that end in long-fingered hands with nails meant for rending flesh. His head is a bit bigger, with large almost bat-like ears. To Derek he smells of rotten flesh and deep earth.

His strange, loping run allows him to easily keep up with Derek’s werewolf speed. Everything inside the wolf tells him that this thing will eat him if given the chance – or it would if it wasn’t for the strong Pack Bond tied between the pair of them.

It takes until the pair of them have rounded the corner after the black dog and established a defensive line behind the creature with several police cars and armed officers that just what Happy Lowman is comes to him. Derek puts himself between the cops and the goddamned chupacabra as it begins to pace the width of the road, eyes riveted on the clash of teeth as the monster and their Alpha collide in the middle of the street with an ear-popping thud.

Derek will never admit it, but staring into Happy’s eyes (black with glowing white pupils that track the smallest prey) and looking into that grin full of two inch needle-like teeth is far more frightening to him than anything he’s ever encountered before.

And he’s seen some terrifying shit.

*  
The monster’s claws tear great furrows into the asphalt beneath their feet as it snaps its teeth. The wolf snaps back, twisting away while sinking fangs into his opponent’s hide. The monster doesn’t flinch. The teeth are like the bite of a mosquito. Annoying, but altogether beneath notice. Not with the Spark walking down the middle of the street toward them. He walks, a great beacon of power, bands of the purest light writhing around his arms as he creates lashes out of nothing. The wolf bites again, tearing this time.

It hungers for that power. It’s going to eat that power. First it must rid itself of this nuisance.

It turns, rears back and rakes its claws down on the wolf. The wolf avoids one paw, but not the other. Hot blood sprays from the wounds. Droplets pattering against the torn-up asphalt in a ten foot arc. The wolf snarls, but gives no room to the creature. The wolf turns, favoring its side. The creature snarls, acid dripping from its jaws to sizzle into the ground.

A hot stripe of pain lances across its left flank. It turns to see a bright shard of metal dancing away from it. A tall creature wields the shard. Face a moue of cold concentration. The Fae.

Yes. Yes. Come little Fae. Come to the slaughter. It has been so long since I have eaten the power of your kind. I will drink your blood and consume your heart and all you are will be mine.

The beast turns, snarling and lunging for the Fae. He dodges out of the way, rolling gracefully to one side of the attack. It lunges after it, but a bright lash of searing heat wraps around its muzzle, yanking it around. It follows the cord of white-hot light as it sheds bits of plasma into the ether to its weilder.

Yes! Come. A feast! Such power will sate my thirst.

The giant Alpha wolf at the beast’s back lunges up and onto its back, teeth snapping and claws digging in. It makes the beast roll in fury, breaking the lash about it with a whip crack snap as the two huge creatures snap and claw at each other.
Juice, fully transformed for the first time in public, almost immediately begins to use his powers. He flashes here and there, intercepting the largest of the debris coming flying from the battle in the middle of the intersection and directing it through the moonpaths to somewhere the large chunks of pavement aren’t at risk of flattening or beaming anyone in the noggin.

As the Alpha and the huge scary dog-thing begin the kind of death roll that makes Juice think of alligators, Jax wolfs out completely and yanks Clay out of the way of a piece of half-melted asphalt. It hits the windshield of the cop car the President was standing by with a crash of breaking glass and the bubbling of tar as the black stuff melts through the hole in the windscreen to drip thickly onto the dashboard.

“They’re coming this way!” David Hale yells. “Watch your aim! Don’t hit the wolf!”

A series of clicks as weapons are cocked sound. Clay gives Jax a speaking, furious look that says they’ll be having words later and raises his .45. Jax bares his teeth back at his stepfather, then crouches to brace himself to attack the monster rolling toward him. Juice steps out of the shadows at his side and they share a look before they turn and charge into battle.

It’s the kind of look that doesn’t need words to have meaning. It says: *don’t get dead.*

*  

There’s a pounding between Opie’s ears that pounds in time with his heartbeat as he deflects another chunk of concrete. He diverts it to the right this time as he staggers. The earth beneath him surges up to steady him. Charming herself muttering in discontent as she begins to feed the strength of solid stone into her Speaker.

Opie steadies, feet once more solid on the ground.

The next chunk of debris to fly in the general direction of the barricade he’s protecting nearly squashes June Stahl flat. It stops midair for a moment before dropping to the ground at her feet. She looks around with wide eyes to find herself on the receiving end of a bloody smile from the Son as his nose begins to bleed.

He turns back to the fight, hands clenched into fists at his sides.

*  

Stiles turns and flings up his other arm, the lash follows the movement. It catches around the beast’s rear foot and he yanks backward, believing that he is strong enough to pull the creature backward. It roars as it gets dragged back toward the center of the intersection as the lash begins to sear through the flesh it’s wrapped around.

Robin darts past him, his glowing sword flashing as he swings for the extended limb. The sword bites deeply into the flesh of the hock, clipping into bone before pulling back. The blood along the length of the blade sizzles ominously, even as Jaime appears and wraps his arm around the leg as Happy claws his way up the flank to hack at the wound with his talons.

Stiles sets his feet and prepares to haul backward even as arms wrap around him to aid in his effort.

Robin swings the sword up for a second swing, sword flashing through the air as Stiles and the packmate at his back haul back on the lash he has wrapped around that foot.
The limb separates from the beast with a sickening tearing sound. The creature roars and writhes, flinging Pack in every direction as it thrashes in pain at the loss of the limb. It roars and turns, lunging for Stiles and Derek as they fall backward under the sudden give. Stiles loses concentration on the lash with a yelp as they crash to the ground.

He has just enough time to throw up a small shield as the beast’s teeth snap down on them.

* 

John screams his son’s name as Stiles vanishes into that mouth. He starts firing as quickly as he can, stalking out from behind his cover, his own safety forgotten. Several of his men follow their Chief.

Opie Winston himself steps up next to John Stilinski with an oath as he concentrates as hard as he can. His ears begin to bleed as chunks of asphalt begin to rise to the air and fling themselves at the monster. Each of his footsteps is heralded by the cracking of the asphalt beneath his boots as Charming drives strength into him.

* 

Peter will never admit to weakness of any kind. It’s not in his nature. His wounds scream at him with every breath. The claw marks down his side had cut nearly to the bone. His left front forepaw’s range of motion has been hindered, some of the muscles and ligaments severed. He’s lost too much blood already, but he can’t stop.

He won’t stop.

He rears back to get as much leverage as he can and lunges at the thing’s unprotected neck. His teeth sink into flesh and sinew. The searing pain of the blood of the creature burning his mouth is familiar and nothing in comparison to the wild panic in his heart as his mate vanishes under the beast’s teeth.

He digs his claws in as much as he can and wrenches himself backward with as much strength as he can muster.

At the same time Iarrrthoir Robin’s ancient magical sword flashes out, aiming for the throat as the Alpha hauls the beast’s head backward. There is a glimmer of octarine as the beast rears back to get away from the blade at its throat. Peter twists his body to throw the beast away from his mate. Robin darts forward, sword ready as the Alpha goes for the wound created by the sword.

He cannot afford to look behind him. He must trust his Bond and Stiles.

* 

In a small crater of shattered ground, a small dome of octarine flickers out of existence as the wolf drags the monster away from the pair beneath the dome. Derek pops up immediately, checking their surroundings before climbing out of the crater and leaning down to help Stiles out of the hole. Blood is trickling from one ear, and the sclera of his right eye has gone red due to busted capillaries. There’s a ringing sound in his ears.

He leans heavily on Derek’s shoulder as they turn to face the fight.

Peter rips the throat of the creature out with a great tearing sound at the same time as Robin thrusts his sword into the monster’s eye up to the hilt and discharges whatever ability the sword holds.

There is a moment of utter silence.

Then, with a slick groaning sound like the air being let out of a balloon, the monster slumps to the
Death coils heavy in the air for a moment that feels like eternity.

And then it begins to rain.

Stiles turns his head up toward the clear sky, allowing the sunshower to neutralize the blood and saliva of the beast that had quite obviously wanted to eat them all. He turns dimly glowing eyes to Derek who looks back at him with werewolf blue in his own and his hair plastering itself to his head.

“Not funny.”

Stiles smiles cheekily at him (they both ignore how tired he looks). “It’s a little funny.”

John arrives, thrusting his rifle into Derek’s chest so that he can check on Stiles for himself. “You’re okay?”

“Mostly. All my limbs are attached.”

“Not funny, kid.”

Stiles shrugs. “Get me over there?”

The trio turn to head in Peter’s direction. Most of the pack is already circling around the downed Alpha. In the distance John can see David slowly getting his officers into motion to cordon off the area and start cleaning up. When they reach Peter Jax is lowering an unstable Opie to the ground. Juice is using a bottle of water he got from somewhere to rinse off the blood coating Robin where the rain hasn’t reached.

Happy is licking the blood off his fingers, the only one unaffected by the caustic nature of the beast’s blood.

Jaime seems to have taken it upon himself to intercept Agent Stahl and herd her back toward the station house.

Stiles plops down on the ground and Peter shifts his great head into his lap with a groan of effort and pain. Stiles runs his filthy hands into the matted fur and hisses as his hands sting when they come into contact with the blood of the creature. The slight rain he’s managed to conjure isn’t doing much for his soulmate.

“Shhh,” he murmurs into Peter’s ear. “I’ve got you.”

Derek and Jax crouch on either side of the Spark to settle their hands on his shoulders, lending him strength from Pack as he taps into his Spark again. Juice appears to set his hands on Jax’s shoulders and lend his own strength. Happy quickly joins them as the only other packmate not currently occupied or too wounded to help.

Stiles reaches down into himself.

He believes.

Beneath him, Charming surges into full wakefulness as pure creation and healing coalesce into being around Stiles Stilinski-Hale. She reaches for her Speaker at his side and lends her power to healing him. She creates an eddy in the Current, allowing Stiles to tap into the river of the world and draw strength from it.
The acidic nature of the beast’s blood and saliva is neutralized on any creature, even as it turns on itself and begins to rapidly corrode and dissolve the creature itself. Peter’s bones begin to knit. The hemorrhage in Opie’s brain stops and reverses itself. The accelerated healing of the wolves is aided and pushed to act faster.

The Fae called Robin draws into himself the pure healing power of a Spark and is Changed for it, even as his wounds close.

Peter comes into awareness and with a ripple of skin and the clicking of bones he shifts back into his human form and cradles Stiles in his arms. He uses their Bond to stabilize the work the Spark is doing. To channel some of that healing into Stiles through it.

When it’s over, the street is torn up and thrashed. The site of a great battle. The rapidly decomposed corpse of the monster that started it flickers into fire as Happy sets it alight to burn it to ash and dust.

Bystanders turn to go about their lives now that it’s over. For most, life will go on, unchanged as they convince themselves it really was just a giant rabid dog and a car accident that the cops quickly dealt with it. For other, their worldview has changed forever as the knowledge of the kinds of creatures that live in their town settles into them.

Either way, they all go away feeling safe. After all, the cops had dealt with the problem. Their new Chief obviously knows what he’s doing. He even pulled in the Sons as reinforcements. They are obviously in the know.

Of course they are. They are, after all, criminals. And criminals live on the edges of society, where things like werewolves dwell.
After

Chapter Summary

“What was the phone call?” Derek asks as Jaime un-pauses Vikings on the television.

John sighs again, “That was the warden at Santa Rita Jail. Gerard Argent was declared dead early this morning.”

Derek makes a noise around his cookie. Then he swallows and says, “Couldn’t have happened to a nicer guy.”

Chapter Notes

I love writing after-the-battle domesticity chapters. They make me happy. This one was fun. It took a while to decide how to handle Stahl, but in the end I decided that Clay deserved the moment of triumph given by being the one to deal with it.

Additionally, babies are hard to write. I tried a little bit of Abel-pov for this and it was an exercise in trying not to make him emote like a dog or something. Give me a child of two or older and I’m golden, because they have words and serious personalities. Babies under a year old spend a hell of a lot of time sleeping and figuring out how their own limbs work while communicating through basic noises. A kid between one and two is at least crawling/starting to walk and has first worst and the beginnings of toddler-crankiness to aid in the effort.

Anyway…. I will stop ranting about the difficulty of writing small children to produce a couple of book recommendations! I have been reading a lot of poetry since my grandmother passed. It was one of the things we shared. As a result, I have been reading newer poetry. Hence recommendations. If you like poetry, if it speaks to you in any way:

1) Emily Skaja - Brute
2) Ann Lauterbach - Spell
3) Kyle Tran Myhre - A Love Song A Death Rattle A Battle Cry

Disclaimer: Octarine as the color of magic belongs to Terry Pratchett and the Discworld. I own nothing SOA or TW.

Thirty-Five:

“Oh let me see your beauty when the witnesses are gone…”

Dance Me to the End of Love, The Civil Wars
Stiles arches into the hand stroking down his back with a tired groan. It’s a needy, satisfied, wanton thing. It makes Peter hum and nose into the crook of Stiles’ neck to mouth at the skin he finds there. Stiles settles into the heat his wolf exudes and tilts his head a bit to give him better access. He’s still riding the endorphin high that comes with channeling so much pure magic. Every time they touch, sparks of octarine flicker off them like static.

Something in the back of Stiles’ mind nudges at him. It’s an old sort of thing, sleepy and contented but entirely too aware.

Stiles groans again, “When did we get a Nemeton?”

Peter growls at the word and he nips at the underside of Stiles’ chin in admonition before leaning up to look his lover in the eyes. His own are a glint of ruby beneath heavy, tired lids. “Since it appeared in the yard.”

Stiles pulls their blanket up a bit more so that their warm cocoon will remain uninterrupted. “Huh.” He blinks, then relaxes as Peter curls around him with a tired grumble. He lets himself relax as the mattress dips under a slight weight. Twila digs her way into the cocoon with a delighted twitter and drapes herself over Peter’s back, wings outstretched to take advantage of the higher body temperature of the wolf. Peter huffs, but leaves her where she lay.

Through a series of rapid pictures and emotional impressions Stiles gets the gist of the story from Twila before the faerie dragon dozes off. The Nemeton had translocated into the yard sometime during the fight or immediate aftermath two days before. Yes, it is the Nemeton from Beacon Hills, Derek had double and then triple checked.

No one can figure out how it grew back into a full tree or how it managed to translocate itself several hundred miles south past the strongest set of wards in the western hemisphere to settle near the gnome-bed.

No one wants to look too closely at why.

The Willow is quite put out about no longer being the only tree in the yard.

The gnomes adore the extra shade, though are quite grumpy about having their network of tunnels interrupted by the roots of a gigantic oak tree.

The flower faeries and house brownies seem to have started a war over acorns due to its arrival.

Additionally, there is a very surprised family of squirrels now living in the yard. Twila likes them best because they’re fun to chase.

“We were only asleep for a day!” Stiles exclaims at the barrage of information. “Two tops!”

Peter snorts. “Since when has that stopped anything from happening. I slept for over six years and yet…”

Stiles pinches Peter just below his ribcage where his love handles would be if his supernatural nature would allow for such things. It makes him yelp and roll away from him. Twila protests the movement vehemently and flaps her way out of the cocoon, leaving behind a few feathers and indignation.

They wrestle around for a few minutes before settling. This time Stiles gets to press his ear to Peter’s
chest and listen to his heart beating. Peter runs his fingers through Stiles’ hair and stares up at their bedroom ceiling. His eyes flicker back to their normal blue. The magic flickering between them calms as Stiles centers himself on Peter.

“I never imagined a life like this,” Stiles says softly a few minutes later. Peter hums a response so that Stiles knows he’s listening. “I mean, it’s way better than I ever imagined. I always imagined that I’d eventually win Lydia over, we’d get married and have 2.5 kids. I’d go into law enforcement like my Dad and hold her purse while she ruled the world… This is better.”

For a long time, Peter is quiet. “I almost had that. Or my version of that. I was working on my doctor’s thesis when the fire happened. After that I was going to take a faculty position at whatever university was in whatever city was the farthest away from Talia and chase old books across the world. I would have taken Corinne and Malia with me if Talia hadn’t taken the memories away from me.”

Stiles had decided a while back that he doesn’t like Talia Hale. No disrespect to her memory or anything. He knows that she was a good mother and that Derek loves her, but she was a heavy-handed Alpha with a my-way-or-the-highway style of doing things that Stiles just doesn’t gel with. It had put her and Peter at odds more often than not, and he knows that makes Peter feel conflicted in the wake of everything that’s happened since he woke up.

“I like this,” Peter says softly. “This life we’ve built together. Our Pack. You.”

It’s Stiles’ turn to hum. His is pleased. He squeezes Peter’s torso where he’s got his arms wrapped around the older man. “I love you.”

“I love you, too.”

* 

John hangs up the phone and heaves a sigh, dragging his hand down his face. Across from him, nestled into the couch, Jaime watches with curiosity. He knows better than to badger the Chief. The man raised Stiles, he’s got no end of patience and the ability to resist endless questioning by curious minds. Derek wanders into the room in his bare feet with a large glass of milk balanced on top of a package of oreos. He settles into the unoccupied corner of the couch.

John leans back and then pull the handle on his armchair so the legs go up and he’s reclined into the comfortable seat. Twila pops up as if summoned by the sound. She hops up into his lap and kneads his chest for a few seconds before curling up on his stomach with a happy chirrup. Her wings flare out dramatically and John gives into her demand and starts to scratch the hard to reach places around her wing joints.

“What was the phone call?” Derek asks as Jaime un-pauses Vikings on the television.

John sighs again, “That was the warden at Santa Rita Jail. Gerard Argent was declared dead early this morning.”

Derek makes a noise around his cookie. Then he swallows and says, “Couldn’t have happened to a nicer guy.”

John snorts, “Sure.”

“How’d it happen?” Jaime asks as he steals a handful of cookies.

“A fight broke out in the yard and he was stabbed in the confusion,” John explains. “Nobody seems
willing to take credit for stabbing a sick old man.”

“You gonna look into it?”

“I work for the town of Charming, not the California Corrections Department. It’s not my job to look into inmate on inmate violence.”

“Fair enough.”

Derek doesn’t say anything, but a slight relaxing in his shoulders says enough. He’s relieved to have Argent gone. He can no longer haunt his dreams. He no longer has to pretend he never glimpses the man in the corners of his eyes. Gerard and Kate Argent had featured strongly in nearly all of his nightmares for the last decade.

