The Dolorous Stroke

by Escalus

Summary

Stiles and the younger members of the pack are in the middle of their junior year. Things are quiet; there's finally a chance to be happy. There's a chance for them to be teenagers and maybe even pursue love. But everything is about to erupt once again as buried secrets come to the surface, the Alpha Pack finally makes its move, and the guilty will be brought face-to-face with their crimes.

Oh, and after disappearing for more than a year, Scott McCall has returned to Beacon Hills.

This is a rewrite of the first half of season three with the idea that Stiles was bitten in Wolf Moon instead of Scott.

Notes

I do not own Teen Wolf; this story is written for purposes of homage and entertainment.
Vernon Boyd

Vernon Boyd walked down the hallway of Beacon Hills High at the head of the pack, the other three teenage members of it spread out behind him. Erica flirted with every good-looking boy as they headed toward class, even as she held tightly onto his hand. Isaac stalked on his left, sneeringly indifferent to anyone else. Stiles followed up behind, eyes fixed on his phone, always looking for a cool meme for the others to laugh at or a bit of lore they didn’t know to share. Over time, the student body had picked up the habit of getting out of the pack’s way. They did it subconsciously; no one knew they were werewolves. Their limbic systems simply reacted to the presence of predators. Boyd himself hadn’t noticed their prey response until Derek had pointed it out to him.

It might have caused a little confusion among the rest of the students, if they caught themselves shying away. The pack hadn’t made an effort to be intimidating. While the Bite had transformed the four of them into something more than they were before, the first months of their new lives had been about learning to control themselves, learning to harness their powers, and learning how to be a pack between occasional bouts of pain, horror, and running for their lives. This had left them with little time to improve their reputations at school. Yeah, all have them had become physically more imposing, and they wore leather jackets in imitation of their alpha, but they wouldn’t seem like anything truly special.

As it had been before the Bite, people avoided paying attention to Boyd; only now, he didn’t care. He had a group of friends who were closer to him than any stupid high-school clique could ever be. The others were also treated much the same. People still talked about the tragedy of Isaac’s family; only now they did it in whispers behind his back. No one seeking social clout did it by messing with the tall youth any more. People didn’t make fun of Erica, either; instead, they lusted after her, were envious of her, or both. And Stiles? He was the smartest kid in the school, and he no longer had to care who was annoyed by that fact.

Yet most of the students and many of the teachers, however, had become intimidated by the pack’s presence. No one had forgotten the terrible events in which all four of them had been involved, though no one had anything close to the true details. They just knew that three students had died, and several more had disappeared. So, people kept their distance, even though it had been a year to the day since the trouble had started. It was the first day of class in January of 2012; the second semester of the pack’s junior year, and the day after the Wolf Moon.

Boyd wished that he could stop thinking about that time; as much as he had gained, those events hadn’t been pleasant for anyone. Things seem to be changing for the better. It had been eight months since the Alpha Pack had left their calling card on the door of Derek’s old house. During those months, no matter where the pack had looked, they had found no other sign. Derek was sure that the Alpha Pack wouldn’t just change their minds, so he remained vigilant. Even with this nebulous threat, Boyd was glad he and Erica had been convinced to stick around.

Because the truth was that Boyd now had everything he had ever wanted. He had friends who sought him out; friends who missed him when he wasn’t where he was supposed to be; friends that cared. Once he had learned control, he also enjoyed the physical power of being a werewolf; he wasn’t going to lie about that. He also enjoyed his blossoming relationship with Erica. Underneath it all, when he got down to it, it was being pack – the feeling of belonging – that had made every horrifying moment worth it.

If you pressed him, he would also have to admit that he enjoyed being Derek’s second-in-command. Derek trusted him to handle things when the alpha couldn't be around, such as when they were at
school. Boyd hadn’t expected when he had taken the Bite to be placed in a position of leadership. He certainly hadn’t expected how good it would make him feel, and how hard he would try to live up to his alpha’s trust in him.

So, in the end, Boyd couldn’t care less that the other students avoided the pack. Let them be scornful; he knew better. Let them be afraid; they should be.

“I think this is going to be a good semester.” Boyd announced to the other three.

“And now we’re doomed because you said that!” Erica squeezed his hand to show she was joking.

“I don’t think it really works like that. Right, Stiles?” Isaac turned around when the last member of their pack didn’t answer. Stiles was standing in the hallway, his face scrunched up in concentration.

“What is it?” Boyd turned around and walked over to where he stood. Of the three of them, Stiles had the best command of his heightened senses, and he could put things together quicker than any of them. The pack had learned to pay attention to Stiles’ intuition over the last year. Even if his conclusions turned out to be wrong, they were never baseless.

Stiles twisted his head back and forth while looking up and down the hallway. While he was a lot more graceful now after the Bite, he still could flail with the best of them, especially when he was surprised. “I don’t know; I thought I smelled another one.” He dropped his voice so low that only the pack could hear him. “Another werewolf. Not our pack.”

The four of them gathered in the middle of the hallway; it wouldn’t look out of the ordinary. Erica tossed her hair back, as if she were being playful, but her whisper was serious. “Could it be the Alpha Pack?”

“What would they be doing in school?” Isaac suggested. “Aren’t alphas usually older?”

Stiles nodded but his attention was focused elsewhere. He was still searching. “They could have replaced a teacher. Remember, that’s how the Argents kept an eye on the school.” He gnawed at the tip of one of his fingers. “I can’t find the scent anymore.”

Boyd paused to think for a moment; he always asked himself what Derek would want him to put first. Finally, he reached a decision. “We’re going to act like nothing is wrong. Everyone be alert, especially around new teachers. I doubt anyone is going to do anything during the school day, but just in case each of you will text me after every class.”

Luckily, Boyd, Isaac, and Stiles all had the same class during first period. Erica kissed him on the cheek and waved the rest of them off, strutting away to her own class. While Erica enjoyed the effect she had on people after she had been pitied and mocked for so long, she always reserved the real thing for Boyd alone. He liked that; he liked that quite a lot.

As luck would have it, their first class was Miss Blake’s English class. She was one of the new teachers, so Boyd and the others would keep an eye on her. It wouldn’t hurt to make sure she wasn’t an enemy werewolf in disguise.

He hadn’t taken more than four steps in the door when Stiles gripped his jacket, bringing him to the stop. The scent of anxiety suddenly poured off of Stiles, so strongly that Isaac and he both felt compelled to turn to him. Boyd marveled at the strength of the chemo signal; if he had felt this badly, he would have thrown up. Stiles’ face was pale, but he wasn’t looking at the new teacher and he wasn’t looking at them. His eyes were locked on the second seat in the third row.

Scott McCall sat at the desk staring at the top of his notebooks.
“Stiles?” Boyd whispered to him. The other werewolf shook his head.

Even with all the time they had spent as a pack, Stiles had never spoken to Boyd about Scott. Like the rest of the school, Boyd knew that before last January, the pair of them had been so close that half the school thought they were romantically involved. He also knew that Scott had been out with Stiles the night that Stiles been bitten by Derek’s crazy uncle. He also knew that something so terrible had happened to his friend before Boyd, Isaac, and Erica had joined the pack that neither Derek nor Stiles ever talked about it. Scott had simply vanished from Beacon Hills one day, though his mother still lived here. The very few times he had come up in conversation, Derek and Stiles had made it clear they weren’t going to talk about it.

Whatever happened must have been even worse than Boyd had imagined, because Stiles became so agitated that he looked like he was approximately thirty seconds from shifting right in the middle of the classroom. Boyd placed a hand on Stiles shoulder, the way he had seen Derek do, and gently guided him back to a seat as far away from McCall as they could get.

“What’s wrong with you?” Boyd whispered.

Stiles only answer was to shake his head, once again, vigorously back and forth. Boyd kept his hand on him as long as he could, at least until he was sure that Stiles had managed to suppress his shift. Of the entire pack, Stiles had had the hardest time learning to control the shift, because he tended to overreact. The same sensitivity that made him so helpful in figuring things out also made it almost too easy for him to spiral out of control.

Isaac took up the seat on the other side of Stiles, after glaring so hard at the poor girl who was already sitting there she moved. He had probably realized how badly his pack mate was spooked, so Boyd was content to let it slide this time. Both Boyd and Derek had had to speak with Isaac before about his tendency to use violence as a first resort, but Boyd couldn’t really mind it in this instance.

As the class settled down, Boyd split his attention between McCall and Stiles, until Miss Blake did a cute thing by sending a text to all of her students. It was the last line of *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad. He hadn’t read the novel before, but he was looking forward to it.

Stiles paid little attention to the lesson or anything else that Miss Blake said. It was as if he was trying to bore into the back of McCall’s head with his eyes to find out what was going on in there. Every time Boyd or Isaac tried to get his attention, he waved them off. He wasn’t willing to talk about it.

As for McCall, Boyd watched him just as intently as Stiles was, even as the class continued, and the teen did … nothing out of the ordinary. He carefully took notes as Miss Blake spoke, as every good student in the class was doing. Boyd did notice that McCall never once looked back to where Stiles was sitting.

Stiles eventually subsided from extreme anxiety to pretty damn nervous. He still wouldn’t talk about it, even when they spoke with a whisper only werewolves could have heard, so Boyd turned back to the lesson at hand. Miss Blake seemed to be a great teacher, and he suspected he would enjoy her class. Putting Stiles’ strange reaction aside, Boyd buckled down on the novel.

His concentration lasted until a crow slammed into the window. Stiles nearly jumped out of his seat. He wasn’t used to being surprised these days, so the fact that he had missed the crow’s approach probably shocked him more than the actual event. Stiles looked back at him.

Miss Blake and the rest of the class looked outside, seeing an entire flock of crows heading toward them. Boyd couldn’t believe his eyes; surely, they’d turn at the last minute, but the flock smashed through the windows. Most of the class scrambled to get down on the floor as Miss Blake shouted
instructions. Boyd made sure Isaac and Stiles were covered. Flying glass and crow talons were scratching other students, and they didn’t need anyone noticing how quickly the werewolves’ wounds healed.

Everything was confused, but it wasn’t chaotic enough that Boyd failed to notice that McCall had not left his seat. He had raised one arm to cover his face, but he didn’t drop to the floor nor did he seem to be panicking. Indeed, with his free hand he grabbed one of the birds and held it, even as it struggled and pecked at him.

When the uproar had ended and all the birds were dead, except for the one that McCall had in his grip, the dazed students and teacher got to their feet. McCall left his desk and walked to the window, sticking his hand out of it and gave the bird a little toss. It flapped away.

“Now that was weird shit on weird shit,” Isaac stated so loudly that everyone could hear him. Boyd made sure that the three of them would lurk at the back of the classroom. Emergency services would be coming and they just had to be patient.

Patience was not something which Stiles had ever mastered. He shifted from one foot to another as the paramedics arrived started checking over each student. “I’m going to go talk to him,” he stated, though it was more as if he was trying to convince himself rather than Boyd and Isaac.

“No, you’re not.” Boyd took hold of his arm. “You’re going to wait until there isn’t a classroom full of frightened people, concerned teachers and …” He looked at the door as someone entered. “Your dad.”

Stiles looked up as if someone had shot him in the chest. “Oh, God.” He whispered. “Ohgod, ohgod, ohgod. Not now.”

“What?” Isaac shook him a little. “I thought we didn’t have to worry about your dad anymore.” Derek had insisted on Stiles telling his father the moment things had calmed down after the whole trouble with Gerard and the kanima had been resolved. Derek and Stiles had fought like wildcats over it, but Derek had finally worn Stiles down. He hadn’t used his alpha voice at all to win the fight, but relentless logic. Not telling his father that he was a werewolf in a pack was not only extremely risky, but it would destroy their father-son relationship if the sheriff discovered it in the wrong way.

“We don’t; I do.” Stiles swallowed and paled; the fact that his father was here did nothing to calm him. His heart rate was beginning to spike once more. “I have to … just let me sit down.”

Boyd slid in front of Stiles, keeping himself between his pack mate and the rest of the room. “Okay, this is getting pretty strange. Stiles, what’s going on?” Again, he lowered his voice so only Isaac and Stiles could hear it.

Stiles looked up at him. Most of the time, when Stiles was either distracted or distracting, you could barely get his eyes to focus in one place let alone on yours. When they did though, it was important. This time he held Boyd’s gaze and his eyes were full of some nameless emotion. “I can’t tell you.”

“Can’t or won’t?” Boyd demanded. “Because either way, you’re staying right here until we can leave. We’re not drawing attention to ourselves now.”

Boyd turned to see Noah Stilinski watching their group, or more specifically, his son, and then turn to look at McCall, as if confused by the distance between them.

“Hello, Scott. It’s good to see you.” The sheriff stood next to desk. “I didn’t know you were coming back. Stiles didn’t say anything. Is your hand okay?”
“I just got back a few days ago.” Scott answered calmly. He was looking up at the Sheriff like nothing had happened. The paramedic has bandaged his hand where the captured bird had wounded him. “School was starting. It was either come back or miss more.”

“Your mom told me you were spending some time with your father. I’m sure Stiles will be glad you’re back.” The sheriff did that little head turn again to glance at his son, as if he was trying to figure out what was going on.

“I’m glad to be back too.” Every single werewolf in the room heard the lie. “Nice to see you, Sheriff.”

The sheriff looked puzzled and walked over to where the pack was standing. “I have a lot of stuff to do, but I was wondering if you three … noticed anything?” He was obviously hinting about the supernatural aspect of things.

All three of them shook their head. “Dad, this was uh … we don’t know anything.” Stiles swallowed once again and tried to crane his neck to look over his father’s shoulder.

“Well, it’s been happening all over town. If you hear anything, let me know?” The sheriff looked up and then shooed them out the door. Emergency services had cleared the students.

As the three of them walked out of the classroom, Boyd saw McCall heading down the hallway towards his next class. Boyd decided he had had enough of whatever it was that was going on. Whether Stiles was willing to talk or not, he needed to know why his friend’s return had spooked him so much.

“McCall,” he called out, moving quickly to catch up to him. Without hesitation, Isaac backed him up. Behind them, they could hear Stiles whisper a plea, almost begging. “Guys don’t. Please.”

Boyd thought about stopping, but he knew from becoming his friend in the last six months that Stiles had the habit of hiding things when he thought they might be a burden to the people he cared about. It irritated Derek to no end, and to tell the truth, Boyd wasn’t so fond of it either. Stiles still hadn’t learned that pack was about sharing burdens. And, to be even more honest, it wasn’t just what had gone on between them that had perked Boyd’s interest. McCall had acted strangely during the whole event with the birds.