Now they’re both dead; and he feels like he can breathe again.

A few minutes pass before he gets up to head into the other room, “I’m going to go call Cora.”

*

Abel kicks his feet, eliciting a coo from the man above him. One of his feet is grabbed and Dad pretends to eat it. It feels funny, and Dad’s face looks weird so Abel lets out a bark of surprised laughter that makes Dad grin so hard the corners of his eyes crinkle up. Abel waves his arms in the air, a demand to be picked up if ever he saw one.

Juice finishes securing the infant in his footie pajamas before scooping him up into his arms. Abel babbles something at him and places both palms on the two skulls that adorn his chest before snuggling close into the warmth that Juice represents. He makes sure to grab Abel’s bear before walking the two of them out of Abel’s room and into his and Jax’s.

Jax sits up as they enter, shoving pillows behind his back for support before accepting his son from his husband. “Hey little man!”

Abel brightens and slaps both hands against his Daddy’s scruffy cheek. The right one is covered in drool after it found its way into Abel’s mouth. He babbles at Daddy and bounces on his knees, trusting Daddy to help him stay on his feet and not fall over.

“Someone’s happy this morning!”

Juice grins and crawls onto the bed to lay down next to his family, “I already put some of that numbing cream on his gums. Also, he may have bitten me. I’m pretty sure from what I felt we’ve got some teeth incoming.”

“Poor baby,” Jax says with a snicker. He leans forward and rubs his nose against Abel’s, making the boy go cross-eyed for a second before another peal of baby laughter erupts from him. Jax smiles stupidly at his son for a few seconds.

Abel spots his bear in Dad’s hand and lunges for it, making Juice let out an ‘oof’ as just under fourteen pounds of baby impacts his chest and stomach. Jax does nothing to lessen the impact, he just makes sure that Abel doesn’t roll off Juice’s other side and therefore off the bed. Juice wraps one arm around the kid and lets him have the bear.

Abel promptly starts chewing on one ear.

“This bear is a war veteran, man,” Juice says. “The things it’s probably seen.”
Jax chuckles and watches his Mate and child with soft blue eyes for a few minutes. He doesn’t know what he would do without this anymore. Who he would be if he and Juice hadn’t become a them. If he hadn’t taken the Bite and chosen Pack for himself. He wouldn’t be happy, he knows that much.

“I love you,” he says.

Juice turns to look up at him. There are silver flecks in his eyes when he replies. “I love you, Jackson. With every fiber and a few stars.”

Jax’s smile softens and he leans over to kiss his husband. When he pulls away Abel protests, so he kisses his son as well. When he pulls away, his eyes are a little electric. Abel rolls to one side and Juice helps him settle into the space between the pair of men. He entertains himself with his bear, babbling at it and thoroughly soaking both of its ears. Jax manuvers himself down onto his side and tucks his arm under Juice’s head before placing his other hand on Abel’s belly. Juice’s joins his, and they intertwine their fingers over their son.

The silence that follows is long and comfortable, interrupted only by a happy child content to entertain himself… for now.

Eventually the tableau is broken by Jax, whose thoughts have circled around. “I’m going to have to move for the gavel sooner than planned.”

Juice sighs heavily, “I know.”

“He knows I’m a werewolf now. He’s got to be panicking. We already figured he was going to regret bringing Peter in, but now he knows about me. Not to mention Happy.”

Juice snorts, “Happy’s a whole other nightmare. One we don’t have to worry about.”

“We might if I have to kill Clay.”

“He’s not going to eat Clay.”

“You don’t know that.”

“Yes I do. He’ll leave it if you tell him to. You know he will.”

“I’m thinking about asking him to be my Sergeant at Arms.”

Juice makes a considering noise at the back of his throat. He’ll keep his spot as Intelligence Officer, and Opie was always going to be VP. Peter won’t take an official role in the Club. He’s content with being a brother. He’s got enough responsibility being the Alpha of an ever-increasingly magical territory. “It’s not a bad idea.”

“He eats people.”

“Which makes him the best Unholy One the Club has ever had. He’s solid as a rock and you know it. He only eats the people he’s told to.”

Jax snorts a chuckle after a moment. “Is it strange that I don’t find a casual conversation about eating people strange anymore?”

Juice shakes his head, “Nah. Honestly, once you’re part of this whole supernatural side of things you either learn to roll with whatever comes your way or you end up dead pretty quick. You’ve always had good survival instincts.”
“Hmm.” Jax lets the subject go. There’s a lot about Happy Lowman that’s still a mystery, even after the big supernatural reveal. He’s pretty sure he wants it to stay that way. He gets the feeling that knowing everything about Happy would just add fuel to his nightmares. “I want Jaime in a Sons kutte.”

“He deserves it,” Juice replies. “It’d have to be unanimous outside of Clay, or you’ll have to wait until you take the gavel.”

“I’m pretty sure I can talk Tig and Chibs around to it. Piney’s easy. Jaime isn’t black and he’s been more useful than not lately. He’s got a good thing going with Opie and the kids right now and he won’t want to rock that boat.”

“Piney’d vote yes just to contradict Clay and you know it. He’s a nonissue.”

“True.”

“It’s really Bobby you’ll have to convince. He’s been real careful to stay neutral in this thing brewing between you and Clay.”

“You think he’ll vote against it?”

“I think you need to have a serious conversation with him. Bobby’s about the club and what’s best for it. The other charters will listen to him.”

“Right. I’ll take him to Tucson with me.”

“Take Chibs and Opie, too. Armando’s an asshole and you’ll need the backup.” Juice doesn’t like not going with Jax, but he knows that if they’re going to move on Clay one of them has to stay in Charming at all times while Stiles and Peter are recovering from the fight two days ago. Stiles is going to need several weeks to replenish his reserves, and Peter’s not going to want to be far from him during that time.

“Right.”

Abel chooses that moment to lose interest in his bear. He rolls toward his Daddy, babbling and patting at him with slobbery hands. Jax laughs and tables the conversation in order to pick the boy up and hold him in the air much to his delight. Jax can’t help grinning up at his kid and misses the long string of drool that gravity helps evacuate from Abel’s mouth until it hits him in the mouth.

Juice laughs at his spluttering and rolls out of bed, “C’mon Daddy. Let’s get breakfast.”

Jax wipes drool off his face and rolls himself up out of bed, toting Abel with him as he follows Juice down the hallway toward the kitchen.

His life is pretty damned complicated, but he wouldn’t trade it for anything.

“I’m makin’ pancakes!” Juice declares.

Jax laughs at him, “You mean you’ll try to make pancakes.”

Juice gives him an offended look. “I am an expert! Pancakes will be had!”

“Sure.” Jax and Abel exchange a look before settling down at the table to wait. It won’t be long before the smoke alarm is going off and they’re evacuating the house to head down to their favorite diner for pancakes that don’t resemble charcoal briquettes.
He gives it until Juice is pouring the first of the batter onto the griddle before he gets up and heads off to get both himself and Abel dressed for the day. When the cursing erupts from the kitchen and the smoke alarm starts screaming, he can’t help but grin down at Abel.

Yeah, he wouldn’t trade any of this for the world.

*

The room is small. No more than a three by three foot square. The walls are a dull shade of ecru – or maybe eggshell. The color isn’t important. There is evidence on the walls that shelves had been set into them at even intervals at some point. They have since been removed. The floor was once carpeted. Now it bares the carpet tacking around the edge, a sharp surprise for anyone trapped inside it with bare feet.

Above, dangling from a chain is a single bare lightbulb with a pull-chain to turn it off and on. The light is currently off.

Sitting in the middle of the small space is a woman. Her naked skin is mottled with a few bruises, the bottoms of her feet adorned with little red pinpricks from stepping on the carpet tacking. Mottled striping adorns her arms, legs and back. Her skin is coated with fine, soft fur in golden blonde and black. Her arms are wrapped around her knees and her claws are cracked and broken, several of her fingertips are bloody.

The door to the closet opens and the occupant flinches away from the light instinctively; cat-like eyes blinded by the brightness outside of her prison.

A shadow falls over her.

“You gonna try and bite me again?” a deep voice asks. She shakes her head rapidly and looks at Clay Morrow warily. “Good girl,” he says. “Now, here’s what’s going to happen – “

She had tried to bite him when he shoved her in this closet. He’d had his crazy goon strip her naked and they had laughed at her when she had tried to bravado her way out of being uncomfortably bared to their eyes. Tig had called her a ‘scrawny bitch’. He hadn’t held his opinion of her back. In fact, she’s pretty sure he’s gone out of his way to degrade her verbally since he’s not allowed to hit her.

“You’re going to put your clothes on and you’re going to go to your hotel. You’re going to get your shit and get out of my town. Do not pass go, do not collect two hundred dollars. You’re never going to enter a town where a Son lives or works again.” Clay’s face is neutral, if a little amused. “You’re going to drop this RICO case. You’re going to take the lumps that go with failing your assignment. If I ever catch wind of your name again we’re going to revisit this closet. I’m going to remind you just how easy this was for me. Then I’m going to have Tig here peel the skin off your body inch by inch while you watch in a mirror.”

Above him Tig Trager smiles at her. It’s a special sort of smile. The kind you see on serial killers and rapists. He’s never profiled as a serial killer, but he is classified as a psychopath. He is entirely capable of skinning her alive.

He’d have nightmares afterward, but he’d do it.

After all, Clay Morrow holds his leash. He’s a glorified attack dog, and he’s got a ruthless (well-earned) reputation for violence that would make him a great Hunter if he ever chose to leave the
Sons.

Clay catches her gaze again. His face is congenial, like they’re talking about the weather. Her skin crawls as goosebumps erupt across her arms.

“You might want to take your minion with you. Wouldn’t want anything bad to happen to him, now would we?"

June Stahl shakes her head rapidly.

Clay leaves and Tig throws her clothes into the closet with her.

It takes her a minute to stop shaking enough to drag the rough material on.

*

Opie’s head hurts. According to Stiles, using his powers so extensively just after they awakened and without any training had caused his brain to bleed rather badly. He’d reversed the damage and healed the hemorrhage, but it had left Opie with a migraine for two days afterward.

Honestly, he’s just happy he’s alive.

The door to the bedroom opens and his beautiful wife enters the room with a tray in her arms. It’s a tea tray. Not the best device for delivering food to ailing husbands in bed, but it’s big enough to do the job and it was that or one of the plastic holiday serving platters she has. She notices that he’s awake when she turns to face the bed and a smile crosses her face.

“Hey,” she says as she sets the tray down on the nightstand. She takes a seat next to him and feels his forehead before running her fingers through his hair. It’s getting pretty long. “How you feeling?”

“Better,” he rumbles, leaning into her touch. “Still hurts but the light isn’t spearing into my eyeballs anymore.”

Donna grins at the description and leans over to kiss him. He kisses her back and makes a noise of protest when she pulls away. “Gemma took the kids to school. I’ve got to get to work. You going to be okay?”

Opie sighs, “Yeah. I’m going to have to go to the clubhouse today.”

Donna frowns, “You going to be able to ride with your head like this?”

“Yeah. I’ll take some meds. It’s just a headache now.”

“Don’t overdo it,” she commands. “And no powers, Alpha’s orders.”

“Yes ma’am.”

She huffs at the cheek in his voice before kissing him again and leaving the room. Opie stares up at the ceiling until he hears her car doors close. Then he sits up and looks over the breakfast she left him. Orange juice, eggs on toast and a medicine cup with pills in it. He picks it up and shakes it in order to identify the meds. The blue ones are noproxin sodium, a painkiller that they’ve found works for him, his daily Claritin and one of the kids multi-vitamins.

Opie shakes his head in amusement before throwing back the lot and chasing them down with the juice.
He’s a damn lucky man, and he knows it.

He eats his breakfast and then gets ready to face the day. There’s a lot to do, and miles more to go before they sleep.
He’ll go back to France. He’ll live in the little flat he shares with Isaac and return to the quiet peace of semi-retirement. He’ll mourn his losses. Every Hunt he goes on from this day to his last will be a memorial for his daughter. For the woman she had become before she died. He’ll honor her by sticking to her code.

"We protect those who cannot protect themselves."

It’s all he has left. It will have to be enough.

Here’s the next chapter done and dusted. Much needed conversations are had. We finally have a little bit of Bobby’s POV, though it's not a lot. As much as I adore Bobby, I have a hard time keeping his character together when I try to write him.

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Stiles stands in the garden facing the ancient oak tree that has taken up residence next to the raised vegetable beds. He’s been standing here for nearly thirty minutes now, just staring at the tree. The garden gnomes work around him, busily moving the bed the tree’s arrival had disrupted to a new plot. Several of the rosebush faeries flitter around him with curiosity.

Stiles isn’t sure how he’s supposed to feel about the Nemeton.

There’s certainly no love lost on his side of the equation. The Nemeton has caused Stiles nothing but grief since he was sixteen years old. Oh, he knows that it isn’t really the tree’s fault that crazy people keep using it for nefarious purposes, but still. Also, it’s a tree. Until recently Stiles wasn’t even aware that there was anything to be concerned about considering he’d moved several hundred miles south of the thing’s domain.

He really hated being proved wrong.

The guys are all out. Dad to the station, Derek to meet Cora half way between here and LA, the rest to Teller-M Morrow. Stiles is alone for all intents and purposes. After all, the gnomes, faeries and brownies are all lesser magical beings that rely on him for protection and a renewable source of magic, they’re not going to go blab anything to anyone. Willow doesn’t like the new tree on principal and so is ignoring everything and sulking by the pond. She wouldn’t say anything besides.
“Dammit,” Stiles mutters. Then he steps forward and presses both palms flat on the trunk of the Nemeton.

Awareness floods his mind. He closes his eyes to the onslaught, trying to parse through the myriad of sensations, emotions and thoughts flooding into him through his hands.

Affection first and foremost. All-encompassing. The Nemeton knows Stiles. It knows Peter and Derek and his Dad. It’s learning the Pack. Staking a claim because it has chosen to belong to the Pack, so now they all belong to it. Affection that bleeds over into possessiveness so strong it makes the Spark dizzy.

Pleasure. The Nemeton likes it here. The soil is rich. The land is cared for by creatures of nature and the area protected by magic. It chose its spot for its proximity to the house and the life the house holds. Near enough to tap into, and to be of use to the residents, but not so close its roots might cause damage.

Roots dig deep into the rich soil, drinking not just from the water of the earth, but of the wellspring beneath as well. It strengthens, purifies the last taints that remain from being severed. From being used as a prison for an evil being. For being used in old rituals by a Darach with evil intentions.

In magic, intention is eighty percent of the casting. The rest is guide ropes.

Intention, it seems, is a theme here.

The Nemeton wants to be close to Stiles, and to Peter. It sheltered and grew in a forest protected by Hale wolves for several hundred years. It has grown attached to the feel of their paws in its territory. It had seen the birth and death of every Hale. Now the last of the Hales was settled not in Beacon Hills, but here in Charming.

Stiles himself had been born in the shadow of the Nemeton. It was him that breathed new life into the tree.

Here, it can protect and be protected. Here it is more. Like it was before scared men with axes cut it down.

Stiles pulls away, frowning. Before his fingers leave the trunk he tells it, “Just don’t get any funny ideas. The second I suspect you’re causing mischief, chaos or death I’m having Peter cut you down and I’ll burn your roots myself.”

The Nemeton agrees to these conditions.

*

Occasionally Peter finds himself pondering his life. The choices that led him to where he is. He is a flawed man. Prideful and stubborn. He and Talia had clashed on many occasions. They had differing temperaments and ideals. Talia had grown up with the weight of becoming the Alpha on her shoulders up until she had turned fourteen. Then Peter had come along. A surprise for their parents late in life.

Suddenly, Talia wasn’t the only child of Hazel and Gabriel Hale that had Alpha potential.
The age gap between them was so large that Talia had been going off to college when Peter was starting kindergarten. They’d never bonded, never been close. Then Gabriel had a heart attack when Peter was seven. Talia had transferred to the UC Beacon Hills campus and begun training to take their mother’s place in earnest. It hadn’t left much time for Peter.

Peter had decided then that he would never challenge Talia for the role of Alpha. The fight wasn’t worth it. Instead he’d done is his best to make himself as indispensable to the Pack as he possibly could. When Talia stepped up Peter was there to stand as her Enforcer; not because he was her brother, but because he was the best one for the job. They had learned to work with each other. They had loved each other as family, but they would never be friends.

When Talia had begun her own family Peter decided to be the favorite. To be the one the kids could go to when Talia became too much the overbearing Alpha and not enough the loving mother.

It had worked. For a while.

Then Kate Argent had hatched her diabolical plot to burn their house down with them inside it and everything Peter had ever considered his had gone up in smoke.

The coma had lasted a little less than a year. The rest of that six years he’d spent in the long term care ward of Beacon Hills General was in a state of wakeful catatonia. He’d been trapped inside his own brain with nothing to do but dwell on his memories. To let the rage grow until it had entirely consumed him.

And then a scrappy kid with an unpronounceable first name had helped set him on fire.

Every choice he’s made since. Every word spoken, every body added to his kill count, every (un)helpful suggestion, comment or gesture had all led him back to the boy with whiskey eyes.

Because of where he is now. What he has. Who he has become; Peter regrets nothing.

Except for perhaps allowing himself to be placed under the leadership of Clay Morrow. One must either adapt or die; and Clay refuses to do either. It blinds him to what is going on around him. After all, Peter has never once bowed to Clay. He’s never been subservient to the man. Everything he’s ever done as a Son has been by choice. Running guns for the Sons of Anarchy has been diverting, interesting and (admittedly) fun.

He’s also managed to build up a strong Pack right under the man’s nose because he believed that he was always in control.

Well, not anymore.

“Would one of you like to explain to me why the fuck this guy is here?” Clay’s voice is deep, implacable. His blinkers have been pulled off rather abruptly and he doesn’t like what he’s seeing.

Peter is sitting in his seat lazily. When he speaks his voice is a slow drawl made to irritate. “I would like to make a motion to vote Jaime Martel in as a full Son.”

“He’s a Mayan,” Clay says flatly. His eyes are chips of blue ice.

“He’s Pack,” Peter drawls back, unperturbed. “And he’s loyal.”