McCall wasn’t sprinting or anything, just walking at a normal pace to his next class. “I don’t really want to talk to you.” His voice was carefully neutral. He didn’t slow down or speed up.

Boyd frowned. He hadn’t expected this type of passive resistance. “We just want to ask you about what you did back there.”

McCall paused without turning around, long enough to answer. “I caught a bird.” He kept moving. “Leave me alone.”

Isaac reached out and took McCall by the shoulder. “Hey, what’s your problem, man?” With a little more strength than necessary he spun McCall around.

McCall, at the end of the spin, took a step towards Isaac and thrust out his arm. There was an audible snap and Isaac suddenly stiffened as he had been punched. He had not been punched; he had been stabbed, in the gut, with the switchblade McCall had hidden in his sleeve. “I know you guys don’t really think you have to keep your hands to yourselves, but I said leave me alone.”

Before anyone else in the hallway could notice, McCall drew the knife out and palmed it close.
“What the fuck?” Isaac clapped his hands over the wound. Boyd pulled him back and took his place. He growled in a threatening manner.

“That,” Boyd gritted, “was not necessary.”

McCall just looked up at him, barely even blinking. He wasn’t showing much emotion at all. “I think it was, since I don’t like being touched. Especially by people like you.” He jerked his chin over at Stiles. “You should ask him why.”

Stiles had followed them up reluctantly, so he was standing only five feet away like he dare not come closer. “Scott, don’t…”

Even though Boyd and Isaac were between the two of them, McCall acted as if they weren’t even there. “Don’t what? Don’t what, Stiles?”

Stiles came to a stop. He stared at some space between the wall and Scott’s feet. “You don’t need to take it out on them. They didn’t do anything. Look.” He took a deep breath and a single step nearer. “Look, I’m just trying to say …”

Scott’s heart was beating so hard that Boyd was surprised it didn’t burst out of his chest. So much anger coming off the human, that Boyd shifted positions to put his body between the former friends. “What are you trying to say? That you’re sorry? That you didn’t mean to? You can’t even look me in the eye when you talk to me.”

Stiles could be pushed only so far. “What do you want me to do? I can’t take it back, and I’m not going to kill myself to make you feel better. Why’d you even come back?”

Now that their attention was fixed on each other, Boyd took a moment under the guise of helping Isaac cover up his rapidly healing wound to study the both of them. His senses told him that Stiles felt terrible guilt but he also felt cornered, and a cornered Stiles always came out swinging. He had never known McCall, but the tightly controlled anger was evident in the set of his crooked jaw and the way he gripped the hidden switchblade in his palm. Below all of that was the terrible reek of misery.

“I came back because my mom lives here. I came back because this is my home.” The next sentence was hissed with such a depth of corrupted longing that it almost made Boyd want to step back. "I came back for you.”

At that challenge, Stiles finally raised his eyes and looked his formed friend right in the face. It must have been the first time since they had met this semester.

“Nous chassons ceux qui nous chassent.” Scott’s words struck Stiles like a physical blow. “Or however the hell you pronounce that. My French sucks. Now leave me alone.” He turned around and walked off.

Boyd stared after him and then turned to face Stiles. He expected anger or some sort of puzzlement, but what he got was a mixture of disbelief and sadness. Stiles looked like God had played a particularly mean practical joke on him.

“What the hell did that mean?” Isaac demanded.

“It’s the Argent Code,” Stiles breathing was heavy and he trembled. “It means he’s with them. He’s a hunter now.”

Boyd turned to look down the hallway McCall had disappeared. “Why do you think he’s here?”
“I know why he’s here,” Stiles replied, devastated. “He’s here to kill me.”
Erica Reyes

Chapter Summary

Erica has a nasty encounter with Aiden at school and overhears a fight between Derek and Stiles.

Erica flashed her brightest smile at the freshman boys as they ogled her in the hallway; one of them was distracted that he walked into an open locker door. The entire hallway broke into good-natured giggles at that, even the blushing boy; he wasn’t badly hurt. Having this effect on men flattered and thrilled her, and Erica still enjoyed being flattered and thrilled even a year after her lycanthropic makeover. As Boyd had said, this semester was turning out to have all the makings of a good one.

Of course, nothing would ever be perfect. Even now, the pleasure from all the boys – and a few girls – staring at her wasn’t without its downside. When she had been Epileptic Erica, she had hated the fact that when anyone in the school looked at her – and anyone at home, if she was being honest – all they saw was the disease. They hadn’t seen that there was so much more to her than her symptoms; she was smart, she had great taste in music, and she could argue the intricacies of super heroes with any boy.

In many ways, things were still the same, at least at school. She was now Super-Hot Erica, but all the people there saw was the hair, the eyes, the boobs, the legs, and the revealing clothes. They still didn’t see her. But, if she was going to have to remain hidden, she preferred the Super-Hot Girl disguise to the Epileptic Girl disguise.

Not everything was a downer. Her mother had just this morning scolded her for wearing clothes that, quote, “make you look like a two-bit hooker.” Erica had immediately hugged her mother so fiercely that she had to pull back before she went too far, confusing the hell out of the other woman. Her mother couldn’t understand that before the change, she had been so stiflingly overprotective with Erica that it was dehumanizing. Every morning and every night, her mother would check to see if Erica had taken her medicine, which was fine, but she had seldom asked if she was fine. Her mother would forbid her from doing anything that could be seen as remotely dangerous should she have a seizure. First and foremost in her mother’s mind had always been that her daughter was sick. Now her mother treated her like a normal teenage girl who was dressing inappropriately for her age. Now her mother saw her like every other mother saw every other daughter, and she had no clue how much of a joy that was to Erica.

Even better, her mother, shocked by the hug, had asked what Boyd thought of her clothing choices as a way of recovering. Erica could easily have replied that Boyd liked the way she dressed; he wasn’t jealous at all. Erica had been so pleasantly surprised to find that her mother and father approved of her relationship with Boyd. They saw him as quiet, steady, dependable and hard-working, and he was all those things. They also saw him as a safe boyfriend for her, which was also true. If they only knew the rest, Erica was also sure they wouldn’t be so supportive.

Unlike the fight between Stiles and the alpha over Stiles’ dad, Erica had managed to convince Derek that she shouldn’t tell her family. While the sheriff had both the resources and the investigative mind to cause them trouble, her parents were simply cloyingly overprotective. They would be much less troublesome if they didn’t know, and one of the reasons she had said yes to the Bite was to get them
to stop worrying so much. Derek had relented because he understood. As a compromise with him, she scrupulously called them to let them know where she was, even if she had to lie sometimes.

Her mother’s taste was wrong, though. Her clothing was fabulous. Any boy who stared too long could kiss her ass. Stares didn’t make her feel self-conscious or afraid, not like before. She was a goddamn werewolf, and she wasn’t afraid of any high-school scum bag. Any boy who got handsy or rude was in for a very big surprise.

Maybe she would end up having to surprise this clueless motor-cycle jacket-clad douchebag who was presently stalking up to her like he had already won a prize at the state fair. Erica stared right back him, openly checking him out, in order to make sure he understood who he was dealing with. His face definitely as hovering around a six, while his body ranked at a nine-and-a-half. Derek was the only person she knew who ranked a ten, but he had made it perfectly clear before she started seeing Boyd that nothing was ever going to happen between them. She had never ranked Boyd; he was different.