“I second the motion,” Happy rasps quickly.

It’s the only thing the Sons need to bring it to a full vote. It’s in the Club rules. Any vote brought to
the table without the President’s permission must be seconded to be put to a vote. In this case, voting in a new brother without a prospecting period must be unanimous.

Chibs lets out a slow breath and taps his cigarette on the table. “I cannae say getting all tangl’d up in Mayan shit is a good idea brother.”

“He isn’t a Mayan anymore,” Peter replies. “He was let go due to conflicting loyalties from his becoming Pack. He’s got no black marks from the Mayans, and he’s had plenty of opportunities to take Sons stuff to them and hasn’t.”

“Helped me move more than one body,” Happy says. No one seems willing to look the man directly in the eyes now that they all know that he eats people. He thinks it’s funny. “Been around when shit’s hit the fan and kept a cool head. He’d make a good brother.”

Clay’s nostrils flare with fury and his grip on the gavel tightens. He doesn’t want it, but he knows if he doesn’t let it go to a vote he’ll look weak. “Alright. All in favor of patching in Jaime Martel?”

Peter, Happy, Juice and Chibs all vote yea easily. Opie shrugs and nods. Tig and Bobby have no stakes in it personally, but vote yes when Piney throws his lot in with his son. It leaves Jax and Clay staring into each other’s eyes for a few very tense seconds before Jax says ‘Yea’ very clearly.

Clay knows when he’s beaten. He doesn’t like it, and he isn’t a graceful loser, but he can see it Jax’s eyes when they tell him if he doesn’t let it pass he’s not going to like the rest of church. He bangs the gavel once, “The aye’s have it. Get him in here.”

Juice gets up to pull Jaime into chapel. Jax helps him into the reaper, and the kutte looks natural on his shoulders. He sits himself down in a folding chair between Peter and Happy so as to remain unobtrusive in his first meeting as a Son.

Clay lets the back-slapping and congratulations happen for a few minutes before he pulls the meeting back to order. “Okay. Now, would my VP please explain to me why the fuck he let himself get turned into a werewolf?”

Jax smirks. It’s a little bloodthirsty, and aside from Juice squeezing his thigh under the table, no one reacts to the expression. “I asked just after the Nevada run.”

The Nevada run had been several months ago. “Why,” Bobby asks, “would you go and want to do a thing like that? This supernatural shit is ten kinds of fucked up.”

“Exactly,” Jax says. “This supernatural shit. I don’t know how long we’ve been wading in that pool without knowing it, but it was pretty damn obvious that we run in those circles by being who we are and doing what we do way more than we should.”

Clay leans forward, “Why?”

Jax turns to meet his gaze, his own eyes icy. “Because I found ATF staking out my kid’s hospital room. Because people close to the club were being attacked. Because I’ll take any advantage I can get to protect this club and whatever else is mine.”

“That include the idiot.”

Jax growls when Juice is brought into the subject. “My relationship with Juice is not up for debate.”

“What relationship?” Clay demands. He already knows after having a long talk with his wife, but he hates when people that aren’t him have secrets. “You mean the thing where you’re fucking?”
“No,” Jax says, voice hard. “I mean the part where we got married a month ago. I mean the part where my husband legally adopted my kid. I mean the part where my magical Bond with my Half-Fae husband means I’m gonna live a fucking long time before I start showing my age old man.”

Clay visibly hides a snarl behind his teeth.

“Wha’ d’ye mean by that laddie?” Chibs butts in with surprise.

Juice looks sheepish and he scratches his cheek nervously and shrugs. “I’m a half-born. Fae live a really long time. Like, thousands of years. I might hit a thousand? Maybe more if my Fae half is stronger than the human half.”

“And Bonding is?” Bobby prompts.

“Bonding,” Peter interjects, sitting up to lean his elbows on the table, “is what supernatural creatures call getting married. Two beings exchange a Bite that creates a link between them. They can sense where the other is and what they’re feeling to a certain degree. Sometimes they share a few abilities if they’re of different races. Usually, if one is longer lived than the other, the one with the longer lifespan shares their years with other.”

“Shares their years?” Opie asks curiously.

“Literally. As a Half-Fae Juice could easily live two to three thousand years. By bonding to a werewolf, who usually live human lifespans, he’s shared those years with Jax. Meaning that the pair of them will live a thousand to fifteen hundred years instead.”

“Huh.”

“What else can be shared?” Bobby asks. He’s an intelligent man, and they can all see him rebalancing what he knows to incorporate this new knowledge into his worldview.

“Well, I know that Stiles’ night vision is better than average since we Bonded. And my full shift is because of him.” Peter doesn’t mention any of the other things that exist because of his bond with Stiles. Like how he can fully shift because of the Bond. Like how he’s a type of werewolf that hasn’t been seen in hundreds of years because it was the only way his body could cope with the power that Stiles’ shares with him. Like how they’re going to live until they’re either killed or Stiles gets tired of existing.

Jax and Juice share a look before Jax speaks, “Well, aside from his shadow-travel thing not making me nauseous any more I don’t think there’s anything else.” Juice just shrugs.

“Also,” Peter puts in smoothly, meeting Clay’s eyes. “You can’t sever a Bond. It’s permanent. So there’s nothing you can do about them being them.”

Clay frowns, but lets it go. His gaze goes to Happy, who looks bored. “And what the fuck are you?”

Happy grins, baring his teeth. “Chupacabra.”

A pregnant pause fills the room while everyone (sans Peter) takes this in. Then Piney of all people demands, “You mean that goat eating gremlin thing from Mexico?”

Happy lets out a bark of sharp, amused laughter. “Sure. Only we don’t eat just goats, ya know?”

“What the fuck’s that mean for us?” Tig demands, staring.
Happy gives that unsettling grin, “Nothin’ so long as I still like you.”

The air fills with unease as several people run scenarios where Happy has gone rogue and decided to eat them all. No one says anything, but each mental image is visibly unnerving.

“Does this mean you’re older than you look?” Tig abruptly changes the topic, turning to Juice to avoid looking Happy in the eye.

Juice shrugs, ”Sure. I turned a hundred and eighty-three on my mast birthday.”

“I’ll turn two-hundred next month,” Happy rasps with a shrug.

They all turn to look at Peter, who grins smarmily and shrugs, “I’m as old as birth certificate says I am. I have no idea if I’ll live longer than normal, we’re learning about what Stiles is as we go.”

“On that fucking disturbing note,” Clay sardonically. He turns to look at Opie, “What’s up with you?”

Opie gives a Gallic shrug, “Earthspeaker. Can talk to plants and rocks and shit.”

“And how long have you been able to do that?” Clay demands with a sarcastic bent to his voice.

Opie meets Piney’s gaze, “About a week and half. The witch at the new age shop figures I’ve always had the ability, but I didn’t need it until shit started coming out of the woodwork.”

Piney nods, accepting this for now. Opie figures the old man will probably swing by the house to talk about it while using seeing his grandkids as an excuse in the next few days.

“Okay,” Clay says slowly. More than half the members of the Redwood Original Charter are some kind of supernatural bogeyman. He looks at each of his brothers and he can see that if he pushes this now he probably won’t like the way it ends. Besides, he needs time to adjust his plans for this new information. “Tig and I dealt with Stahl. She should be on her way out of town as we speak.”

“Are you sure she’ll listen?” Jax asks. “She’s not exactly the sharpest crayon in the box.”

Clay’s smirk is sharp, “Oh, she knows what’ll happen if she doesn’t listen and skedaddle.” Tig snickers.

“I’ll check with the Chief to make sure she cleaned out her desk,” Peter offers.

“Do it.” Clay orders. “I want everyone laying low for the next few weeks if we can. That thing in front of the police station wasn’t exactly subtle. Last thing we need is the wonderful citizens of our happy little burg to decide they don’t want us here anymore.”

Nods go around the table in agreement.

Clay nods his head once, “Good. We’ve got that charity run coming up. We’re gonna moves some stock up the coast during it. We’ve got brothers coming into town from Washington, Oregon, Arizona and Nevada for this. Pack up the supernatural shit while they’re here. I don’t want to have to explain any of this to anyone.”

As soon as agreement rolls around the table Clay bangs his gavel and dismisses them from church. We waits until nearly everyone has filed out of the room before he speaks again.

“Jax. Stay a minute. We should talk.”
Bobby Munson likes to consider himself a practical man. He does his best to provide for Precious and the kids. He’s never gotten more than a month or two behind on alimony and child support. His trips to Tahoe are considered pretty non-negotiable. The entire club has bent over backward to make sure he misses as few weekends playing Elvis as they can. They all stood witness to the ugliness that was his and Precious’ split. They get it.

Maybe that’s why he feel separate from the current situation. Maybe his efforts to be neutral in the power struggle between Clay and Jax have worked a little too well. Honestly, he feels like he should have seen something like this happening.

Bobby’s made his peace with Peter. Peter is, in fact, a great brother to have at your back when shit hits the fan. His life as a supernatural monster has only ever interfered in Sons business in a major way once. It’s why he votes yes when patching in Jaime is brought up at the table. That one piece of weird business that interfered with club business. Jaime has since proven himself capable and willing to work.

Also, he helped save all their lives; and that means something to Bobby.

He’s been watching Jax and Clay butt heads for years. Ever since the kid was made VP. Jax has been chomping at the bit for the gavel since the very beginning. Bobby has no complaints about his leadership style. To be honest, he’s not getting any younger; and Jax respects his choice to be fray-adjacent as treasurer. Let the young bucks take over and lead them into the future.

Jax has been advocating legitimizing their interests for nearly a year now. Sometime since Peter was patched, he’s gone after it like a dog with a bone. Bobby isn’t necessarily the biggest fan of Luann and Cara Cara, but it is a money machine and the girls are pretty. Opie leans as straight as he can while being all in with the Sons. He quit his job at the mill, but that was because it sucked ass, not because he hadn’t been good at it.

Peace with the Mayans is nice, too.

It’s nice to be able to go on a run and not have to look over his shoulder for enemies.

Juice follows him into the clubhouse kitchen after they’re dismissed from church. He’s full of nervous energy, uncomfortable to have left Jax and Clay alone together. Bobby’s pretty damn uncomfortable with it, too.

“Bobby,” Juice says, standing in the doorway as Bobby putters about the kitchen getting out the things he needs to make his famous muffins. “I’m sorry we didn’t tell you.”

Bobby heaves a sigh, “I haven’t really been around a lot.”

“That’s not a good reason to not have told you,” Juice replies. “We both know what a phone is. We could have called.”

Bobby doesn’t look at Juice. He knows it will help make the younger man feel more at ease. “I get why you didn’t tell us, Juice. Between Piney and Clay I’m not sure which one is the bigger homophobe.”

“I still don’t see how they can be. They’ve been friends with Tig for thirty years.”

Bobby snorts. This is true. Tig has never been one to hide his proclivities, and he’s never hidden the fact that he swings for both side of the fence. Bobby himself has walked in on way worse situations
that tiger in bed with a man. More than he cares to remember or count on one hand.

“I get why you kept it quiet,” Bobby reiterates. Finally, he looks up, expression wry. “The monster thing I get, you’re used to hiding that. And the relationship thing I get, too. Clay’s not nice when he’s pissed, and he’s been pissed more often than not lately.”

“He knows that he hasn’t got long in the big chair and he’s scared.”

“Wouldn’t you be?”

Juice shrugs, “There isn’t much I’m afraid of anymore. Comes with age and the knowledge that I can fuck up most people’s shit if I use my abilities.”

Bobby silently concedes the point. He changes the subject, “We’re okay Juice. Tell me about Jax’s plan.”

Juice grins and settles in to tell Bobby all about their plans to oust Clay and legitimize the Club.

* 

Chris can hear a buzzing noise. It goes well with the numb feeling that encompassed him as soon as he’d gotten the call about his father. It’s all finally over is the only thing he can think about. His father is dead. His sister is dead. His wife is dead.

Allison is dead.

He’s the only one left of this branch of the Argent Family.

He stands, stoic and still, as the coroner pulls the slab that his father’s dead body is lying on out of its refrigeration unit just enough for the head and shoulders to be exposed.

“Yeah,” Chris says. His voice sounds like it’s coming from down a long tunnel. “That’s my father.”

The coroner has kind, sympathetic eyes. He gives Chris a minute to absorb the death clinging to Gerard before pushing the slab back into the fridge and closing the door with a hollow thunk. It’s hard, having to see a family member like this. This is the least favorite part of the job.

After a moment of staring at the closed door, Chris turns to look at the coroner with a grim expression, “What do I need to sign?”

He follows the man into his office to fill out the release paperwork. He’ll ship Gerard back home and bury him next to his mother. It’s what she would have wanted. If he had his druthers, he wouldn’t be claiming the body. Gerard deserves a pauper’s burial. But… Chris loved his mother. She was a good woman. Strong and fair for the most part, if a little short on patience. He’ll do this for her and then wash his hands of it all.

He’ll go back to France. He’ll live in the little flat he shares with Isaac and return to the quiet peace of semi-retirement. He’ll mourn his losses. Every Hunt he goes on from this day to his last will be a memorial for his daughter. For the woman she had become before she died. He’ll honor her by sticking to her code.

*We protect those who cannot protect themselves.*

It’s all he has left. It will have to be enough.
Be Prepared

Chapter Summary

Being Prepared isn't just a catchy tune from a Disney cartoon anymore. It's a way of life that everyone should implement.

Well, that's how Jax and Clay feel.

Chapter Notes

Here's the next chapter. There isn't any Stiles and Peter in this chapter. I thought we needed to check in with a few of the Sons and a few unaffiliated people in order to help the plot along.

Also, the Baby Butt Scoot(TM) is a real thing. I've got 13 nieces and nephews and the majority of them did this instead of crawling when they got Mobile. It's really frickin' cute.

Disclaimer: Octarine as the color of magic belongs to Terry Pratchett and the Discworld. I own nothing SOA or TW.

Thirty-Seven:

Once upon a time, when he’d been younger and so angry at the world that his first reaction was to fight, he had wished Clay was his father instead of JT. Clay seemed to be the perfect father at the time. He’d been present in a way JT hadn’t been. When Thomas had gotten sick and JT had run away to Ireland, Clay was there to listen to a young boy’s woes. He never brushed him off or feel stupid for not understanding everything that was going on.

Then Thomas died, and a year later John Teller laid down his bike on the I-580 and Jax was angry.

He was angry at Thomas for dying. Angry at his dad for not being strong enough to deal and leaving Jax. Angry at his mother for slowly moving on with Clay. Angry at Clay for not being his father. Angry at himself for not being able to do anything about any of the shit piling up on him.

He rides the same stretch of highway that JT died on after he and Clay finish talking.

The roaring of the engine, of the wind whipping at his hair and face, is almost enough to make him stop thinking. To drown out the ringing in his ears that has been there since Clay had told him that he really is Jax’s father. That Jax was the result of a short affair Gemma and he had had shortly before she married JT.

They’d had a paternity test done to prove it.
JT didn’t know. He died believing that Jax was his son.

He’d done right by Gemma when she told him she was pregnant. They’d gotten married when she was seven months old. Clay stood as JT’s best man.

They’d been lying to him his entire life.

Jax is absolutely furious. His incandescent rage is so intense that Stiles had felt him through their pack bond. Juice is worried about him, their Bond tells him that. But both his husband and his friend can tell that the last thing Jax wants right now is to talk. They both let him leave without saying anything, but he knows he’ll have to deal with it when he gets back from Tucson.

Jax has never been very good at talking.

Clay knows that Jax is aiming to take the gavel from him; and Jax knows that Clay is going to do everything he can to keep it. They know where they stand with each other now.

Clay only told him that he’s Jax’s real father to unsettle him. To put him on edge. To make him question his every move and become emotionally compromised enough to make a mistake. To make the other charter presidents reconsider backing him. To make his own charter question his ability to lead.

Clay hands aren’t going to last forever. They both know that. Even though he’s been in Stiles’ vicinity when he’s been healing, Clay’s hands haven’t gotten any better. Stiles doesn’t know why. His healing magics tend to affect everyone in a certain radius. If his healing can heal Piney’s lungs to where they were twenty years ago, they can certainly handle a little arthritis. But Clay’s hand’s haven’t gotten better; if anything, they’ve gotten worse.

One day he’ll have no choice but to step down because if you can’t ride, you don’t get a vote. Once upon a time Jax had been content with waiting for that day. Little by little, his patience has worn thin. If they keep on the path that Clay has set them on, the club is going to die.

Jax won’t let Clay kill his club, father or no.

He’s going to have to deal with this eventually, but not right now. Not today. No, today he’s on the road. The scent of exhaust is on his tongue. He’s got Bobby and the Prospect with him. He’s got the weekend to convince Armando to back his play for the throne. Bobby’s got his back now that he’s talked with Juice. The Prospect prefers the younger Sons over the older ones.

He can move past this. For his club. For his Pack.

For himself.

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Mortals are fascinating.

Well, these mortals are fascinating.

Robin has never experienced this kind of upheaval before. He’s more than a millennium old. He’s hunted things that would make a cú acras turn and run in fear. He’s fought in wars, languished in the idleness of peace, been bewitched in love and grieved in loss. And yet.

And yet, Stiles and Peter Stilinski-Hale (and their Pack by proxy) are two of the most interesting people he’s ever met. They are second only to Queen Titiana, whom he serves with utter devotion.
The last time Robin had encountered a Spark he had been a small child barely into his first decade. The memories are blurry and wispy as smoke. He can remember that the Spark was female. That she had been close friends with Titiana and that she smelled of frankincense and myrrh. He also remembers a lot of red. He has no context for it, but believes that perhaps the Spark had preferred the color in her clothing.

He’d been raised at Court. His mother is a distant cousin of the Queen and has served as one of her Ladies since before she was crowned. Court was always full of intrigue, drama and scandal. It had given a young fae plenty of opportunity to cause mischief. When he had gotten older and his interests had turned to hunting, his mother had appealed to the Queen, and Robin had been apprenticed to the Huntmaster.

He had left the Summer Palace, and when he’d returned three hundred years later, the mysterious woman that smelled of winter was gone, never to be spoken of again.

He’d had little reason to think of her since then.