Erica already knew that she didn’t like this new boy’s attitude, which was directly confrontational and a little bit possessive. It was like he was challenging her, daring her to defy him. She would certainly enjoy dropping him on his ass.

“Hello.” He lifted the corner of his mouth in a way she guessed was supposed to be a smile.

She gave that greeting the eye-roll it deserved. “That’s your opening line? What’s your play here? Right now I’m not seeing it.”

“Did you want a line?” She hadn’t rattled his confidence at all. In fact, he seemed pleased by her sass. “I could give you a line, but I thought I’d just come up and introduce myself like normal people do.”

She frowned slightly. “Well. Openness and honesty – that’s a new approach.” She was disturbed because usually even grown men’s hearts quickened in her presence, yet his remained slow and steady. “I guess it fits because so are you.”

“I’m a senior transfer.” He smirked at that, almost giggling, as if it were a joke. “My name’s Aiden.”

“Well, hello, Aiden.” She turned to close her locker. “Because you are being so polite, my name is …”

“I know who you are, Erica.” He said and his tone dropped from playful to serious. “I thought that we might meet somewhere after school.”

She turned around and squinted at him. This was getting weird. “I think … No. Definitely no. Confidence is sexy but you can overdo it.”

Shrugging as if it didn’t matter that she rejected him, he pulled a folded slip of paper from his pocket. “At least let me give you my number.” He reached out his hand to put it in her jacket pocket.

“Creepy much?” Erica had reached her limit of nonsense with this guy. She grabbed his wrist and squeezed it hard to show that she meant business. Usually, a small display such as this would make most douchebags freak out, but it was her turn to freak out because all her strength didn’t even slow him down. His arm kept moving inexorably; he was stronger than she was. She didn’t give up the struggle, but he slowly advanced his hand and slid the paper into her pocket. To an outside observer, this looked like a playful struggle, but to Erica, it was about dominance. She growled at him, almost imperceptibly.
Aiden flashed red eyes briefly. “There, that wasn’t so bad, was it? You should come and see us.”

“Well … fuck you.” She sounded a bit impotent to her own ears. She could also feel her heart beating so fast, even though she fought to keep herself under control.

He smiled at her, and this time it was a genuine smile which somehow made it even creepier. Then he just walked away. She leaned up against the lockers and sighed. So much for a good start to the school year, she thought. Out of the corner of the eyes she saw a boy staring at her. He had witnessed the whole exchange between her and Aiden, but he probably hadn’t seen enough to be suspicious. She thought she recognized him; he was a Latino boy with a crooked jaw. He disappeared around the corner without even an acknowledgement.

She called Boyd immediately afterwards. They were all going to meet at lunch on the lacrosse pitch to talk about what happened to the boys and what happened to her. After school, though, Erica was going to go straight to Derek’s apartment. The Alpha Pack had made another move, and she wanted her alpha to know exactly what was going on.

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The loft was definitely an improvement over the burnt-out shell of Derek’s childhood home and the abandoned train station. It always made Erica think of a steam-punk monastery, but she supposed it did give the pack a place to hang that would be safer than a three-bedroom ranch in a subdivision.

Today it seemed too isolated as she looked over her shoulder. She moved carefully. Most likely, the Alpha Pack knew where Derek lived, but if by some chance they didn’t, she wasn’t going to lead them straight to it. She kept her senses wide open so she was sure she wasn’t followed, though she wasn’t as confident in her abilities as she had been earlier that day. She would never admit it to anyone, but Aiden approaching her in the hallway had really rattled her.

It was only because she was listening closely for any signs of people following her that she heard the argument inside before she had even reached the heavy iron door to the loft.

“Panicking? I’m not panicking!” Stiles was shouting, in a panic. “I’m nervous. I’m concerned. I’m freaking the fuck out, but I’m not panicking. When and if I start to panic, Derek, you will damn well be able to recognize it. My panic is very recognizable and comes with a whole different set of sound effects!”

“Calm down.”

“Yeah, I think that instead of calming down like you want, I’m not going to calm down, especially when you try to use the same suave alpha-command tone you take when you settle arguments about which pizza toppings to order! It’s not as effective as you think it is, Derek! In fact, right now, it’s not very effective at all. I would love to calm down. It’s all I want to do right now! Well that and go back in time to when my life wasn’t an enormous pile of crap!”

Derek’s voice was patience incarnate. “I think you’re overreacting.”

Erica could imagine Stiles giving Derek his eye-twitching stare of disbelief. “I’m overreacting? I … am … overreacting. My former best friend shows up after eleven months of being God-knows-where doing God-knows-what with a switchblade and death threats, and my alpha tells me that I am overreacting! Would you care to explain your thinking behind that statement?”

“Stiles, find your anchor; you’re shredding your book bag. From what you told me, he didn’t actually say he was here to kill you.”
“He stabbed Isaac in the gut and quoted the Argent Code at me!” Stiles shouted in exasperation. “No, he didn’t actually say ‘I’m going to cut you in half’ but since I’m a relatively intelligent werewolf, I can read between the lines! This is such a mess.”

Erica hesitated to interrupt what was going on; Derek was doing his best to calm Stiles down, and she had been around her pack-mate enough to realize that her present wouldn’t help that happen. She had to give her alpha time. She remembered the day she finally realized that Derek hadn’t come equipped with all the answers, when she realized that he was still learning how to be an alpha as she was learning to be a beta. It had made things so much easier. Derek may not have been the best leader in the history of leaders, but he was so much better at it when he wasn’t dealing with crazy lizard creatures and geriatric psychopaths. He had admitted to her once, and only once, that he did his best work when he was consciously mimicking his mother. She assumed he was doing that now.

“Scott is your oldest friend. Do you really think he would do that?”

Stiles’ temper flared as it always did when he was scared. Erica could hear him talking around his fangs. “I don’t know! I don’t know! Don’t you get that that is the reason I’m freaking out? I don’t know any more what he is capable of doing. After all, I didn’t know what I was capable of doing. I don’t know what I’m capable of doing now.”

“Then maybe it’s better if you don’t assume the worst about what he would do.”

Stiles snarled and Erica knew there were teeth and claws involved. “Like you didn’t assume the worst about what Kate would do?”

The loft was plunged into silence. Erica had no idea what those words meant, but she could tell by the sudden chill in the conversation that it was one of those things that remained between Derek and Stiles and only Derek and Stiles. She accepted – everyone accepted – that Derek had a different relationship with Stiles than he had with the rest of the pack. It was more intense while at the same time more unstable. Boyd thought it was because Stiles hadn’t been bitten by Derek. Isaac thought it was because of whatever had finally made Stiles accept Derek as his alpha. Erica thought that both Boyd and Isaac were right and they were both wrong. Derek and Stiles shared something that went beyond the alpha-beta bond. All she could point to was that Stiles could get away with more than they could, but, at the same time, that freedom sacrificed the solidity that they, as bitten betas, had with Derek. Derek seldom used the alpha voice on Stiles, but then he wasn’t as closely affectionate with Stiles as he was with them. It was as if he held back on purpose.

“I …” Stiles stuttered and she could tell by the timbre of his voice he had shifted back to fully human. “I shouldn’t have said that. It’s not the same, and I shouldn’t have implied that it was the same.” There was a pause where Stiles have been figuring out how badly he had screwed up. “You aren’t saying anything, which is now making this very uncomfortable. I shouldn’t have brought that up.”

“You are right. You shouldn’t have brought it up.” Derek’s voice was tight, but he was still in control. “I shouldn’t be surprised. You tend to go for the low blow when you want to avoid admitting that you’re wrong.”

Stiles made a sound somewhere between a scoff and a gasp. “I don’t do that.”

“Sure you do. We’ve talked about this before. If you can’t control a situation, you avoid it by changing the subject. When you hurt Scott, you focused on me. You helped me deal with Peter. You joined my pack. You did anything you could to avoid dealing with it, hoping it would go away. And it did go away for a while, but now it’s back. And you can’t ignore it this time.”
Stiles muttered something that Erica couldn’t quite catch, even with her hearing focused as much as it was. She thought it may have been “Watch me,” but she wasn’t sure.

There was a pause in the conversation. Erica was sure that there was a staring contest happening inside, and she began to think that this would be the best time to stop eavesdropping and enter, but then she hears Stiles begin again.

“All right, so I like ignoring things until they go away. This isn’t new. But what do we do about it? Wait to see if I’m right and he starts shooting me?”

“No. We take steps to make sure that doesn’t happen. Have you talked to your father yet?” Derek’s voice had relaxed. He was back to sounding like a reasonable leader.

“No! No, no, no. And again, no. My father isn’t going to be involved in this.” Stiles suddenly was back into defense mode.

“Why? Scott’s still a minor; your father can …” There was another pause as Derek was talking. Erica wished she could see the conversation as well as hear it.

“Stiles.” It was an accusation. Whatever was going on, Derek was unhappy. “Stiles, tell me he knows about this.”

“Well, I might have told him that Scott left town for reasons involving werewolves without giving very much detail about what exactly those reasons were.” She could feel Stiles wincing from here.

“Stiles!” Now the tone was condemnation. She imagined angry eyebrows.

“What was I going to say? Oh, hey, Dad, remember my best friend for like eight years? The kid you kind of treated like a second son? Yeah, he might have left town because I lost control, mauled him, and then left him bleeding out alone in his bedroom? If it wasn’t for his girlfriend making a surprise visit, Melissa would have found his corpse the next morning.” Stiles sounded pleading. “Yes, my dad would have totally not looked at me like some sort of monster after I told him that.”

“Your father would have understood. He understood everything else.” Derek sounded sad. “You should have more faith in him.”

“My dad has limits, like any rational human being. He wouldn’t have forgiven me for everything. I haven’t forgiven me for everything.”

“You should,” Derek said almost too softly for Erica to hear.

“Hypocrite!”

“I will talk to Scott,” Derek announced. “Just relax. We’ll solve this together.”

Erica decided that it was a good time for her to make her entrance, so she punched in the code for the alarm. Both Derek and Stiles would hear it and assume she had just arrived – or so she hoped. One of the things that Stiles had done, being very safety conscious, was demand that Derek get a real security system for the loft. It was a pretty good system with a few special twists, such as the fact that the door became electrified if you tried to use your key before you put in the code.

Stiles and Derek turned to her from where they had been standing, between the table and the window. Derek had been standing comfortably close to Stiles but quickly stepped away when the door opened.
Erica put on her best I-totally-wasn’t-eavesdropping act. “One of the alpha pack approached me at school today.”

She told them both of them all about it. Derek, after making sure she was okay, immediately called Boyd and Isaac to double check on them, while Stiles very eagerly began to interrogate her about it. She smiled at him, because he was doing just what Derek had accused him of doing.

“Why are you smiling? It’s weird. I mean I really don’t understand it. Four months of nothing and then they play their hand like this.” Stiles scratched at the back of his head. “Do you think he was sincere?”

Erica wasn’t quite sure what Stiles was asking. She often didn’t follow his thought processes. “Who was sincere?”

“This Aiden dude. Do you think he actually wanted to ask you out on a date? We are assuming that he has some secret ulterior motive, but we don’t really have any evidence that he doesn’t want to date you. He’s still a guy, and you are still a very, very attractive female werewolf.”

“Why, Stiles, that may be the nicest thing you have ever said to me.” She bopped him softly on the arm. “If he really wanted to get a date with me, he chose the creepiest way ever to try to get one. Girls really love it when you slide your phone number into their jackets without their consent.” She pulled the slip out of her jacket pocket.

“Well, in his defense, we can be pretty stupid when it comes to girls.” Stiles grinned at her. “I know this from both eyewitness accounts and personal experiences.” His grin faded. “That’s weird.” He snatched the piece of paper out of her hand.

Erica grimaced at the rudeness of what he had done, but she didn’t say anything. She understood by now it was the way his brain worked. He saw something interesting and he just went for it. “What is it?”

“The piece of paper isn’t a blank piece of paper. It’s a deposit slip.” He held it up so she could examine it. “Most people don’t use deposit slips as notes, because they have their account numbers on it. This one is completely blank. Banks keep them around just in case you don’t have one of your own with you.”

“So? Maybe that was all he had to write on?”

“It’s just strange.” Stiles glanced at the numbers and then stopped. “This isn’t a phone number, either. Those have seven digits or ten digits. This has eight.” He studied it. “Zero eight dash one seven dash one nine nine five.”

Erica grabbed his wrist and pulled his hand over to get a better look. “Looks like a date.”

“You’re right. August 17, 1995. Does that mean anything to you?” Erica could see the gears whirling around in his brain.

“No. I don’t think so. Why would they give me a date? Did they want me to look something up?”

“No, but if it isn’t a message to you, it’s probably a message to Derek.” He turned around to where Derek was still on the phone, giving instructions to Boyd.

Derek finally hung up. “Boyd and Isaac are finishing with school stuff. They were talking with Coach Finstock about what they have to do for lacrosse in the fall. Didn’t you want to play this year, Stiles?”
Stiles shook his head, slowly. “Not interested.”

Erica mentally sighed. For as much as Derek could be a good leader, he sometimes misunderstood the simplest things, such as the real reason Stiles had always played lacrosse before he became a werewolf.

Stiles changed the subject. “Does the date August 17, 1995 mean anything to you?”

Derek thought about it for about a minute or two. Then Erica could see his face kind of fall in on itself. “It was my younger sister’s birthday.”

Stiles looked down at the slip of paper and then quickly explained where they had gotten the piece of paper. “It has to be a message to you. Do you recognize Beacon Hills First National Bank?”

Derek was lost in thought until Stiles reached out his hand and tugged on his sleeve. “Do you?”

Derek returned from wherever he had been; Erica knew he must have been thinking about his family. He shook his head as he looked at the slip. “Nothing. It’s not my bank. It’s not my family’s bank.” She could see him shut down the nostalgia and the bad memories in order to return to alpha mode. “You did well, Erica.”

“Thanks.” Erica looked at Stiles, but he had gone elsewhere as Derek had been. He was staring at the slip as if he could force it to reveal the secret plans of the alpha pack. In her gut, Erica didn’t think this meant anything good, but she realized she wasn’t afraid. Not yet, anyway. She trusted her pack.
Chapter Summary

Derek confronts Scott about what happened after the accident with Stiles.