As he watches Stiles spin a circle of spells around the Nemeton that appeared a week ago, he can’t help but wish he’d found the subject of Sparks more interesting during his studies. He wishes he understood more of what all of this meant. What having a Spark walking the mortal world would mean, but he doesn’t.

The earth beneath his feet is awake.

The Alpha is the kind of Wolf that hasn’t walked the world in nearly three thousand years.

Ancient powers that linger in the world seek the boy out.

The very weave of the world is slowly changing around Stiles as he grows into himself. Steadily at a pace the boy can handle. He’s anchored in his Bonds. In his Mate. He stands with both feet on ground that reaches up to greet him like an excited child.

Robin isn’t needed here. He has the information his Queen ordered him to retrieve. He should go. Return to whence he came and put this Hunt behind him for the next. But he can’t. He doesn’t understand how this can be. Why it is happening now, when the world is faded. It should have happened long ago when the Waning had begun.

And yet. And yet.

He will stay a while longer. Perhaps he will receive answers to his unasked questions.

More likely, he will come away with more questions.

* 

Gemma screams at him when he tells her what he did. She believes that telling Jax that Clay is his real father is the stupidest thing Clay has ever done; and considering the fact that she thinks he does stupid stuff on a bi-weekly basis, that’s saying something. When she starts throwing whatever she can get her hands on at him, he bails.

He knows when to pick his battles. This is not one of them.

He knows that telling Jax is a real gamble. That any respect for him that the kid might have will probably sail out the window without so much as a farewell. He also knows that it’s going to have an impact on life around here in ways that he can’t predict. Gemma’s pissed, Jax is gunning for him,
and he won’t pretend that he ever had control of Peter.

His web is unravelling. The end is nigh. Most people would probably pack up and go home.

Not him.

No, Clay Morrow makes a phone call. The Nomads are the loners in the club. They ride alone; and most of the time, they die alone. The Nomad President is a good man with a wealth of common sense between his ears. Rhane Quinn would never do what Clay wants him to. The man’s a Nomad because the deaths of his family had torn through the man and the length and emptiness of the road had helped him. The charter is made up of men like Rhane (who get in trouble when they stay in one place or two long), Happy (who needed to be free to travel for family reasons), and the kind that have done good work for the Sons, but who none of the Charters want to lay claim to.

That last category is what Clay needs. He needs a few brothers who will do anything he wants them to, no questions asked, if he promises them a transfer to Charming. Most of those guys don’t like being Nomads; but it’s better than not being in the club at all. They have few scruples and the tenacity of a pissed off Terrier.

Clay needs loyalty if he’s going to survive Jax’s attack. Bobby would ask questions. Chibs would try to mediate. Piney would help Jax if only to pull one over on Clay. Tig is the best Sergeant at Arms Clay has ever had. He’s loyal and willing to do whatever it takes to fulfill his duties. Clay isn’t stupid, however, he knows where Tig’s loyalty really lays.

Tig will do whatever he has to to protect Gemma.

Clay can’t fault him for it. It was Gemma who saw Tig through his cocaine addiction. Who held him every night while he cried and vomited and shook through the withdrawal. She’s the one who saw him through his divorce, through the loss of his daughters who only ever come around when they want something from him. She’s seen him through all the worst bits of his life, and Tig will never be able to turn his back on the woman he feels for like an older sister.

The younger brothers (Opie, Juice and even Half-Sack) will follow Jax. They’re of the same generation. In Jax and Opie’s cases, they’ve been best friends since they were born. Juice will never turn on his own husband (and that’s a kick in the teeth). Jax sponsored Half-Sack into his prospectship. He’ll never turn on Jax, not with how much he loves the club (even when they give him all the shit jobs).

He could possibly call of Happy. Happy is reliable; but Happy is also not human. He’s shown willingness to follow Jax’s orders before. He does follow Peter’s. Happy hasn’t got the stakes in Charming that would be needed to buy his loyalty. If his mother wasn’t sick, he’d have stayed in Tacoma.

Clay doesn’t even want to think about Happy’s mother. Is she really his mother? If she is, how old is she? Is she human? If not, is she a Chupacabra like Happy? If she is, how the hell did that whole thing happen? These are questions best left unanswered, if only for Clay’s sanity.

So he calls a couple of Nomads that he knows want to belong to a ‘real’ charter. He promises them a full patch-over to Charming if they help him out with a few things. Just to remind Jax that Clay is top dog. That he holds the gavel and has for over thirty years.

Just a reminder.

Nothing harmful.
No one has to die.
Not yet.

* 

Gemma tries calling Jax. She calls and she calls and she calls. She leaves a couple of voice mails. She calls the Prospect, who answers but tells her that Jax is currently busy in that terrified tone of voice he uses when he’s telling her no. Meaning she scares him, but not as much as someone else right now. Bobby tells her he’s staying out of whatever is going on.

It’s between her and Jax.

She can’t respect the neutral stance that Bobby has kept for years. It takes a lot to remain impartial in the face of club politics, but he manages it.

This leaves her with Juice.

Gemma’s relationship with Juice is not the kind of relationship that she had imagined having with the person her son married. For one: he’s a guy. For two: he’s always been a little bit of an awkward duck. He’s frightened of her and equal turns with how much he doesn’t give a shit about her opinion.

It’s enough to give her whiplash.

They’ve been in a kind of holding pattern ever since the wedding.

Juice tries not to shove his relationship with Jax in her face too much, and she tries to remember that for some bizarre reason he makes Jax happy.

If it wasn’t so obvious how much he loves Jax and Abel, the two of them would be having…problems.

Gemma’s always been able to read Juice.

At the end of the day all he really wants is to fit in. To belong.

She used to adore making him feel that way. It was like giving a puppy a treat. It was happy, playful and cute – until it made a mess on the carpet.

She goes to Jax’s place. Juice won’t be at the clubhouse by himself right now. All his allies are on a run (or in mandatory school for magic in Opie’s case), so he’d be on his own there. With things as they are, it’s best that he stays out of Clay’s way. As far as she knows, there’s still a cone of privacy around the Stilinski-Hale place.

That leaves the house or the weed shop Juice recently got half-shares in in exchange for financing. The place is a hundred percent legal and above bard, offering a wide array of holistic practices, dietary supplements, essential oils and acupuncture.

It’s still a weed shop though.

Until recently, Juice smoked enough pot that it always clung to him. Weed does not smell good. Paired with the leather and cordite smell most of the Sons wander around with and Juice smelled like a cliché. Then he’d gotten into it with Jax and Gemma hasn’t seen him light up since. Oh, he still smokes, but the occasional joint among friends on the weekend or at the table is not the same as the two-a-day habit he’d cultivated over the last three years.
With that information in mind, the house it is.

Juice’s bike is in the driveway next to the SUV they’d bought when Gemma pointed out that they couldn’t exactly strap a car seat onto the back of a Harley. They can get toddler-style seats for the bikes (they probably already have one), but according to California State law he has to be at least five before he can be legally strapped to the back of a bike.

Gemma parks her Escalade at the curb and heads for the door. She knocks loudly, but doesn’t wait for Juice to answer the door. She’s got a key, and she uses it.

She finds her son-in-law and her grandson playing in living room. There are baby toys scattered across the ground. Abel is laying on his belly on the fleece blanket Juice has laid on the ground. As she enters the room, Abel is rolling over with a grunt and struggling into a sitting position. By the time he collapses onto the couch with a sigh, he’s scooting himself across the floor toward the TV.

“You okay?” Juice asks after a minute of silence between the adults in the room. He’s watching Abel pull blocks out of the storage tote by the TV and carefully not looking at her.

She’s a little bit grateful that he doesn’t. She looks like hell and him not looking at her makes pretending that she’s okay a little easier. “Jax tell you what Clay told him?”

Juice nods. His lips press together into a thin line that whitens when he bites on them. Gemma’s grateful for the show of restraint. She can see by the tense set of his shoulders that he’s doing his best to restrain himself.

“I never meant for this to happen.”

“Then you shouldn’t have lied about it.”

“I thought I was doing the right thing.”

Juice cutting her a look, fierce and protective, “You ever think you keep too many secrets Gemma?”

Gemma swallows, her mouth suddenly dry at the intense look in his eyes. Keeping secrets is what she does. It’s what makes her a good wife and mother in the world that she lives in. She had to keep secrets from Rose, and when she ran away at sixteen she started keeping secrets for other people.

She was there at the beginning. She stood by the First Nine when they were building the club into the nationwide (and Belfast) organization it is today. She’s buried so many metaphorical bodies she’s half made up of lives.

“What I do is to protect my family,” she defends.

“You and I have very different definitions of ‘protect’ then. As far as I see it, protecting someone doesn’t mean keeping something from them, it means trusting them to make good choices with the information you give them and being there when the news is shitty.”

“I lied to John because I loved him.”

“Sure. That I get. You sleep with a guy once that isn’t your guy, either your drunk as hell and it seems like a good idea, or you’re sober and you’re not getting something you need or want from your guy. I don’t know why you slept with Clay way back then, but get why you lied to John. I do. What I don’t get is why you never told Jax after JT died. Wouldn’t it have been better to tell him? Kids are resilient, Jax would have gotten over it and moved on. If he’d known, he and Clay could have a real relationship, not whatever toxic hell they have now.”
“I can’t take it back.”

“No, you can’t.”

“I thought I was protecting him.”

“You thought you were protecting yourself, you just told yourself you were doing it for Jax to make yourself feel better.”

Gemma pressed her lips together for a moment. Her first instinct was to snap at him. To defend herself. But she’s got no leg to stand on. “You lied, too.”

Juice gives a wry smile, “Of course I lied, Gem. Once you know about the supernatural, you can never not know, and knowing makes you a target because you see more than the average joe. I could say that’s why I lied, but then I’d be lying. I did it to protect me, and I’m not ashamed to admit it.”

Gemma knows that comparing her lie to Juice’s is like comparing an apple to a pasta salad. You might put an apple in a pasta salad if you know what you’re doing, but most of the time it’s a bad idea.

“Can I fix it?”

Juice looks away to help Abel when the boy scoots over to him to hand him a stackable ring donut. Eventually he says, “It can be fixed, but not by you. You did the bad thing, so you need to take your lumps and give Jax space to come to terms with having his world-view shifted. Then you’re going to wait as long as you have to for him to forgive you.”

“I’m not good at waiting.”

“I know.” Juice looks over at her and his expression softens a bit. “You love Jax. He knows that. Say you’re sorry and let him decide when he’s ready to move on.”

“And Clay?”

“Stay out of what’s going to happen. Let them deal with them. You butt in and neither will thank you for it. Just… be ready to pick a side if you have to. It might come to that.”

Gemma says nothing. She sits there and watches her grandson play and wonders if she can survive this. If she’s strong enough to survive it if Jax decides to walk away from her.

“What if he doesn’t forgive me?”

“Then you accept it. You accept whatever he’s willing to give and you spend as long as it takes proving to him that you won’t ever keep something that big from him ever again.”

She swallows again as another lie she’s kept from her son pushes itself to the forefront of his mind. That one really was to protect Jax. It’s better for him to believe that JT was so distraught by Thomas’ death that he laid down his bike on purpose.

“I’ll try.”

“That’s all I ask… C’mon, come play.”

Gemma sits down on the floor across from Juice and accept a drool covered ring-donut from Abel. For the time being, she lets her grandson chase away her worries.
Chapter Summary

They hear the bell over the shop’s door tinkle. A minute later Caliana steps into the workroom. Stiles’ clacking at the keyboard resumes. She offers Opie a smile, “How’s it going in here?”

Opie looks down at the aloe plant he just finished re-potting and shoves it to one side toward the witch, “Bertrude doesn’t like the corner you’ve got her in. Not enough sun.”

Chapter Notes

Here is the next chapter. I decided that the Stahl chapter of this fic needed wrapping up a little more neatly than just Clay driving her out of town. Enter Rafael McCall stage right because I had mentioned John calling him. I think Stahl ending up in the one agency department she didn’t ever want to be in is poetic justice.

Also, I’ve had the SOA wiki open on my browser for so long now to keep people and places correct, that google is now advertising Mayans at me. Irony right there. Of course I’m current on Mayans.

*Additional Note:* The earthquake referred to is the 1980 Eureka, North Coast earthquake. It had a magnitude of 7.3 and mostly rocked uninhabited areas. Since the North Coast area above San Francisco is kind of where I imagine Beacon Hills to be, I envision that quake having an impact there. The druid mention is, of course, Deaton.

*Disclaimer:* Octarine as the color of magic belongs to Terry Pratchett and the Discworld. I own nothing SOA or TW.

Thirty-Eight:

“You should learn to meditate.”

Opie looks up at Stiles. They’re both sitting in Caliana’s workshop across the counter from each other. Stiles is working on a paper for his criminalistics class and practicing making his magic less obvious by trying to use it to type on the keyboard of his laptop without making his eyes glow. It’s a hit or miss process. His eyes aren’t glowing, but there are octarine sparks drifting to the floor intermittently.

“Why?”

Stiles shrugs with one shoulder. His eyebrows furrow in concentration. “So you can commune with mother earth or something.”
Opie snorts. Trying to learn to wield his newfound abilities has been an uphill struggle. Tossing rocks around the yard no longer gives him a nose bleed. He’s developed the ability to sense the plants around him to a certain degree. He can tell the difference between awakened land and slumbering land. The transition between the pair gives him the worst vertigo. This was discovered when he’d tried to go on a run.

He’d nearly killed himself when he’d laid down his bike.

Thankfully both he and his bike had gotten away with minimal scarring.

The books all say he’s supposed to be able to purify plants and soil. He’s supposed to be able to aid in plant growth, shore up unstable ground and become one with solid stone and pass through it if he wants. These are not skills he’s managed to tap into yet.

Instead, Opie got the offensive and defensive stuff. Throwing rocks for one. That’s proved itself useful. Whenever his feet are on the ground he becomes an immovable object. He’d been sucker punched at the Hairy Dog the other day when he went there with Tig and Happy to remind Darby that dealing in Charming is a bad idea, and the hit had barely moved him.

In fact, the guy had broken his hand.

Cali calls it stone-skin. A defensive benefit that makes him harder to damage, but not to mistake it for being suddenly bulletproof.

Opie calls it lucky when he didn’t break anything when he laid it down at the Charming border.

The communication thing is intermittent at best. He can’t shut any of it out, and only gets bits and pieces when he tries. He knows more town gossip than anyone else but has no context for most of it because plants don’t understand why humans do what they do. He’s never been able to commune with the land of Charming on purpose either.

“I’m not sure that would help.” Opie says dryly. He’s repotting a few of Cali’s potted plants after she got sick of hearing about them complaining about not having enough space or unbalanced soil. She declared it payment for services rendered when he’d asked why he had to do it.

Honestly, he probably owes Cali his firstborn by this point with all the help she’s been giving him. Of course, he won’t ever give Ellie up, but it’s the principal of the thing.

Blake meows from the cat bed on top of the cat tower at the end of the table. He’s shedding stardust in his contentment and kneading bread into Twila’s spine. Twila’s out cold, one wing draped over the edge of the bed and stretched toward the ground. The only reason Blake gets away with shedding so much is the fact that Cali can collect it and sell it or reutilize it in potions.

“Why not?” Stiles asks. “I’ve seen you do it unconsciously, why not try for actively.”

“When have you ever seen me meditate?”

“You do it when you’re working on an engine.” Stiles shrugs. “Don’t worry, the other guys do it too. Especially Jax and Juice. Lowell’s in a class of his own. Plus all of you meditate when you ride, even Peter.”

The last part makes sense. There is no better way to empty one’s head than hitting the open road. The roar of the engine, the scent of hot asphalt, the vibrations in his hands and arms. There’s nothing quite like it.
They hear the bell over the shop’s door tinkle. A minute later Caliana steps into the workroom. Stiles’ clacking at the keyboard resumes. She offers Opie a smile, “How’s it going in here?”

Opie looks down at the aloe plant he just finished re-potting and shoves it to one side toward the witch, “Bertrude doesn’t like the corner you’ve got her in. Not enough sun.”

* Rafael McCall is an intelligent man. He’s dedicated, patient and discerning. He’s a shitty husband and a pretty bad father. He’s an excellent FBI agent. If called upon, he’s a decent friend. He gives horrible advice on every subject save the law. He’s polite and kind in turns. He’s got a long fuse, but once his ire is earned it’s hard to reverse it. He’s a workaholic. In general, he’s a good man.

It’s taken literal years to have any kind of relationship with his son that is anything other than hostile. After he gets back from his stint in Beacon Hills during Scott’s junior year it’s harder than he likes to admit not fall into old habits. Thankfully, he persisted and now he’s got a pretty good relationship with his kid. They have an ongoing text conversation going; and Scott calls once a month to talk and catch up.

The Stilinski’s leaving Beacon hills should have just been a footnote in one of those monthly phone calls. And it was, it just wasn’t the only place Rafe heard about it. Scott had been distraught. More over the fact that he and Stiles had stopped being best friends somewhere along the way than the fact that Stiles left town with barely a goodbye.

But comforting Scott had quickly taken a back seat to his growing curiosity.

After all, a small town sheriff taking a job and moving from one small town to another should not be interesting to a senator, congressman or agency director. Then again, it isn’t every day that said small town sheriff turns down multiple job offers from the governor of the state in which he serves. It isn’t every day that he finally takes the job.

Rafe sometimes wonders what that had been like. Having conversations with a man lovingly nicknamed the Governator on a regular basis where job offers are regularly dismissed. Did Stilinski and Schwarzenegger talk about the weather? Their families? Did they complain to each other about how irritating and moronic their underlings could be at times?

It’s a fascinating concept.

But John Stilinski never did anything by half. After trying to recruit the sheriff and finally succeeding, Schwarzenegger had felt the need to boast. He had done the impossible. He had convinced a county sheriff who had run unopposed even every election for fifteen years to resign from his elected position and take up a Chief of Police job.

Rafe is baffled by the sudden choice to move. Scott had been unable to explain in any concrete way. He had muttered about people growing apart, but had never elaborated in an actual reason. He’s pretty sure that Scott doesn’t actually know why the Stilinski’s left, just that they did and Scott was hurt by it.

One of the best things about Scott is his ability to believe the best of people.

One of the worst things about Scott is that that belief leads to him blindly believing in the goodness of people.

Rafe has met plenty of people who didn’t have an inherently good bone in their entire body.
Things have layers, like onions.

Charming, California has been a place of interest to several alphabet soup agencies for as long as Rafe has been on the job. After all, he who doesn’t have a passing interest in gun-running motorcycle clubs is not in law enforcement. Biker gangs that are actual biker gangs are few and far between. After all, they’re not called one-percenters for nothing.

And then the ATF goes to Charming. Rafe’s never met June Stahl. He doesn’t usually have reason to work with other agencies. For most of his career he’d been in the major crimes unit, and for the last year he’s been in the FBI’s special cases unit (or the supernatural cases unit to those in the know). So overall, June Stahl is indistinguishable from a hole in the ground.

That is, until John Stilinski calls him of his own free will asking about her.

Rafe does and does not want to know what the woman did to gain Stilinski’s ire. The man has the patience of a saint. He’s had to in order to raise a kid like Stiles.

So Rafe looks her up when she comes back to Washington with her tail tucked between her legs and a ruined investigation. Before now, her solve rate has been impeccable. Not now. Now she’s the talk of the water cooler. Not only had she botched her investigation, but the ATF has even less to use on the Sons than she started with.

The worst part is (according to scuttlebutt) she won’t even explain what happened.

Rafael meets her on a rainy day. The restaurant she’d chosen to eat breakfast at is a little waffle joint on 19th between K and J streets. She’s unkempt. Her skin is sallow and she’s got the biggest raccoon eyes Rafe’s seen in a long time. Rafe gets himself a ham, turkey and brie waffle sandwich and sits down across from her.

He’s been wearing the same suit for two days and hasn’t had a chance to shave. He feels like sleep deprived shit, and yet he still looks better than her.

June Stahl looks like she stared into the abyss and the abyss stared into her.

That’s the risk one takes with this job. Seeing the worst of humanity takes its toll on a person. Especially on those that brush up against the supernatural in the course of doing their jobs. There’s a reason why that world is kept secret by silent agreement of the community that exists within it. Preventing another era of witch trials is only the official reason. The truth is that most people can’t handle knowing what’s really out there in the dark. Humans need to feel safe in order to be sane and happy. Supernatural happenings mean you’re constantly checking under your bed for monsters.

Rafe checks his place for things hiding in the shadows all the time. Especially late at night when he’s overworked or he can’t sleep and starts to imagine hearing noises.

He knows that Stilinski didn’t drive her out of town. Knows that there was a big supernatural kerfuffle that she ended up adjacent to. Rafe doesn’t believe that it was the magical dust-up that drove her away from Charming. He’s pretty sure the Sons did something.

It’s what usually happens.

This is not a good woman. She’s too selfish to be a good woman.

But Rafe doesn’t need a good person. He’s surrounded by good people in the office. He needs a good investigator that won’t flinch in the face of the toothy maw of a wendigo.
Eventually Stahl looks up at him when he doesn’t go away. She says nothing, but her face is stony.

“So,” Rafe begins, “normally I would give a fancy recruitment speech. But I’m not going to. You know who I am?”

Her lips press into a thin white line for a moment, then she says, “You’re one of the FBI’s monster hunters… You here to kill me?”

Her eyes flash, catlike, confirming his suspicion. “No. I’m here to offer you a job. You fucked up in Charming. You and I both know you’re going to get shoved behind a desk to do paperwork for the rest of your life when your suspension is lifted.”

“Why would I want to work for the FBI?”

“Because you’d get to go into the field. And it’s far away from organized crime.”

“I don’t fancy dying young.”

“No one does. Can’t promise you won’t. Every case is deadly.”

“Why are you doing this?”

“John Stilinski asked me to keep an eye on you.”

“So you’re my babysitter? What, am I supposed to just take it?”

“That’s up to you. You’re going to be watched either way. Why not do the job at the same time? I could use a partner that’s good at puzzles, and you could use a job that won’t slowly wither your soul away.”

“Can I think about it?”

“Sure. Here’s my card. Call if you want the job.”

Rafe watches her study the card for a few seconds before she tucks it into a pocket and rises to leave. She doesn’t say goodbye. Doesn’t throw away her trash. She just turns and walks away down the street. Her back is a straight line of hard tension. Rafe wonders how long she’ll take before she calls; then decides it doesn’t matter. He’s got her over a barrel and they both know it.

He finishes his sandwich.

* 

Armando Cruz doesn’t like Jax Teller. He thinks he’s an uppity little prick who got to where he is by merit of being the kid of one of the First Nine. Armando got his position at the head of the Tucson charter through blood and sweat. He earned his place at the head of the table. Jax got handed his spot as VP by inheritance, not because he earned it.

The world is a cold, cruel place. If you get handed everything in life, you can’t be prepared for the shit when it comes flying at you.

The only redeeming quality Jax has is the Men of Mayhem patch he wears. There are Sons that go their entire lives in the club without earning that patch. It means you killed for the club. That somewhere out there is a dead body in a shallow grave and you’re the one that put it there. You have to be willing to do anything for the club to earn that patch.
Armando’s got his Men of Mayhem patch. There isn’t a charter president that hasn’t got it. A good president isn’t going to ask his brothers to do something he isn’t willing to do.

The only person that he dislikes more than Jax Teller is Clay Morrow. Don’t get him wrong, he respects the man. Morrow is the driving force behind the Sons expansion. He’d carried the weight that had crushed most of the First Nine, and he’d done it without complaint. Of the Nine, only two are in any position to influence the club. Four are dead. Lenny the Pimp is serving life in prison and is never getting out. Piney’s a washed up alcoholic that barely manages to ride enough to keep his vote. McGee runs SAMBEL, and he might as well be on another planet for how much influence he’s got.

That leaves Clay, the president of SAMCRO and the head of the entire organization. He rules with an iron fist, and he makes sure that all the other charters keep in line. Armando appreciates his resolve and tenacity.

Doesn’t mean he likes him. Morrow’s a prick, but he earned the right to be a prick if he wants.

SAMTAZ is a different animal than SAMCRO. Tucson is sixty miles from the Mexican border, and they share the city with Mayans Tucson charter. Armando and Philippe Gonzales have a hands off agreement. They’ve been able to work together in the past to the benefit of both clubs. Most of the other charters don’t share their home territory with a rival MC. This makes SAMTAZ unique.

Armando doesn’t know what to make of it when word comes down that Marcus Alvarez agreed to a truce with the Sons. It’s no secret that there’s no love lost between Morrow and Alvarez. But SAMCRO apparently recruited a new brother that Alvarez respects enough to call a truce with. Not Morrow, this Peter Hale guy. Armando’s never met him, but he hears things.

And now Jax Teller is sitting in Armando’s clubhouse and asking for his backing to take the throne from Clay. He’s got to admit that the younger man has balls. His reasoning is solid. It’s no secret that it’s getting harder and harder to do business and remain under the radar. Jax wants to legitimize the club. Take it legal for the most part.

At least, to the point of walking on the side of the line that means the alphabet agencies leave them alone.

“I don’t like you, Teller.” Armando tells him. “As far as I’m concerned you ain’t done the legwork to deserve that VP patch. What makes you think I’m gonna back you against Clay?”

Jax smiles like a shark. “Let me tell you a few things about Clay Morrow, and then you tell me if he should be sitting in that chair.”

Armando leans back in his chair and exchanges a look with his VP. Jax dug up something, whatever it is, it’s big. He gets the feeling he isn’t going to like the rest of this conversation.

“Do your best, kid.”

* 

Roots dig down deep in new soil. The soil in this garden is nutrient rich and saturated in magic.

This is a good place. Rich in magic. Not as secluded as it’s last place, but certainly more protected. No one will be able to cut it down here.

And, as long as it follows the rules laid down to it by the Spark, no one with access will want to cut
it down.

As long as it is here, that Druid can’t reach it. Oh, the Nemeton isn’t stupid by any means. It has been used in too many rituals over the course of too many centuries to be stupid. You pour that much power into anything and it will take on a life of its own. It can tell good from bad, like soil that can no longer sustain life.

And that Druid is the most selfish being the Nemeton has ever been used to sustain the life of. And it had been used by a Darach and a Nogitsune. The oak knows from selfish.

Stiles is selfish. He wants things his way, and he will plow through anyone that gets in his way. Peter is less selfish and more possessive. All humans have a tendency toward selfishness. It is in the nature of sentient beings to lean toward selfishness and the preservation of one’s self.

The Nemeton is one of many. It’s needs are the needs of its brothers the world over. They are the roots of the world tree. Physical representations of a concept. Roots that lead into the branches. Even now the Nemeton can sense its brothers in the current in a way it hasn’t been able to since it was cut down by that druid and used to repair the Hale house after the earthquake.

The Hales didn’t know where the wood had come from, not after the druid had processed it and turned it into boards indistinguishable from the rest they’d ordered from the local lumber yard.

By then, then damage had been done.

The druid had gotten what it wanted. Until recently. The last couple of years had not been kind to him. The Nemeton had seen that much, even in its limited, dormant state.

Now it is here, in a garden several hundred miles south. If it stretches its power, it could go back there. It has no desire to do so. There are gnomes living amongst its roots now. A wellspring below it. Wards around it. A Pack. The Spark.

It is content.
Chapter Summary

“It means that the Nemeton no longer resides in the Beacon Hills Preserve.” Peter meet’s the boy’s gaze. He can see the killer hiding behind his façade. Can see that this Theo is the kind of person who will do whatever it takes to get his way. He wonders briefly how long it will be before this kid decides that he wants to be Alpha and plots to kill Scott for it. “And if the Nemeton is no longer here, creatures will no longer be drawn here. Hence the lessening of activity. Sooner or later the McCall Pack will be the only supernatural creatures in town.”

“The Nemeton is a tree stump.” Scott says. “Tree stumps can’t move on.”

“Can’t they?” Peter asks mildly.

Chapter Notes

So, the earthquake note from last week actually goes with this chapter. >_< I think it ended up where it is because I was actively writing this chapter when I posted last week. Mistakes were made. Oh well.

Please note that all my Spanish is coming from Google Translate. I barely know enough Spanish to introduce myself, ask for directions and then really insult someone. I can’t guarantee that it's completely grammatically correct, but Google Translate at least means it's spelled right.

C'est la vie.

Disclaimer: Octarine as the color of magic belongs to Terry Pratchett and the Discworld. I own nothing SOA or TW.

Thirty –Nine:

Every now and then a thought strikes.

This thought stirs feelings.

Feelings stir emotions.

Some call feelings and emotions the same thing. They are not the same thing. One can feel something physically, yes, or they can feel content. To feel something is to experience it. Emotions are the things we feel. In order to feel content, first contentedness must exists as an entity unto itself. If the option of contentedness does not exist, one cannot feel it.
As such, feeling something changes the nature of the thing itself.

Feeling content may lead to feeling happy, or tired, or confused, or any number of other emotions.

One begets the other.

Reflecting on such things and upset them, and you can lose the feeling.

Peter is content.

Oh, he’s not content to the exclusion of all else. After all, he’s a Son in a charter that is quick-stepping toward destruction and reformation. He’s an Alpha of a large territory. A territory that continues to grow as his Mate grows in ability. This leads to politics and complications. There is a Fae crashing on his living room sofa like an old college buddy. His uncle is a selfish man motivate toward public office.

Politicians are all self-possessed people. After all, power corrupts.

Peter is powerful. He’ll admit that he enjoys it. He’s always wanted more than he was given. Always strived to be the best.

When Talia was Alpha, Peter had been shoved into the role of Pack Enforcer and got raked over the coals if he so much as stuck a toe out of the little box his sister had so neatly packed him into.

His relationship with Corrinne had threatened Talia; so she had taken her away from him.

Corinne had gone and Peter had never known about Malia until too many years and too much damage had passed. Malia isn’t his, despite the blood in her veins. Perhaps even in spite of it. She wants nothing to do with him, and he can’t blame her for it. She never knew him. She has a father; a man that wants her. A man that never stopped looking for her. What little she knows of him is what Scott knows.

Scott will never be able to forget what Peter did to him by biting him.

Scott McCall, in Peter’s expert opinion, is a giant hypocrite.

After all, he’s willing to give everyone else a second chance. People who have done worse things than Peter ever has. But those people hadn’t directly slighted or harmed Scott himself, and so those people deserve forgiveness. Not Peter. Everything bad that ever happens in Beacon Hills is Peter Hale’s fault.

Hence why Scott’s picture is next to hypocrite in the dictionary.

Peter will admit that it feels nice to walk into a situation in which Scott is involved and be the superior being for once. Oh, he’s always felt superior; but to feel a thing and be a thing are different. That Derek, of all people, who had helped guide Scott at the beginning had asked Peter to come with him is just the cherry on the sundae.

They’re waiting at a diner on the outskirts of Beacon Hills. Scott had called Derek for help, and Derek had agreed to a meeting on the condition that he could bring his new Alpha and a couple of packmates for backup. Scott had agreed after being reminded that every bad thing that has ever happened to Derek has happened in Beacon Hills.

So here Peter is, sitting in a booth with Derek and Jaime, playing Marvel Puzzle Quest on his phone and waiting for Scott. Happy, Opie and Juice are stationed in the booths on either side of them. Stiles
had opted out of the meeting, citing classes as his excuse. They both know his real reason, and classes isn’t it.

It’s amusing, the looks the group of them are getting from the locals. They obviously recognize both Derek and himself. It’s also hard to hide a conversation from a werewolf if they’re in the same room with you. He’s entirely aware that he, Derek and the fact that they’re surrounded by men in biker kuttes is the man point on conversation in the diner.

Just as his patience is beginning to wear thin, Scott enters the diner. Lydia and Kira are with him, along with two others he doesn’t know. Malia isn’t here, obviously she wanted nothing to do with him.

The sight of Peter lounging in his booth surrounded by his brothers gives Scott pause.

Slick amusement bubbles up at the back of Peter’s brain.

Next to him, Jaime waves down their waitress to refill his coffee cup.

Scott walks over to them, “Hey Derek.”


“Scott flicks his eyes to Peter, “Peter.”

“Hello Scott,” Peter drawls. He keeps his gaze on his phone. Awkwardness creates a pall on the group as their server tops off the Sons coffees and asks Scott and his pack if they would like anything. After she walks away Peter says, “Please, sit. Looming is unbecoming.”

Lydia rolls her eyes and sits primly on the bench next to Derek. Scott retrieves a chair from a nearby table and sits down in it. For a long time, Kira and the two boys don’t know what to do with themselves. Eventually they settle around the nearest table.

“What do you want, Scott?” Derek says, demanding more than questioning.

Scott shakes his head visibly startled at being addressed so abruptly. He’s been thrown by Peter being present, much less the rest of their little group.

“I thought you were bringing your Alpha?” Scott says.

“I did,” Derek says, voice flat. He tilts his head in Peter’s direction.

Peter gives Scott his most irritating smile and twiddles his fingers in his direction before returning to his phone.

“Peter’s your Alpha?!” It takes a hissed word from Lydia to prevent Scott from yelling.

Peter ignores him.

Derek shrugs. “What am I doing here, Scott?”

Scott’s mouth works for a few moments, obviously at a loss. He’s used to getting answers when he demands them. Used to being the leader, the Alpha. He doesn’t seem to know what to do with this new information he’s been given.

Lydia cuts in, “We’ve been seeing a marked decrease in activity around town lately,” she says, ignoring both Peter and Scott’s speechlessness. “Usually when that happens it means that something
big is coming. We had hoped you might have a line on anything coming our way.”

“Why would I?”

“Last we heard you were still hunting with Braeden.”

Derek shakes his head, “Not for months. I’ve been in Charming.”

“I see.” Before Lydia can get any more out, Scott blurts, “You’ve seen Stiles?!”

In the booth behind Derek, Juice snickers. Across from Juice, Opie’s eyebrows go up in disbelief.

Behind Peter, Happy cracks into a chicken bone, making the McCall Pack flinch at the sudden noise.

“Sure,” Derek says. He’s manfully trying to ignore his own pack-mates. He’s wearing an expression, so it’s obviously not working, but Scott doesn’t know that. “He says hi. He would have come, but he’s got class today.”

“Class?” Scott asks.

“Berkeley.” Derek decides that this thread of questioning is not for him and looks back at Lydia.

“We haven’t heard of anything acting up between Charming and Tacoma. And we’d know. There’s a charter in Tacoma and there’s a couple of Nomads that ride the roads between on the regular.”

Lydia raises a single perfectly manicured eyebrow. “Good. That means that I can go back to Boston without worrying.”

“Lydia,” Scott whines. “We don’t know something isn’t going to happen!”


Peter heaves a sigh and shuts off the screen on his phone. He looks up at Lydia, who is obviously wearing the pants in this conversation. She looks at him challengingly. He smirks at her. He’s always liked Lydia. She’s intelligent and shrewd. “The last big supernatural kerfuffle happened in Charming three weeks ago. We’ve not seen or heard anything since. We’re allied with three Packs that share borders with us, and the Sons keep an ear on the pulse of the areas they operate in as a precaution.”

“And you’re a Son,” Lydia says. It’s not a question. Her eyes flick down to his kutte and then to Jaime and Happy behind them.

“Yes. I was patched in nearly a year ago.”

“How did you become an Alpha again?”

Peter keeps eye contact with her while he considers answering. Eventually he says, “Stiles.”

Scott jerks in his seat, eyes flickering red as he turns a furious glare on Peter. Jaime straightens in his seat, eyes flickering beta blue at a perceived threat to his Alpha. Behind Peter, Happy has gone unnaturally still. “Stiles would never help you kill someone so that you could be an Alpha again!” he snarls.

Peter resists the urge to roll his eyes. “Once again you fail to see how powerful Stiles is, Scott. He’s a Spark. I didn’t have to kill anyone.”

Lydia makes a noise in the back of her throat, and quickly puts her hand on Scott’s arm to prevent him from reaching out to punch Peter like he wants to. “We all know Stiles is powerful. What Scott
means is why would Stiles help you?"

"Why, because he wanted too, of course. He didn’t appreciate how you just left me to burn in the woods."

"So he healed you," Lydia says. "You saved his life and he was grateful. That doesn’t explain why you’re an Alpha."

"Doesn’t it, though?" Peter asks her mildly. "Think about it, Miss Martin. How much training did Deaton offer Stiles after making him manipulate mountain ash like he did?"