If there was one thing that Derek had learned about himself in the last year, it was how often he confused strategy with impatience. He could never bear to sit around and wait for his enemies to make the first move. This tendency had backfired more than once.

Whether this particular move was strategy or impatience didn’t matter, it was important for him to be where he was, perched on the roof of the McCall House. Confronting Scott was something he could do immediately, and he was glad that it would make Stiles feel better. Hell, it would make him feel better. Derek preferred concrete steps; he preferred making a difference.

The message that had been passed to him through Aiden and Erica had left him unsettled, which was probably the point. The Alpha Pack wanted him to be thinking about Cora rather than how to deal with their threat, and the last thing he ever wanted to do was think about Cora or any other member of the family he had lost. Confronting another potential threat was a particularly useful distraction.

The moon was no longer full but very close and very bright, hanging above Derek even while he was hiding on roof of the McCall house. He could see the entire road, which would give him time to prepare when Scott came home from wherever he had gone. It would take Derek but a moment to slip into the house for what was sure not to be an easy conversation.

He could see Scott’s bed, illuminated by a square of bright moonlight, from where he was perched. While Derek hadn’t been anywhere near Scott’s house the night the tragedy had happened, Stiles had talked about it in as deep a detail as he could manage. Of course, that was only after Derek had spent weeks trying to get Stiles to talk about it at all. For all his words, Stiles was an intensely private person, and he seldom wanted to share what was bothering him. Derek would have usually let him have his space because he knew what it was like not to want to share the thoughts roiling around inside your own head. However, it had become clear that the guilt about that night was eating Stiles up, and so Derek had finally dragged it out of him in a terrible fight. Finally talking about it had helped make Stiles’ third full moon a lot more manageable, which was good for everyone, as it had been Isaac’s, Erica’s, and Boyd’s first full moon.

Derek studied the pattern on the coverlet. The worst part of tonight would be the fact that there was little he could say or do that would repair the damage caused by his insane uncle. There was little he could say or do to repair the damage he had caused when he had made those first foolish mistakes. Derek couldn’t escape that ultimately all the blame in this was his. He just hoped he wouldn’t have to shed any more innocent blood.

The house was empty now, Melissa McCall at work, which was good as this conversation would be best done one on one. For the first time in a long time, he had not had to argue with Stiles to get him to stay at the loft. Instead, he only had had to argue with the others. Derek had tried to assure them that he wasn’t in much danger. No matter what had happened, Scott wasn’t going to turn into a master hunter like Chris Argent in less than a year.

If Scott turned out to be an actual threat to Stiles, Derek would go to the Sheriff, regardless of Stiles’
opinion in the matter. He would much rather have a pissed-off Stiles pissed than a hurt or dead Stiles. Derek had just begun to feel bonds with his betas the way he had with his family. That is why he had hoped beyond hope that the Alpha Pack had just given up and left.

He’d deal with the Alpha Pack later. They were never going to get him to turn on his pack, now that he finally had one again. Derek turned his head to the street as he heard Scott’s motorcycle and saw a single headlight moving down the road. Boyd had noted the make, model, and license plate before he had left school that day. Switching off the bike in the driveway, Scott did a sweep of his surroundings like a hunter would, but he still couldn’t see in the dark.

After Scott entered the house, Derek slid in through the bedroom window. He had been taught by Peter long before the fire that a well-timed entrance could give you the upper hand at the beginning of any conflict. Talking could be a lot like fighting.

So Scott didn’t notice him lurking in the dark of his own room. The boy set his helmet and gloves down on his desk, shrugged off his jacket, and pulled off his shirt as he went into the bathroom. When Scott switched on the light, Derek got a good look at his back. It was a horror. The scar tissue ran from the tops of his shoulders all the way down to his waist, a network of angry red and bilious white that the boy would carry with him for the rest of his life.

Derek could barely believe he was still alive.

Scott washed his face in the sink but when he turned around for a towel, he saw Derek standing by his bed. Derek’s eyes were immediately drawn to a strange tattoo on Scott’s chest, which looked like some sort of heraldry. For a moment, Scott’s eyes grew big like a deer in headlights, but when Derek didn’t make a move, he grabbed a shirt that was lying on the ground and pulled it over his head.

“You know, breaking and entering is illegal. In twenty-seven states, I could kill you and claim I stood my ground.”

Derek wasn’t impressed. “Not in California.”

“No.” Scott crossed his arms. To his initial surprise there was now added anger. “What are you doing here, Derek?”

“You stabbed one of my betas.” Derek scowled; Scott’s heart rate increased with fear.

“I stabbed a werewolf who put his hands on me after I told him to leave me alone. You shouldn’t get angry at me for defending myself.” Scott tried to sound like he wasn’t intimidated. It wasn’t working. Derek saw no reason not to keep scowling. “That’s it? That’s all you’re going to say.”

“What do you want, Derek? What was so important that you couldn’t use the phone or knock on the front door like a normal person?” Scott took a step to the side, toward the closet.

“You quoted the Argent Code to my pack. Are you a hunter now?”

Scott took a deep breath. “So what if I am? You here to kill me for it?”

Derek sighed. “Why would you do that? You’d really hunt your best friend? You know he wasn’t in control that night. He didn’t know what he was doing.”

“You weren’t there!” Scott replied viciously. His fear had fled with a rise in fury. “You weren’t there; you don’t know everything that happened.”
“Stiles told me everything.” Derek went for reassuring. A year ago, he would have thrown Scott against the wall and threatened him, but that would have been wrong and made an enemy when the last thing he wanted was to make an enemy. “The early full moons are dangerous for bitten wolves, precisely because they can’t be unpredictable. He had managed to get through the first one without any problem, because his anchor was there. You were his anchor. But for new wolves, an anchor doesn’t hold all the time.”

“I already know that, because I was there when you told him, remember? I was there when you carefully explained that even though he did well on his first full moon, he shouldn’t take it for granted. But, what you didn’t know is that Stiles is always right.” Sarcasm filled Scott’s voice. “He didn’t need to listen to you; he knew better than you did after just one full moon. He told me that all we needed to do is just ride it out. Like an idiot, I listened to him, because I always listened to him.”

Derek grimaced. “We all made mistakes.”

“A mistake. Unbelievable.” Scott laughed, but it wasn’t a positive sound. “I was in intensive care for six weeks! And that was me being lucky I wasn’t in the morgue! If it hadn’t been for Allison, I would have bled out in my own bedroom on my own bed. Did he tell you he just left me there?”

Derek couldn’t begrudge Scott some anger. “I know.”

“Thanks to that mistake, I have what the doctors called extensive nerve damage. If it wasn’t for the medicine I take every day, I wouldn’t be able lift my arms above my shoulders.” He demonstrated his range of movement. “Not only would I not be able to drive my motorcycle, I wouldn’t even be able to put a helmet on!”

Scott took a step toward Derek. The fear was gone and there was fury in his eyes. “And it isn’t going away. It’s not going to heal. Crippled in every sense of the word. And not just that, every morning when I wake up, the dosage has worn off. So, on a good day, I wake up and I’ve got pins and needles running up and down my back and arms. On a bad day, it feels like my body’s on fire.”

“And where was my best friend while I was in the hospital? You don’t need to answer, I already know: running around in the moonlight with you! I hadn’t heard one word from him since that night until he failed to avoid me at school today.” Scott was breathing so heavily that Derek was afraid he might hyperventilate. “So, yeah, someone made mistakes.”