They both know the answer. Lydia says it out loud for Scott’s benefit. "None. Deaton never offered."

Derek snorts, "Of course he didn’t."

"Deaton’s a good man," Scott defends.

"No," Peter cuts in. "He isn’t. He’s nice when he’s motivated. He isn’t good by any means. He’s a druid, and druids are self-motivated for the most part."

"So you becoming an Alpha happened because Stiles wasn’t entirely sure what he was doing?"

Peter inclines his head, "At the beginning, yes. Not now. He’s gotten both training and experience since then."

"Do you know why Beacon Hills has hit a lull?"

"Because it’s no longer a beacon."

"What does that mean?" one of Scott’s minions pipes up. The one with the calculating eyes. Theo.

"It means that the Nemeton no longer resides in the Beacon Hills Preserve." Peter meet’s the boy’s gaze. He can see the killer hiding behind his façade. Can see that this Theo is the kind of person who will do whatever it takes to get his way. He wonders briefly how long it will be before this kid decides that he wants to be Alpha and plots to kill Scott for it. "And if the Nemeton is no longer here, creatures will no longer be drawn here. Hence the lessening of activity. Sooner or later the McCall Pack will be the only supernatural creatures in town."

"The Nemeton is a tree stump." Scott says. "Tree stumps can’t move on."

"Can’t they?" Peter asks mildly. A crease appears between Scott’s eyebrows. His confusion is obvious, so Peter elaborates. "The Nemeton is magical. The Druids made it that way hundreds of years ago. Things that have that much magic pumped into and through them tend to gain a sort of sentience over time. The Nemeton decided it didn’t like it here anymore and left."

"Where did it go?" Kira asks.

Peter exchanges a look with Derek. Derek shrugs, "Who knows? Wherever it wanted I guess."

"You guess?"

"I’m not a tree, how am I supposed to know where one would want to go?"

They all know exactly where the Nemeton is. They also know why it is where it is after Stiles’ not-conversation with it the day after it appeared. None of them see any reason to inform Scott of its
current location. The last thing Peter wants is Scott showing up on his doorstep making demands and expecting *his* pack to fall in line with said demands.

“Well, that’s fine then. Thank you, Derek.”

“Lydia!”

“What?” Lydia demands. “We got our answer. The Nemeton is gone. All the weirdness around town is winding down. We can all go off and live our lives without worrying about dying every day.”

“It can’t be that easy,” Scott says.

“What do you care?” Derek asks. “You never wanted this, and it’s not your problem anymore.”

“It’s still a beacon! People will still get killed!”

“People die every day,” Opie rumbles, causing several flinches at his voice. Scott’s head swivels to look at the bearded giant. He’s hard to read at the best of times with that beard on his face, much less by anyone that doesn’t know him. “Suck it up.”

“Who are you?” Scott demands. “You can’t tell me what to do.”

Opie’s eyes get a shade darker and his voice an octave deeper, “Beacon Hills may be your territory, but it doesn’t really like you. You and yours make it restless, and it just wants to sleep for a while.”

“What does that mean?” the beta, Liam, pipes up.

“Means suck it up and leave it alone, kid.” Opie says flatly in his regular voice. His shoulders are tense, and he flicks a telling look at Peter.

“Right,” Peter says, rising and pulling out his wallet to toss a few bills on the table to pay for their coffee and Happy’s fried chicken. “You’ve got your answer. We’re leaving.”

The others rise to follow their Alpha. Derek politely asks Lydia to let him out of the booth so that he can follow. She does so as Happy imposes himself between the two Alphas like a bodyguard. Derek nods at her once in thanks and then follows Juice and Jaime out of the diner. Opie is the last to rise, and his imposing height and solid nature causes the rest to lean a little bit away from him as he lights a cigarette on his way out the door.


Then he and Happy leave.

It’s very satisfying to leave Scott McCall and Beacon Hills behind him in the wake of his pack on their motorcycles.

* Stiles allows himself to feel guilty for not going to the meeting with Scott for the duration of his forty-five-minute commute to Berkeley. Then he tucks a sleepy, glamoured Twila into his bag and goes to meet Danny at the coffee cart on campus that they both like. Then he settles in to take notes in his Criminalistics 101 course and puts Scott out of his mind.
After the lecture there’s a text waiting for him from his husband: *Scott’s an idiot. They know about the Nemeton, but not where it is.*

Stiles nods to himself when he reads it. It makes sense not to tell Scott that the Nemeton planted itself right in the middle of the Stilinski-Hale backyard with no intention to ever leave that spot. Scott would decide that Peter is up to something (because it’s always Peter’s fault) and show up with a rant and his fingers in his ears screaming ‘la la la’ at the top of his lungs whenever anyone tried to reason with him.

It’s honestly amazing how predictable Scott is.

There’s also a text from Lydia waiting for him that reads: *You should have told be about the wedding yourself. Congrats anyway, moron.*

Stiles smiles to himself and punches a quick *thanks* in response before he smacks Danny’s shoulder. Danny clutches the offended limb with exaggerated betrayal. Stiles smiles sweetly at him as their study group snickers at them. “You told Lydia about my wedding before I could,” Stiles says through his smile.

Danny smirks, “No I didn’t, I told Jackson.”

“Which is the same as telling Lydia,” Stiles retorts, “and you know it.”

Danny shrugs, one cheek dimpling with his crooked smirk, “You never banned me from telling Jackson.”

“You’re devious,” Stiles says. “You pretend to be all sweetness and light, but really you’re just a devious little sneak.”

Danny’s smirk evolves into a full-blown grin, “Takes one to know one.”

Stiles huffs with mock frustration, “Next time you talk to Oxford, you tell him that when it’s your turn to get married he’s going to have to thumb wrestle me for Best Man rights.”

Danny laughs and locks Stiles into a headlock that Stiles doesn’t try too hard to get out of as their combined college friends start laughing at them. They’ve got a date with a table in the library and a mid-term to cram for. The group heads in the right direction while the California sun beats down on them.

It’s a good day at Berkeley.

*

It was not a good day in Charming.

Not for John Stilinski, beloved Chief of Police.

Not when his deputy stepped into his office, closed the door behind himself, slapped a flyer onto John’s desk and slumped into a chair with a tired sigh. John contemplated David for a moment before he dropped his eyes to the flyer sitting ostensibly on top of the pile of paperwork John had been determinedly working his way through just moments before.

The flyer is that particular shade of pale blue that says this sheet came in a bulk carton of reams of printer paper, all exactly this same shade of blue. The font is an easy to read Arial in bold type and states simply that in order to make Charming Great Again (with caps and italics for emphasis), that
the citizens of the town needed to vote Jacob Hale in as mayor.

John blinks at the flyer, then looks up at David when it doesn’t disappear. “Well, we figured this would happen.”

“He’s going to try to get you fired. He’s using the fact that you haven’t done anything to rein in the Sons, and the incident with the monster dog as examples.”

“Well,” John says slowly like he’s explaining this to a toddler and not one of the more intelligent men of his acquaintance, “I haven’t done anything about the Sons because they haven’t done anything inside my jurisdiction that I can arrest them for. And last I checked the Gazette and Channel 4 News have been singing our praises for how we handled that rabid dog situation.”

“He’s calling you reckless and saying that your connections to organized crime through your Son-in-Law cloud your judgement.”

“Does it?” John asks mildly.

“This is serious, John,” David says with a frown.

“Yes, it is.” John leans back in his chair to look David in the eye. “But this isn’t my first rodeo. Sheriff is an elected position. I’ve run several successful campaigns of my own. The only campaign Jacob has run in was for deputy mayor, and all he had to do for that was show up and ride in on Mayor Jennings’ coat tails. Not to mention that I was appointed by the Governor of California, who is the Mayor’s boss.”

“I almost forgot about that.”

John nods. It’s understandable that that little tidbit has been forgotten in all the chaos and drama that has happened since John first sat in this chair. “Not to mention my record stands up for itself. Crime in Charming is down, the department’s solve rate is up, and the only complaint anyone has filed about the Sons have been a couple old ladies complaining about how loud motorcycles are and asking if we can put in noise restrictions in their neighborhoods.”

“Mrs. Whitman has started a petition for that, by the way,” David says.

John shrugs, “It’s not going to get past City Council. It’s almost impossible to enforce something like that unless aircraft are involved.”

Which is true, so David leaves it alone. “What do we do about this? Jake’s attacking this department as a major part of his campaign strategy.”

“We do nothing,” John tells him. When David gives him a look he elaborates. “We let every officer know about it, that they aren’t to talk to any reporters about it. Free speech is a fundamental part of the constitution. Every person has a right to their opinion. The Charming Police Department has nothing to hide, and anyone wanting to investigate Deputy Mayor Hale’s accusations is welcome to do so.”

David begins to grin, “Let him hang himself on his own petard.”

John nods and shoves the flyer into the shredder by his desk. After the noise dies down he stands up, “Come on. Let’s go get lunch.”

“Yes, Sir.”
It’s not the best day ever… but then, it’s not that bad either.

*

Occassionally, Jax is grateful for the fact that he learned to speak by watching Gemma Teller-Morrow manipulate people. She is the expert on manipulation. Those lessons rubbed off on him for good or for ill. He can talk with the best of them, and he’s a great liar to boot.

The best part of this entire situation?

Well, the best part is that he’s convinced Armando Galivanaz to back his play for the gavel with the truth. Armando is a notoriously hard man to convince to do anything, much less something he doesn’t want to in the first place.

Of the sixteen charters within the Sons of Anarchy organization, only two truly stand apart from the rest. Only two don’t take every word Clay Morrow says as one of the First Nine and president of the home charter as gospel. Keith McGee in Belfast; more by distance than respect. McGee is First Nine, so he can do whatever he wants anyway. And Armando Galivanaz in Tucson; by design and sheer stubbornness.

Armando has gotten away with doing what he wants because of his proximity to the border and the number of bodies he’s buried out the desert. He’s not a particularly intelligent man, just street smart and shrewd. Not the kind of man you want after your blood.

Jax is grateful that it went so well.

After the hours-long meeting and dinner at Armando’s family’s restaurant, Jax is feeling pretty good. He’s sitting sideways on his dyna and looking up at the sky, puffing on a cigarette when Bobby finds him. Bobby’s a good man. When Jax was younger he used to call him Uncle Bobby. Now that he’s all grown up, he doesn’t address him as such, but he still respects him in the same way.

“This is a lot of shit,” Bobby says once he’s lit a blunt and taken a drag. He must have bummed it from one of the local brothers. Bobby prefers his hash baked into brownies or muffins. “A lot of shit that’s being thrown at a ceiling fan, brother.”

Jax acknowledges the statement with a nod while he tries to shake off the mental image. “I know, brother. We knew this was going to happen eventually.”

“I always thought you were content with VP,” Bobby replies. “That you’d wait until Clay couldn’t ride anymore and handed you the reins.”

“I was,” Jax says, dragging on his cigarette and looking back up at the nearly full moon hanging low and fat in the sky. “Then I had a kid and I wanted to not have to worry about coming home dead. Or getting arrested and not coming home at all.”

“I get that, man, I do. I got kids too. Precious may be a bitch with a mile-wide vindictive streak, but my kids are everything.” And Precious lets him have the kids one weekend a month so long as he’s up-to-date with his alimony and child support. It’s the main reason none of them will let Bobby skip a weekend in Tahoe when they could really use him on a run.

“I’ve always leaned straight though,” Jax reminds. “I’ll do whatever I have to to protect the club, but I’ve always preferred the peace and quiet.”

“Bullshit,” Bobby snaps. “You live by the sword and wouldn’t know what to do with peace if you had it.”
“I used to think so.”

Bobby heaves a sigh, blowing a large cloud of smoke into the space between them. They stand in Silence for a few minutes. It’s hot, even in the black of late night. The night bugs are working away at making their presence known. They can feel the bass pounding from the stereo in the clubhouse behind them. Hear the distant hum of many voices.

“Luann’s kid wants to open a restaurant,” Bobby says eventually. “A diner like that place out by the highway.”

“That place is a shithole.”

“That’s what Charlie said when she came to me for a startup loan. She doesn’t want to borrow it from her mother, and Otto suggested she ask us when she went out to Chino to visit a couple weeks ago.”

“She’d have to survive the first year to even begin to start making a profit,” Jax says. The club’s been known to give loans to friends and family at a low interest rate. It’s a way of looking out for their own and making a little extra legit money.

“She knows. She typed up a real proposal.”

Charlotte Delaney is a fantastic cook with a head for numbers and enough common sense that it’s obvious which parent she takes after. Otto’s serving a fifteen-year stretch for the club. She’ll get her loan either way, simply because he’s inside and he’s there because he took the fall for club business. Otto knows it, but wouldn’t have told his kid that.

“I’m going to suggest we buy in as silent partners,” Bobby says. “Means she won’t have to pay us off, but it gives us another legit earner.”

“Fifty-fifty?” Jax asks. The Sons are fifty-fifty earners at CaraCara. They take care of security (for the studio and its talent) and the books (because Luann’s not a good accountant, even if she is a shark). Getting Luann to agree to it had been a nightmare. She’d wanted a seventy/thirty split her way. She’d even had the guts to demand it, even with Georgie Caruso breathing down her neck. She’d folded like a pack of cards when they’d sat back and let Caruso’s goons beat up one of her male stars. As soon as she had, Jax had gone to remind Georgie that Luann had protection and let the sniveling little weasel know that Luann had sold them half her business. It was working to keep the man at bay – for now.

The other shoe was going to drop eventually. It would probably suck when it did.

“Sounds okay to me. I like the part where we don’t have to put on aprons and work there.”

Bobby chuckles, “I figured you say that.”

“Clay won’t like it,” Jax reminds.

“Clay understands the money.” Bobby shrugs, then cuts Jax a sardonic look. “We’re still not back on even footing with the Irish. Anything that Clay sees as getting us out of owing Peter for the money we needed to pay them off he’ll jump at.”

“I’m going to have to talk to McGee.” Jax frowns up at the moon. “Getting out of guns is gonna mean convincing the Irish to let us.”
Bobby shakes his head, “Don’t do that until after you’ve got the gavel in your hand and we know Clay won’t kick up a shit storm in the background. And take Juice with you, maybe Peter too. If Chibs is any indication, they know more about this monster stuff over there and it may give you a one-up.”

Jax nods thoughtfully, “Probably a good idea. Thanks Bobby.”

*

She wakes up abruptly. It takes a few moments of vague disorientation to register the sound that woke her up as the sound of breaking glass. Another thump from the other room puts her on full alert. She rolls over and shakes her husband’s shoulder.


“What?” he rumbles, cracking an eye open to glare at her.

“There’s someone in the house!”

Opie sits up, frowning. He shoves his hair out of his face with one hand as he swings his legs over the side of the bed. Another thump comes from the other room. Opie opens his nightstand drawer and pulls out his glock .45. He slides the clip in, chambers a round and hands it to his wife.

“Go to the kids room,” he tells her.

Donna nods and follows her husband out into the hall. She clicks the safety off on the gun and turns toward the rooms their kids occupy. As soon as she’s disappeared into Ellie’s room to wake her and take her into Kenny’s room, Opie turns and heads for the front of the house.

Beneath his feet, the ground is still. It feels like holding his breath.

He can hear voices now, coming from the dining room and kitchen. It sounds like two, maybe three guys.

They picked the wrong house.

Opie steps out into the open.

The ground beneath his feet rumbles to life.

The house rocks on its foundation.

Ellie exclaims in surprise, calling for her mother behind him.

The three men ransacking his house start cursing and try to steady themselves on their feet.

All across Charming, people wake up in the night at the 2.6 magnitude earthquake that rocks their little corner of the world. When it quickly abates, most roll over and go back to sleep.
Dream

Chapter Summary

They have to be careful. Dreaming the moonpaths leaves the soul untethered from the body. It leaves them vulnerable. It's the price demanded for knowing the shadows. For knowing and walking the Paths.

But they are together.

Together they are strong.

Chapter Notes

SO: A rutterkin is a D&D monster from Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes. Why yes, I am a D&D nerd... in fact, I am one of the D&D nerds: I'm a DM.

Anyway, I would like to shout-out the SOA wiki this week. I've spent quite a bit of time on it during the writing of this fic to try to keep not only SOA characters straight, but also history as pertaining to JT and the First Nine. I know my TW lore way better, and I stopped watching half way through the Dread Doctors storyline because I just couldn't with Theo.

Onward!

Disclaimer: Octarine as the color of magic belongs to Terry Pratchett and the Discworld. I own nothing SOA or TW.

Forty:

“People try to box me in
Telling me it’s sink or swim
Maybe I should sink until I stand
Out here where the water’s deep
I think I found a voice in me
And someday we will walk upon dry land…”

- Don’t Speak For Me (True), Andrew McMahon and the Wilderness
Waking up at three in the morning to find Donna Winston tucking her kids into bed in the spare room isn’t something one enjoys. In fact, when Jaime wanders across the hall to poke his head into the room and finds her there, his first instinct is to shift and rip apart whatever it is that drove their Pack Mom out of her own territory to the safety of the Pack House.

His second instinct is, of course, to suppress the first one, because Donna Winston is a scary woman. He waits for her in the doorway.

Stiles passes him in the hall, heading down the stairs toward the kitchen. After a minute he hears the kettle being set on the stove and the telltale clicking as the gas burner lights. Another minute and Donna joins Jaime in the doorway and he guides her gently back down the stairs and onto a stood at the counter where Stiles is waiting.

Twila makes herself comfortable in Donna’s lap while Stiles makes the three of them mugs of hot chocolate.

“The house was broken into,” Donna says after sipping at her mug and setting it down to cool for a minute. “Opie managed to catch one of them, but…”

“You kids were in the house,” Stiles says and Donna nods.

Derek appears in the doorway, slipping into his favorite leather jacket. He meets Jaime’s gaze and nods once, so Jaime gets up and heads for the stairs to get dressed himself. They will go join Opie in dealing with the aftermath of setting off an earthquake in their sleepy little burg.

Stiles hops up onto the stool next to Donna. He sits and he waits and listens when she starts to talk about what had happened. About what could have happened if she hadn’t woken because she heard something. About what could have happened if Opie had gone on the run with Jax. What he could have come home to. Stiles lets her get the thoughts swirling through her mind out.

When she’s finished, he wraps her up in a hug and tells her, “I’ll go ward the place this afternoon. This isn’t going to happen again.”

Donna nods at the offer, the reassurance. Wards will protect her kids even if she can’t. Wards will help her sleep better at night when Opie’s not in bed next to her. Stiles will take care of protecting her home from evil people wishing her family harm.

Opie will take care of the rest.

He always does.

*

Peter walks the woods with Robin. His wolf form keeps away the predators that call Chigger Woods home. They know instinctively by scent that he is not the kind of creature to encounter on a dark, nearly moonless night. Peter patrols these woods once a week (more if there’s something going on), he knows the safe paths by rote. The dim light that barely breaks through the trees doesn’t bother him.

Robin uses a trick he learned while he was in training. Something Fae hunters use to aid them in finding their quarry at night when necessary. A little shiver of octarine dances around his eyes for a moment, and then they begin to glow very faintly in the night like a cat’s eyes refracting when it gets dark.
They feel the earthquake of course, but there’s no worry in a shake that gentle and brief. They wait a minute until Peter gets a reassurance from Stiles that everything is okay before they continue on.

There are important things to do tonight.

The Shaman of the Wahewa tribe is waiting for him alongside the Alpha of the coyote Pack that holds claim over the reservation. They leave each other alone for the most part, but Peter knows (and so do they) that a living, breathing Fae appearing in their midst for the first time in nearly two hundred years is important.

The peace must be maintained. The coyotes can’t afford a war with Peter’s swiftly growing Pack. The Stilinski-Hale Pack can’t afford a war with the coyotes. They can’t afford to fight on two fronts.

No one is saying it, but they are in a war with Clay. Oh, there may not be guns and foot-soldiers in this war. They might have the artillery (Stiles) packed away to carefully avoid casualties. They may be doing everything they can to make this a bloodless coup, but that doesn’t mean they’re any less prepared.

And getting Robin introduced around the territory and satiating his curiosity is a loose end that needs dealing with. The last thing anyone needs is Robin getting wind of what Jax is trying to accomplish. After all, they’ve drafted an alliance with the Summer Court and Queen Titania through him. The accord was sent to her through magic, and she returned it signed and smelling strongly of magic just two days ago.

The very last thing anyone Above needs is Titania deciding that her new allies need aid.

Their alliance is fragile in its newness. It is the first foray into Above that the Fae have made since the earth started drifting to sleep centuries ago. Balance must be maintained at all costs.

So Robin needs to leave, sooner rather than later.

He is well liked among them, but he isn’t one of them.

And Clay Morrow isn’t going to care who gets hurt in the crossfire.

He’s not that kind of man.

*

It swiftly becomes common knowledge among the residents of Charming that there are actual live faeries living in the flower beds at the Botanical Gardens. Also, the groundskeepers all get raises from the city when they discover that some of the plant life has developed a habit of moving around by itself when it doesn’t like its neighbors or living situations. There is one particularly stubborn tree that doesn’t want to share its bed with anything other than perhaps some self-contained flowers.

The faeries help, but only a little.

There honestly isn’t anything anyone can do when a twenty-foot-tall tree decides to move itself six feet to the left so that its roots have more space.

Charming isn’t really a tourist town. The only things it has to recommend itself to a visitor is the frankly charming shopping district on Main and the fact that it isn’t Oakland. It isn’t close enough to the coast to be a good place to overnight on a beach trip. It is right off the highway on the way to Oakland, and the gas stations and restaurants located off the 580 get more traffic than anywhere else in town. People stop to refuel so they don’t have to do it in the city.
Charming does get its share of visitors. It has some great hiking trails, and has the old world charm of a town that hasn’t changed much in the last fifty years. People who like nature come to Charming. People who like to tour small town America stop through in their camper vans.

It becomes an unspoken rule to those who live in town that the supernatural elements that make their town unique are not to be spoken of to outsiders. If you know about the faeries at the Botanical Gardens and the gnomes that live under the garden beds in the local community garden space (they were convinced to move there by the Chief last week when the construction company at the housing development filed a complaint with the police department), then you know. The gnomes can often be seen playing on the equipment at the playground attached to the garden.

When, early one morning at the end of September, a minor earthquake rocks Charming, most people don’t think anything of it. Well, not until later that day when the epicenter is announced as a suburban neighborhood in town. Everyone knows who lives on South Blossom Ave. Knowing where the Sons live is seen as just good sense among the adults in town. And it isn’t like any of them can keep their residences a secret from their immediate neighbors.

Small town folks are prone to gossip. The Sons of Anarchy have been a favorite subject for years.

Word gets out that Opie Winston caused an earthquake when a bunch of idiots broke into his home in the middle of the night and threatened the safety of his family.

There are more people who believe this rumor than not.

After all, he was seen flinging chunks of the road around a few weeks ago when that monster dog thing had attacked the police station.

By the time Monday rolls around four days later, the fact that Opie Winston has magical powers is easily common knowledge. People start calling him an Earthbender after a popular anime series. When his kids come home from school calling him that, he doesn’t bother correcting them. It’s a close enough description; and it helps obfuscate the fact that the land under Charming is alive and has… opinions.

Opie Winston having powers makes people reassess the Sons. It becomes a popular debate around town. Which of the Sons have powers and which ones don’t? It’s nearly as talked about as Jacob Hale’s slander campaign against Chief Stilinski.

People remember what happened that day a month ago. They remember what Stiles and Peter Stilinski-Hale did to protect the town. Eye-witnesses are eager to share the story with anyone who asks. Like with all stories, these ones change and become more exaggerated with every retelling. Soon enough, Peter is a shapeshifter who can turn into a wolf as big as a car and Stiles is a real wizard. The Stilinskis moved to Charming when the pair fell in love because their love is some kind of forbidden romance trope on par with Romeo and Juliet.

Strangely, all this exaggeration does is endear the Chief to the people even more for supporting his son’s forbidden love.

By unspoken rote, Peter and Stiles become celebrities around town. Helped along by the small magic beings that live among them, word soon gets out that if you have a problem of the magical variety you can go to the Stilinski-Hales for help.

No one can seem to settle on a decision for what Jax, Jaime and Juice are. There’s a lively debate about whether they’re shapeshifters like Peter, wizards like Stiles, or (in Juice’s case) some kind of gargoyle.
Happy Lowman is the literal bogeyman. He enjoys this comparison. He also enjoys how people give him a wide berth when he looks grumpy now.

For some reason, he always looks grumpy when he goes grocery shopping.

A mystery.

There is some talk about whether or not any of the other Sons are somehow supernatural, but there isn’t any visible evidence to be had, so the rumors remain unfounded.

As a side effect, however, Caliana’s becomes known as a real magic shop and that increases business for her.

Overall, the earthquake becomes small news fairly quickly in Charming.

The goons that broke in? Rumors about them stay in circulation for a lot longer. People will talk about what happened to them for years to come. Eventually the story will become a cautionary tale about how you don’t piss off an Earthspeaker and walk away with all your body parts.

Greg the Peg went into the robbery already missing the lower half of his right leg, but sensationalism calls for a story about how Opie dropped a boulder on him and he had to have it removed because the damage was just too great.

It’s the only slice of fame that Greg will ever see.

Especially when Happy Lowman sees his picture and recognizes him as being from the Nomad charter.

Luckily for Greg, he’s in the hospital under police guard pending his trial for breaking and entering with intent to cause harm.

Unluckily for Greg, the Sons know he attacked a brother and his accomplices scarpered.

Luckily for Greg, he isn’t talking and therefore the man that hired him has no reason to come after him himself.

Unluckily for Greg, Mr. Mayhem is nipping at his heels.

Prison is not going to be a nice place for Greg the Peg.

* 

Juice is asleep when Jax gets back from the run to Tucson. He’s starfished across their bed in his boxers and there are silver freckles scattered across his back as he dreams. Jax checks on Abel first. He breathes in Abel’s unique baby scent greedily. He’s been without for too long. His eyes glow in the dark as he uses his nightvision to take in every minute detail of the boy’s person. He looks bigger, but that might just be Jax’s imagination.

After, he takes a quick shower in the hall bathroom to wash off the road dust and crawls into bed with Juice. With Juice laid out like he is, he finds himself hovering half over the other man. His fingers trace the pattern of stars across Juice’s back softly. He breathes in Juice’s scent. Leather, gunpowder, nicotine and something so light and foreign it can only be described as moonlight.

Juice is walking the moonpaths in his dreams.

He must be so far away.
Jax presses soft kisses across Juice’s shoulder and settles in to hold onto him. He rests his head in the hollow between the half-fae’s shoulder blades, anchoring him in place. He creates a physical tether between them so that Juice can return to him from the moonpaths; because sometimes Jax worries that he’ll get lost and never come back.

Juice turns his head to one side and breathes out shadows on a sigh.

Jax closes his eyes. His breathing settles to match Juice’s. Their heartbeats fall into sync as Jax’s slows to match his mate’s. Down the hall Abel shifts into sleep. Jax can hear the rapid-fire of his heart as it works to pump blood through the boy’s body. He listens for a minute, checking the steadiness of the beating. Any slight hiccup in the rhythm that may indicate that his heart is straining.

But Stiles Healed him.

Abel is healthy. He’s strong. His heart doesn’t have holes in it anymore. Neither does his stomach. He’s not straining for every breath.

Stiles Healed him.

The sound of his son’s steadily beating heart lulls him into a meditative state. The warmth exuding from Juice and the comfort of being at home pull him into dreaming.

Juice can’t hide what he is on the moonpaths. That’s not the way it works. He’s not any taller to Jax’s eyes. But his skin is silvery gray and speckled with platinum star specks. His eyes are black from corner to corner and strewn with distant stars. His hands curve into talons that could rend a man’s flesh from his bones, but Jax isn’t afraid of those claws. His horns spiral up off his head in the twisting tribal pattern of his tattoos, trailing off into black smoke and shadow.

Juice isn’t human on the moonpaths.

But then, neither is Jax.

Jax stands as tall as Juice’s waist at the shoulder. He’s strong like this. Sinew and muscle and bone. Sandy fur and electric eyes. A wolf that allows a shadow-walker to thread claws into the fur at his neck. A wolf that allows a dangerous being to put those claws so close to his vulnerable throat.

The golden cord that links them is visible here. Tied between their hearts and radiant with power.

Tied around each of their wrists is a blue ribbon that disappears into the ether. A tangible link to their son on the material plane.

They walk together along the moonpaths. Mother Moon glows silvery above them, lighting the way lest they fall off the path into nothing. They are both creatures of shadow, of night. Jax’s wolf linked to the moon’s waxing and waning. Juice’s fae-half made of moondust and dreams.

Juice can’t get lost here.

There are things here. Things that dwell and thrive in the dark. Things that shy away from the light. Stay in the light lest ye be lost to Shadows. That’s how the saying goes. One of the few things Juice’s mother taught him that he remembers. One of the few bits of good advice she gave before she returned to Faerie.

Juice walks the moonpaths often in his dreams. Being so intimately connected to them as he is, he can’t help it. He’s done it since he was a child, leaving footprints in the paths behind him. It’s amazing to him sometimes that he’s still alive. That his innate curiosity hadn’t caused him to step
off the safety of the paths to be consumed by something in the dark.

They want him. Hunger after one that walks among them but dares to stay in the light and not get burned by it. They want to eat the fragments of his soul and leave him an empty husk. One day (one night really, in his dreams) one of them will get lucky and he will wander too close to the edge.

When Jax can, he goes with him. Matches his footsteps with his own and snarls back at the things in the dark that want to take him away. Together, the keep watch over their pack from afar. They patrol. They make sure that no shadows slip from the void into Charming to threaten the ones they love.

They have to be careful. Dreaming the moonpaths leaves the soul untethered from the body. It leaves them vulnerable. It’s the price demanded for knowing the shadows. For knowing and walking the Paths.

But they are together.

Together they are strong.

*

Frankie Diamonds likes being a Son. He’s a little too volatile and a little too crass for standard society, but he fits right in with the misfits and renegades that cling to the fringes. He drinks too much, smokes too much, and wouldn’t know what to do with a relationship even if someone was willing to stick with him long enough to call it one. He gambles too much for his luck to ever be called good and prefers a fist to a word and bullet to a fist.

This all being said, he’s actually a fairly stationary object.

He doesn’t like being a nomad; but none of the charters will take him. Not after what happened to get him booted out of Vegas. Luther isn’t his biggest fan, and the man has made sure that all the other charters know what kind of brother they’d be taking on if they let him transfer. Quinn is unflappable, and he deals with guys like Frankie on the regular, being nomad president and all.

But then, as a nomad, all he’s really got to do is check in once a month, pay his dues and help out when its’ needed and he can go wherever he wants and do whatever he wants.

Doesn’t stop him from wanting a real home though. A place to lay his head and brothers that know him and have his back.

That’s the problem with being a nomad. You get in trouble and all you’ve got is you.

When Clay Morrow calls you out of the blue and tells you that you’ll be voted into his charter with no contest if you just do him this one little favor and you don’t look too closely at what you have to do. It’s a shot at something Frankie’s been wanting for years, and Clay Morrow is the undisputed King of the Sons.

Or, so he thought.

Frankie never claimed to be a smart man; but he ain’t no dummy either.

Attacking a brother’s family while he’s out on a run is pushing a line Frankie didn’t know he had. It was just supposed to scare the old lady. Make her jittery. It was supposed to shake things up, Clay said. Make it so that Jax looked weak. Like he couldn’t protect his people. Create a little doubt in the minds of the brothers when the prince went after the throne.
Opie wasn’t supposed to be there.

Clay’s information was obviously wrong. He’d told them that Opie was on a run to Tucson with Jax. It was just supposed to be Donna and the kids there. They were meant to go in, toss the place, maybe give a few good shots at the old lady to get the message across and steal some valuables to cover their tracks.

Clay never said anything about Opie Winston having powers.

Frankie’s seen some shit in his day. You can’t not see some of the things that lurk in the shadows when you ride the roads the way the nomads do. He’s played poker with vampires and helped some hunters deal with a rutterkin once. He knows from monsters.

Opie Winston isn’t a monster. He’s a gods-be-damned force of nature.

He and Go-Go book it as soon as they realize that they’ve bitten off way more than they can chew. They leave Greg the Peg to take the fall. Frankie likes Greg, but its every man for himself. No honor among thieves and all that.

He doesn’t consider that by leaving the bastard behind they’d be implicating Clay in all this.

Boy does he get a wakeup call when Clay aims a gun at his head and demands answers.

He’d like to say he kept his head in the face of adversity. That he didn’t cower before Clay Morrow like a little boy and beg for forgiveness. He can’t. Clay Morrow’s fucking scary. He’s a shark in a pool full of piranhas and he knows it. Frankie goes still lest he draw the man’s ire and be flayed alive for his troubles.

Besides, Go-Go blabs enough for both of them.

*

Before Opie Winston interrupted a break-in in progress, the trio of Nomads had performed four other home invasions in the two night prior to hitting the Winston house. Once John has Greg the Peg in custody, it’s fairly easy to have one of his officers look him up. Then it’s just a matter of pulling the files for the recent break-ins to put the pieces together.

Four home invasions. All of them performed on people either directly associated with the Club or on people associated through someone that is associated with the Club.

Charlie Delaney had woken up two nights ago to a tall, thin man leaning over her in her bed.

Wayne Unser is attacked leaving St. Thomas after a chemo session.

T.O. Cross, whose MC the Grim Bastard is closely associated with the Sons, comes home to his front door open and his wife beaten to a pulp (while his kids hide in a closet) the following night.

Caliana Welbur’s shop is broken into. Thankfully the intruders hadn’t been able to access her workshop or the apartment above the store where she lives.

For John, it’s easy to see that someone’s got it out for the Sons. Charlie Delaney is the daughter of a Son. Wayne Unser was in the Sons’ pocket for nearly all of his career as a Charming police officer. T.O. Cross’ club is located in Lodi, and that may be where he lives, but the Sons are known associates, so the Lodi police had sent Charming PD the file just in case they could come up with any leads. Cali is closely associated with the Peter, Stiles, Jax and Happy, who she’s grown close to.
Not to mention that she’s doing what she can to help Opie learn to control his abilities.

Greg the Peg won’t talk. He sits in interrogation with a resigned expression on his face and a stubborn frown creasing his lips and the space between his eyebrows.

And then Opie storms the building with Jaime and Derek flanking him.

John can’t help but feel that this is just the opening act in the war between Jax and Clay.

In the weeks to follow, John will wish that this was one of those times he’d been wrong.

But he isn’t wrong.

If anything, it’s an understatement.
Irish

Chapter Notes

NaNoWriMo is here and in my crazy I've decided to participate! I'm even hosting several Write-Ins during the month, so if you're in the AZ East Valley region, check out the events page and come join me.

I will be using this month to just try to get as much of this and a couple of other WIPs completed. Posting schedule will not be affected by NaNo. After yesterday, I'm already a chapter ahead!

In other news: I didn't really care for the Ireland arc in SOA, so I originally had no intention of going there. However, it seems to have become inevitable. So here's hoping I'm doing this all justice. Also, running Clay's shenanigans parallel to the Ireland trip was a bad idea, but I'm committed now!

Disclaimer: Octarine as the color of magic belongs to Terry Pratchett and the Discworld. I own nothing SOA or TW.

Forty-One:

When Gemma finds out that a Son broke into a brother’s house to terrorize his family, she doesn’t know what to do about it. She isn’t the kind of woman to sit back and not do anything. She’s a doer, a fixer. Gemma Teller-Morrow has never met a problem she could meet head-on and then break down into its component parts and come up with a solution.

But Gemma’s on the outs with her son, and she’s pretty sure her husband is behind this.

It’s part of Clay’s pattern. When he comes up against something or someone he construes as an enemy, he won’t get his own hands dirty. He’ll move his little pawns around the board, a King crowing in his castle with his Queen to protect his flank while he makes the puppets dance.

It’s worked that way for over thirty years, why not now?

Well, for one, Gemma’s pretty sure Clay is still thinking in a black and white world where monsters don’t exist. That he’s forgetting about the monsters that now live among like they always have. And maybe they have. There have always been monsters at the periphery of Gemma’s vision; why not real ones?