“You can’t blame him for not talking to you. You need to blame me.” Derek remained calm. “I ordered him not to contact you, because we knew that the Argents had taken you.”

Scott paused, stunned into quiet for a moment. Then he shook his head in disbelief. “When has Stiles Stilinski ever done what someone ordered him to do?”

“When his alpha does it.” Derek didn’t feel bad about forcing Stiles to stay away. He knew that the accident would put him in the Argent’s crosshairs. They’d use any opportunity to find him, and they were clearly watching over Scott. “Especially after the last time he failed to follow my advice, he accidentally mauled his best friend.”

Scott stood there for a moment, digesting the new information. He shook his head once more to drive the idea out. “So, if he told you about it, did he tell you what he said to me that night?”

“He was under the influence of the full moon, Scott. If it had been you that had been bit, you would have said things just as bad.”

“Stop making excuses for him! Knowing it’s normal doesn’t help! He whispered in my ear, while he
was holding me down with his claws in my flesh, that he was punishing me for Allison! He told me I
was a bad friend, because after spending every single day with him for over a decade, I had the nerve
to want to spend time with a girl. That I was his, and it was about time I remembered that.”

Derek nodded.

“He did that to me because he was jealous. And according to you, I’m supposed to pretend it didn’t
happen!”

Derek shook his head. “I don’t think you’re supposed to pretend it didn’t happen. He doesn’t pretend
it didn’t happen. He feels guilty about it, every single day. I feel guilty about it.”

Scott stopped and stared at Derek. Derek understood the puzzled look on his face. When they first
met, Derek pretended that he didn’t care about Scott, so why would he feel guilty about it.

“I shouldn’t have left him alone with you that night. I thought he’d be by himself, but when I went to
check the Sheriff’s house, he wasn’t there.” Derek explained. “I wasn’t there because the full moon
was the best chance to find the alpha, so I was out looking for him. If I had been there, I could have
stopped him. I would have stopped Stiles.”

“The alpha. You mean your uncle.” Scott spoke with venom.

“He’s dead now,” Derek said. “He can’t hurt anyone else ever again. I know it doesn’t make what
happened to you any easier. I wish I had done things differently. Stiles wishes he had done things
differently.”

“Of course he’s dead.” Scott answered as if he was suddenly very tired. “I wish things were different
as well. But I’m going to ask again: why are you here?”

“I’m here because I need to know if you are going to hunt Stiles.” Derek spoke as clearly as he could
so there would be no confusion. “I’m his alpha, and I won’t let you kill him. I know you’re with the
Argents.”

“Why shouldn’t I be with the Argents? They didn’t abandon me. I owe them.”

“You don’t owe them anything,” Derek snarled.

“Do you know how much it costs to spend six weeks in an intensive care ward? Do you know how
much it costs to spend the next eight weeks in a regular hospital bed? Of course not, you’re a
werewolf! You heal. It’s a lot, and that’s not including rehabilitation. Insurance doesn’t pay for
everything.” Scott pointed down at the floor of his bedroom. “If my mom had had to pay for it, we
would have lost the house. I wouldn’t even be able to dream of going to college. They didn’t just
save my life, they saved my future and my mom’s future. So, yeah, I owe them.”

This did put Derek off on the wrong foot. Scott was right. The Hale family never used doctors or
hospitals. “The Argents have plenty of money, but even if they didn’t, you’re not something that can
be purchased.”

Scott said in a quiet voice. “Allison’s dead.” Derek stood still. He had been afraid of that. “Allison’s
dead and it’s my fault. So yeah, I owe them for the daughter I got killed.”

“You didn’t kill Allison. If she died, it was the fault of the Argent Code and not anything you did.
She was alive when we defeated Peter.”

“She wouldn’t have been there if it wasn’t for me! Mr. and Mrs. Argent weren’t going to tell her
about their family until after she had graduated high school. They were going to let her choose, but after she found me that night, they couldn’t hide it any more. You know, she never blamed Stiles. She blamed Peter; she went after him with Kate for me.”

Derek sighed once again. “You didn’t make her kill herself.”

“No. Your uncle did.”

Derek shook his head. “That’s not true.”

“Are you telling me that he didn’t know what would happen to an Argent who was bit? Are you telling me that you wouldn’t have known? He bit her and only her, because he knew what would happen next.”

Derek growled. “It’s not my pack’s fault that Allison hated the idea of being a werewolf so much that she killed herself.”

Scott laughed; it was full of rage and desperation. “She didn’t kill herself. Mr. and Mrs. Argent insisted she didn’t have to because she hadn’t been fully trained. It was Gerard who made that happen. He used it to isolate Chris and Victoria so he could have unchallenged control of the family, and then he called the Calaveras. So, who do you want to blame for what came next?”

Derek was never going to understand the Argents, not in a million years. He was just glad that Kate and Gerard were dead: Kate at his uncle’s hand and Gerard at his. “I don’t see why this makes it your responsibility.”

Scott shook his head. “You won’t get it. I know why you hate them, and I know you’ll never believe that what Kate did to you isn’t what they’re supposed to do. Mr. Argent isn’t like that --”

“They’re all like that.”

“And so are you!” Scott shouted back. “Are you telling me that Peter wouldn’t have killed Allison in revenge if he had had the chance? Even though she was eleven when Kate burned your family?”

Derek clenched his jaw. Scott was right; Peter would have killed every Argent, regardless of their personal involvement in the fire. That was why he had to be put down. “I’m not like that.”

“Yes, you are.” Scott bit his lip. “I know I complained that Stiles – my only friend – didn’t come to visit me, but you did, didn’t you? Mrs. Argent saw your Camaro parking lot. But I guess you couldn’t get into the ICU without being seen, could you?”

Derek winced internally. Yeah, he thought back then that he had been seen.

“I guess you were just there to check to see how I was doing? Maybe, you were there to make sure your secrets were kept. Or were you going to put me out of my misery, like you did with whats-her-name, Paige?”

Derek reacted without thinking. He roared and pushed Scott up against the wall. The boy bounced but managed to keep his feet by grabbing on to the dresser. Derek let his eyes dim and his claws retract. How did Scott find out about that?

He focused back on the matter at hand. “So that’s your goal. You want to be a hunter?”

“If Stiles was a human, and he got drunk and stabbed me with a knife ten times, where would he be?” Scott demanded. “He’d be in jail.”
“The full moon isn’t like getting drunk!”

“He acted irresponsibly!” Scott argued. “You told him what to do, and he blew you off! He thought he knew better, and I’m going to be in pain for the rest of my life because he was wrong! I might have done the same in his position – we’ll never know – but that’s the point of this. He won’t face consequences for what he did because he’s a werewolf! The Argents and the hunters who obey the Code are people who can hold werewolves responsible.”

“It’s not your place to police us. What happened shouldn’t have happened, but that doesn’t give you the right to hunt us.” Derek stated. “You’re trying to use hunting to make sense of something that doesn’t make sense. You’re trying to fix what can’t be fixed.”

“What would you have me do? If it isn’t the Argent’s place to police you, should I call my dad then? Stiles has told you about my dad, the FBI agent, hasn’t he?” Scott responded to that statement with fury. “What do you think would happen then?”

“We don’t need policed by humans, either, Scott.”

Scott looked directly at Derek, challenging him. “Where’s Jackson Whittemore?”