She can’t help but like these monsters. Can’t help but appreciate how Peter and Stiles not only avenged her, but gave her a safe place to mourn her attack without question. She can’t help but continue to love Happy, even if it’s now common knowledge that he has a habit of eating the enemies of the club that he’s sent after. She can’t help but appreciate Jaime and his silent watch doggedness that followed her attack. How he shadowed her for weeks afterward from afar, watching over her until she felt safe again.
She’s loved Juice as one of her own since the day that Chibs brought the too-skinny little shrimp in from the cold. He’d been so willing to anything he had to just to belong somewhere. He’d been so proud the day he earned his top rocker. He had never brought trouble to the Sons if he could help it.

And now?

Well, now, Juice is the gatekeeper to her son and grandson.

It’s Juice that brings Abel to see her in the office at Teller-Morrow. Juice who tells her how Jax is doing. How he’s handling the revelation that Clay is really his father. Juice who reminds her that forgiveness takes time when all she wants to do is scream and yell about how she did it to protect Jax.

*Everything* she does is to protect her family. Everything.

She comes home one day just after the break-in to find her son sitting at her dining room table with a steaming mug of coffee on the table and a half-burned cigarette dangling from his fingers. He doesn’t look at her as she carefully puts down her purse and bag of groceries. He just stares at a picture of Thomas hanging on the wall.

Gemma wants to speak. Wants to defend herself. Make him understand. Juice’s voice sounds in her head, telling her to wait.

Eventually, Jax speaks, “There’s a war coming. You’re going to have to pick a side.”

“I’ll always choose you Jackson,” Gemma says. It’s a decision she’s been thinking about for weeks.

He looks at her, blue eyes icy and eerily still in his seat, “Do you? You know how this is going to play out. If he won’t step down I’ll put him down. Can you live with that. With knowing what I’m probably going to have to do.”

“You’re my son,” Gemma says carefully. “I choose you. I choose you and Abel and Juice.”

He watches her with eerie eyes. Studying her, head canted to one side. She wonders if he’s listening to her heartbeat. Listening for a lie. Gemma wants to shift her weight; to look away from those eyes that see too much, but she feels pinned. Like a butterfly under a microscope.

“Did you love John Teller?”

“At the time? Yes, I did.”

“Did you and Clay kill him?”

“No. But we planned to. John just let the road take him before Clay could make a move.”

Jax sits back in his chair and takes a drag on his cigarette before putting it out in the ashtray at his elbow. Gemma can’t move. She doesn’t dare breathe.

“Are you hiding anything else from me?”

“Nothing. I swear.”

Jax rises and steps around the table so that he’s standing next to her. Gemma isn’t a small woman, but he makes her feel that way. Makes her feel tiny in comparison to the barely leashed power contained within his frame.
“If I find out you’re hiding anything else from me I’ll kill you.”

Gemma’s throat seizes as her heart rabbits in visceral terror. The pause is long enough to make her heart constrict.

“We’ve got church tomorrow. You can watch Abel at the clubhouse.”

She reaches up instinctively, grateful at this chance she’s being given. Jax dodges her touch by turning away and exiting the house. She watches the door close behind him and then she sits heavily in his vacated chair. She reaches for the still hot cup of coffee.

For better or worse, she’s chosen a side.

Now she’s got to live with the consequences.

*  

Tig’s got two kids. Two little (not so little anymore) girls that he loves more than anything in his life. When he and their mom had split it had gotten pretty damn ugly, and the courts had ruled it all in her favor. Amanda had been willing to let him off alimony if he didn’t fight her for custody. He’d done it thinking he’d still have visitation with his girls.

But Amanda was a vicious bitch who went behind his back to get him declared unfit. He wasn’t allowed to see the girls at all. Not until they were eighteen.

As soon as Dawn turned eighteen it became pretty damned clear that Amanda had filled his girls full of poison where their father is concerned. To Dawn and Fawn, Alexander Trager is a no-good criminal that walked out on them. It couldn’t be farther from the truth, but the damage is done.

Fawn won’t see him. She won’t even take his calls. Dawnie comes around every now and then to butter him up for money. He gives it to her. He always gives it to her. Because he gets a day or two with his little girl and the knowledge that the next time she needs something she’ll come back and he’ll get to see her again.

Gemma calls it like she sees it. He’s poisoning himself with the hope that they might want their father. He knows it. He’s not a stupid man, no matter what anyone says. He knows Dawn’s just using him; but he’s her father, and he loves her. His girls are the only real good he’s ever done in the world.

Venus doesn’t think so. Venus calls him ‘sugar’ and ‘darlin’ and means it. She doesn’t mind his crazy. His strange love of mushrooms or how he sleeps with a loaded gun under his pillow. Venus takes everything he’s got and puts him back together somehow softer than he was.

Tig tells Venus about his little girls. About how he lets them use him just so he can see them. Venus gets it, because Venus has a little boy of her own that she’s not allowed to see. Venus understands because even if she could see her boy, how could she possibly explain to him that the woman that she is is all that’s left of the man that fathered him. How she's more herself in her current body than she ever was when she was he.

Venus Van Dam is the best thing that ever happened to Tig Trager.

This time, when Dawnie shows up at the clubhouse looking for her father she doesn’t find a broken down man who’ll do anything for her in exchange for a few pretty lies and a hug. She finds something else entirely. Oh, Tig still greets her with open arms and the love he’s so desperate for her to accept, but there’s something different.
“Dawnie, you remember Jax?”

“Sure, hey.”

“Hey Dawn,” Jax returns with a smile. Last time she was here he’d flirted with her. This time his eyes don’t wander at all and he’s got a ring on the fourth finger of his left hand. “How you doin’?”

“Oh, I’m good!” Dawn replies. She’s always good. She’ll be even better when she can pay her dealer and get high. “How are you?”

Jax grins, “I’m great.”

His grin gets wider than Dawn’s ever seen when he spots something over her shoulder. She turns and spots a darker man (the one with the stupid skull tattoos that tried to seduce her last time she was here) walking toward them with a baby on his hip. A little blond kid with Jax’s eyes. He takes the baby when the kid lunges for him. “You remember Juice, right Dawn? This is our son, Abel.”

It takes her a moment to register the words, but Dawn eventually gets it. She’s completely surprised, but she gets it. Sees it in the way Juice and Jax unconsciously square up against her, comfortable in how close together they are. It’s the way Fawn is with her new boyfriend. “Of course, nice to see you.”

Tig pulls her away. Drags her through greetings with Gemma (the bitch), Chibs and Bobby and around to a little table that’s occupied by a group of men and a tall elegant woman with a suspicious looking adam’s apple at her throat.

“Hey Darlin’,” Tig says and leans in to kiss the transvestite sitting among the Sons like she does it all the time. Dawn stares. “This is my Dawn. Dawn, this is Venus.”

Venus smiles sweetly, genuinely accepting though her eyes are sharp. “Hello sweetheart,” she says to Dawn in a soft southern accent. “I’ve heard so much about you, pumpkin. It’s nice to finally put a face to the name.”

“Hi,” Dawn says. She wants to yell and scream. Wants to demand what her dad thinks he’s doing sleeping with a tranny of all people. Why can’t he just be normal? Why can’t he have a regular job that she can tell her friends about? In that way that people her age complain about how oppressive and boring their parents are.

Before she can say anything, Tig gestures to the other men at the table with Venus. One’s a tall, handsome Mexican. Dawn wouldn’t mind climbing that, you know, if he wasn’t wearing a kutte exactly like her father’s. The other two are shorter, but not actually short. One’s dark haired and green eyed and far too pretty for a biker gang. He’s an option, he’s not wearing a kutte. The other one has brown hair and blue eyes and looking in his eyes makes her feel like she’s fallen under the gimlet eye of a predator.

“These are some of the new brothers around here. That’s Peter, Jaime and Derek’s not a Son but he might as well be,” Tig is saying. Derek snorts at the statement. He’s perfectly comfortable as he is and they all know it. They all also know that there’s no way in hell Clay’s letting another Hale join his club.

“Hello Dawn,” Peter drawls out. Dawn feels like if she moves to fast he’ll attack. “It’s nice to finally meet you.”

Dawn feels off-kilter enough to agree to go to lunch with Tig and Venus.
She swears she sees a gleam of red in Peter’s eyes as she turns to follow them out of the clubhouse.

*

It’s past ten at night when Maureen Ashby answers the phone in the little grocery that is her livelihood. She’s just flicked the sign to closed and is sweeping up when the old 80’s era phone shrills from its place on the wall. For a moment she worries. For Keith, for Trinity. It’s a known fact that you only call Maureen Ashby after nine if it’s an emergency. An emergency being that someone is dying.

“Hello?” she snaps into the receiver, ready to rip whoever is calling apart. If her kid isn’t laid up in some hospital she’s going to have hell to pay. The voice that comes through is male, distant and tinny that speaks to long distance. The accent is a slow American drawl. More west coast than southern. Her heart squeezes painfully.

She used to know a man with a voice like that.

“Hi,” the voice says, unaware of Maureen’s turmoil. “I’m lookin’ for McGee. I was given this number.”

“Who’s callin’?” Maureen demands.

“My name is Jax Teller,” he says and Maureen has to reach out to clutch the doorframe with white knuckles. “I’m the VP of the Charming charter. I need to speak with McGee.”

It takes her a moment to force words past the lump in her throat, but eventually she grits out, “He’s not here. I can take a message.”

There’s a pause on the other end of the line, a dry crackle of static through the phone’s ancient wires. Eventually Jax Teller says, “Sure, darlin’. You tell McGee we need to talk. I’ll be there tomorrow.”

Maureen wonders what the hell Charming’s VP could possibly want with Keith. SAMCRO has little to nothing to do with SAMBEL… hell, none of the other charters do. That’s what happens when there’s an ocean between you and anyone that could be called brother. She focuses on that rather than the real reason why a stone settles in the pit of her stomach.

“Why?” she demands.

“Like I said, we need to talk.” Jax pauses and Maureen hears a different voice, muffled by distance from the phone, speaks to Jax. Jax replies, but obviously covered the phone’s speaker to do so. It’s indistinct and Maureen can’t puzzle out what he said before he speaks again. “We’re in at nine. We’ve already got transportation. We’ll come to the clubhouse.”

He hangs up and Maureen stands there in the doorway to the office under the harsh fluorescent lightning with the handset in her hand and her heart beating a disbelieving tattoo. Jax Teller is coming here. To Belfast. John Teller’s son is coming here, and Maureen is going to have to see him.

She’s going to have to see him and talk to him and possibly hide things from him.

She’s going to have to hide Trinity from him.

It takes her a minute, but eventually she pulls herself together enough to press the hook down for a dial tone. She punches Keith’s number in from memory. He’s on a protection run, so she doesn’t expect him to answer. She waits for the ringing to give way to his voice mail.
“Jax Teller just called,” she tells his answer box. “He’s coming here and he says he needs to talk to you.”

Slowly, the handset is placed back into the cradle and Maureen wraps her arms around herself, staring into the crowded little grocery office. She stares at the photos on the far wall with her heart in her throat and a frozen sense of doom in the pit of her stomach.

“Ma?”

She flinches, turns her head and there she is. Maureen’s whole world in all her glory. Trinity is a beautiful girl. All coppery blonde hair and attitude.

“You okay?” Trinity asks.

“I’m fine love,” Maureen says, swallowing hard when her voice comes out a little raspy. “Do us a favor an’ finish sweepin’ up?”

“Sure,” Trinity says slowly. She looks suspiciously at her mother for a moment, but she knows better than to push. Eventually she turns to retrieve the broom and picks up where Maureen left off when the phone rang.

Maureen turns and takes the few steps needed to bring her to the office chair. She sits heavily and reaches up to pull a photo off the wall. It’s an old thing. Taken on an eighties era polaroid camera and mostly covered up by newer pictures. Mostly ones of Trinity when she was just a little thing. Maureen stares down at the face in the picture, brushing her thumb across its surface.

A tiny, faded, washed out version of John Teller stares back at her, smiling. His arms hold an infant. A tiny little girl in a pink striped blanket. It’s the only picture she has of him. This one old photo taken partially out of focus. It’s the only one she couldn’t let go of when he went back to Charming. He’d been so convinced that he’d come back to her. To them.

And then the letters had started arriving, and it hadn’t taken long for Maureen to figure out that John Teller wasn’t coming back to her.

And now his son, the thing that had pulled him away from her, is going to be here.

Maureen stares down at the picture of the only time John ever met Trinity and wonders: is Jax a good man like his father? Or is he more like Gemma? Like Clay?

Maureen Ashby does not sleep well that night.

* *

When the pack sat down to talk about Jax’s trip to Belfast, it had been made abundantly clear that Jax wasn’t going to be allowed to go on his own. For one, SAMBEL owes Charming nothing. In fact, if anything, Charming owes them. SAMBEL was initially made to aid in growing the relationship with the IRA. The sheer amount of protection work they do for the IRA alone is enough to give pause. Hell, more than half the members come from real IRA families.

The break in loyalty has never been a source of contention before. SAMBEL’s relationship with the IRA had kept the pipeline clear of problems. It’s kept the guns flowing; and Keith McGee had stuck his neck out to vouch for SAMCRO’s integrity when the warehouse blew up and they had to stop running guns for a while.

Getting the Sons out of the gun business is going to be a hard sell in Belfast.
There is one thing that Jax is nearly certain of, and that is McGee backing his play for the gavel. McGee is First Nine. He joined up before Clay did and has never wavered since. There’s no love lost or won between McGee and Clay. They mostly just live and let live. So long as the pipeline stays open both men are content to let things lie.

Jax is about to kick over a hornet’s nest. There’s no telling where the sting will land.

So Jax isn’t going to Belfast by himself.

Juice is coming. That’s an unquestioned fact. Juice is their transportation to Ireland. Opie opts to remain behind. With the knowledge that it was a Son that broke into his house, he’s feeling the need to circle the wagons around his family. Jax can’t really blame him. Peter and Stiles don’t want him going anywhere near Faerie without backup. Ireland is steeped in Faerie, even after centuries of silence on the Fae’s part.

The argument between Stiles and Peter is lengthy. They can’t both go, no matter how much they don’t want to put an ocean between them. As Alphas of an ever-growing, ever awakening territory, one of them has to stay. After consulting with Robin, it’s decided that Stiles will be the one to stay. His connection to Charming and the wellspring under the house would make his absence noticeable. Not to mention that no one knows what the Nemeton might do if it perceives Stiles going on a trip as him trying to leave it.

It may be a fucking tree, but after hearing all about Beacon Hills it’s a fucking terrifying tree.

So Stiles will stay and Peter will go to Belfast.

It’s probably for the best. Peter wears the kutte, which will give him an automatic in with the brothers in Belfast.

Jaime declares he’s going to stay. Stiles needs someone around to watch his back because apparently Derek doesn’t count. Which, according to Derek himself, is fairly true. Derek has his own shit to deal with as he tries to get his life back in order after going off grid for so long after Laura’s death. There’s getting the missing persons reports dismissed in New York and trying to get his college credits transferred so he can finish school.

Not to mention that he doesn’t want to be that far away from Cora. They may not be in the same Pack anymore, but she’s still his baby sister and the only real family they’ve got other than Peter.

Happy grins his frightening grin. The one with too many teeth and a homicidal glint in his eye. He’ll go to Belfast. It’ll give him a chance to play at Sergeant at Arms for Jax. A little practice before he’s actually Sergeant at Arms for real when Jax takes over.

So Jax, Juice, Peter and Happy will go to Belfast.

And then Stiles decides it would probably be a good idea to let SAMBEL know they’re coming. It’s not only good manners, but Jax is also going to have to meet with the IRA while he’s there to talk about phasing out gun running, and not having SAMBEL pissed at him can only help.

They can’t ask Chibs for a number to call. Chibs’ past in Ireland is fraught with pain, and there’s no point asking him to dredge it all up. So the only person left to ask is Gemma.

Who throws an absolute bitchfit when she’s asked.

Oh, she’s got a phone number, but she and her contact have history between them, and Gemma doesn’t like the idea of her son going anywhere near the powder keg that is Ireland. She likes even
less that he’s thinking about taking Abel with him. So Jax compromises. Abel will stay in Charming where he’s safe. He’ll stay with Stiles, and Gemma can help take care of him. Full access while Jax is gone.

Gemma will do anything to return her relationship with her son back to what it was before he found out that Clay is his father, so she agrees readily and hands over the phone number of one Maureen Ashby.

That afternoon Jax makes an overseas phone call and the wheels are set into motion.

Jax Teller is going to Ireland.

*

It’s nearly ten o’clock when David gets the call out. A body’s been found out by the highway by a couple walking their dog in the lot adjacent to the gas station. By the time he gets there the scenes already been cordoned off and the coroner is already on the scene.

It’s a mess.

Whoever the guy pissed off, they didn’t want this guy identified, that’s for sure.

“What the hell is this?” Kara Palamas demands when she walks up next to him. She’s a little wild around the eyes, and David remembers that she and Officer Janowitz spent the morning chasing something called a Boggle around the grocery store’s stockroom. She has a few suspicious looking blotches on her uniform shirt and her ponytail is lopsided.

“Looks like a hit,” David says grimly.

“We sure it’s not some bogeyman?”

“Pretty sure,” David says. He’s not a hundred percent certain, but he’s seen stuff like this before. “Mutilation is common among criminal organizations to make identifying victims harder.”

Palamas nods, “Yeah… but are we sure there isn’t some monster out there that thinks fingers and eyes are delicacies?”

“Sure, why not? But his teeth are missing too, and unless the tooth fairy is really a horrifying monster that’s expanding into opposable thumbs, I think we’re safe.”

She snorts, “You know something.”

“I hear things.”

“Like what?”

David shrugs, “Well, the Winston’s house was broken into and we’ve got a fellow Son in custody. We know he had accomplices even if he won’t tell us who they are. Could be an enemy of the Sons cleaning up after himself.”

“Little grisly for clean-up, don’t you think?”

“I think we all need to remember that the Sons of Anarchy are still criminals; even if they tend to protect Charming.”

“I thought you liked them?”
David shakes his head, “Just because I like a few of them doesn’t mean I’m ignorant of what they do. What they’ve done. They still break the law, and until the Sons go a hundred percent legitimate, we’d be remiss to forget just what they’re capable of.”

“You think a Son did this?”

“I think someone wants us to think a Son did this.”

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