Derek crossed his arms and said nothing. There was nothing to say. Scott must have known that he was dead. Derek had barely managed to kill him.

“Okay, no answer there. Where’s Lydia Martin?”

Derek growled at him once again. He kept his arms crossed, but he could feel his claws lengthening out of his fingers. He knew this would come back to bite him one day. It was just another bad decision he wished he could take back.

Scott frowned at him. “We know one of them was the kanima. We know that you killed the kanima, but only after Gerard killed Matt who was controlling it and you killed Gerard when he tried controlling it. But either Jackson or Lydia was the kanima, so which one was it?”

Derek didn’t know why he responded. He wanted to explain why he had made the decisions he had. “Jackson. Jackson was the kanima.”

“Okay. So that’s on you.” Scott repeated. “You turned Jackson, he turned into a murder lizard, and then you had to kill him. So, who killed Lydia Martin?”

“I did. What do you intend to do about it?”

“So none of your betas have blue eyes, Derek?”

Derek knew what Scott was fishing for, but he wasn’t going to let the conversation go that way. This time, he let the change happen deliberately, pointedly. Scott took a few steps back. He wasn’t stupid. “I said I killed her. If you want to press it, I can add you to the list.”

Scott swallowed; he was nervous, and he should be, but he didn’t back down. “Yeah, that’s what I expected. You asked me why I was joining the Argents, and yet you’ve just told me that no one has the right to police you, but you have the right to kill anyone who stands in your way. I believe in what they do. I believe in holding werewolves responsible for their actions. Someone’s got to.”

Derek clenched his jaw, but he wasn’t going to kill a sixteen-year-old boy over his convictions. He was also going to make his convictions clear. “You hurt my pack, and I don’t care who your father is. You understand what I am saying?”
“I do. I promise, if I hurt your pack, they’ll deserve it. But I’ll be ready for you to come at me, because no one passes judgement on werewolves, do they?” Scott went to his desk. “You can go now.”

“No. Why don’t you just leave? Why not go somewhere else?”

Scott whipped his head around. “This is my home. My mother lives here. I used to have friends here. This is where I live. I’m not going to go away to make it easier for the person who did this! I’m not going to move away to make it easier for you.”

Derek transformed back into a human. He understood Scott’s feelings, better than most anyone else did. He understood the need to come home and to not let people drive him away. It was one of the reasons he had decided to build a pack rather than leave when he learned that Gerard Argent was coming. He wasn’t going to let the hunters decide where he should live.

And Scott was also right about the motivations behind Derek’s questions. If Scott left, then it would be easier for his pack. Stiles wouldn’t have to deal with the wreckage of a dead friendship. He wouldn’t have to worry about what would happen if Scott came for Isaac or Stiles. It would just be over, and they could move on and deal with the goddamned Alpha Pack.

Derek knew though that as much as he hated the idea of Scott working for the Argents, the boy had a right to do it. He had a right to get his life back however he could. And that gave Derek a new idea; it was a gamble, but it could mean the difference between continued antagonism and moving forward.

“He misses you.” Derek said it with as much conviction as he could.

“Why would you say that to me?” Scott stood up so quickly that he knocked over his chair. “What are you trying to do? Make me feel guilty? Make it my fault?”

“No. I am telling you the truth. He misses you.” Derek took a risk. “And I think you miss him to.”

“I’m sure you miss your family, too,” Scott snarls, a very human snarl. “We all want what we can’t have.” He pushed past Derek and went into the bathroom, slamming the door, suddenly no longer caring that he just shoulder checked an alpha werewolf.

Derek remained in the home for only a minute longer. He had been right. Scott’s heart rate jumped through the roof when he suggested that he missed Stiles. There was hope, if only a little bit of a glimmer.
I

Isaac Lahey

Chapter Summary

Isaac and Stiles go to a party and get into all sorts of trouble.

Isaac would be grateful for everything that Derek had done for him until his dying day. He liked being strong; he liked being able to heal. He appreciated, more than he thought he would, the bonds between alpha and beta and between pack members. All-in-all, his life was a thousand times better now.

But if Derek ever ordered him to babysit Stiles Stilinski again, Isaac was so totally going to become an omega. And if Stiles was very lucky, Isaac wouldn’t murder him immediately before doing so.

“I don’t want to go to this party. That’s it. I don’t want to go to this party,” Stiles fretted in the passenger seat of Derek’s SUV. “Nope. It’s a bad idea, and I am not going.”

Isaac tapped the steering wheel with his fingers in an irregular pattern. It was something to do other than wrap them around Stiles’ throat and choke him until he stopped talking.

Stiles chewed on his fingers; people gave them weird looks as they passed by the car while going up to the house. “But it’s her birthday party and I said I would come. I’ve known her since I was three. Why shouldn’t I go? I’ve told you we took bubble baths together, right?”

Isaac’s eyes rolled straight back up into his head. “Many, many times.”

On a theoretical level, Isaac understood why Derek wanted Stiles to go to this birthday party. The last few days had seen Stiles alternating between amped-up paranoia and guilt-ridden despondency. Stiles needed to stop obsessing over things he couldn’t change and do something fun. It made sense. It also made sense that Derek needed a night off from the madness himself.

And Isaac understood why Stiles was reluctant. The circumstances of Stiles getting bit were extreme and unfortunate, and the events immediately after it had led Stiles to the conclusion that all he ever did was bring pain and terror to the people he cared about who weren’t werewolves. As a result, Stiles tended to have serious contact with only one human: his father. Going to this party would be an attempt to be human once again – a little anxiety was understandable.

What Isaac didn’t understand was why it had to be him escorting Stiles to a party filled with people who Isaac didn’t know and had no interest in knowing. It wasn’t that Isaac didn’t enjoy teenage parties teeming with drunken idiots, horny idiots, or drunken and horny idiots … no, wait, it was exactly that. Especially since he couldn’t get drunk himself.

Derek had scowled at him. “Because I asked you to isn’t enough?” It had been enough, but that didn’t mean Isaac couldn’t whine about it.

The alpha continued in a gruff tone. “How about this? I want to make sure Stiles, for one night at least, has the chance to forget all of this and be a teenager. I want him to have fun while being safe. I’m asking you to do that for me, because someone my age showing up at a high-school party would be really damn suspicious.”
That was a really good point, and it wasn’t as if Isaac had anything else to do, so he had resigned himself to being surrounded by drunken strangers from another high school for an entire night. What he hadn’t resigned himself was for the incredibly annoying spiral of paranoia, recrimination, and indecision that Stiles had immediately entered into when he sat down in the passenger seat.

“Stiles,” Isaac said patiently. Well, not exactly patiently. “We’ve been sitting in this car for fifteen minutes. Pretty soon, someone’s going to call the cops on us for loitering.”

Stiles gave him the eye. “It hasn’t been fifteen minutes. It couldn’t be.”

“Sorry, thirteen-and-a-half minutes. Stiles, go to the goddamn party and if you don’t like it, we’ll leave.”

“Okay.” Stiles checked his hair once more in the SUV’s visor mirror. “Okay, okay, okay. Let’s go.”

After a tiny bit more fussing over appearance, Isaac led Stiles into a normal-looking house and a normal-looking party. The last of Stiles’ fears had to have evaporated as he was ambushed at the door by his friend, Heather. The birthday girl kissed him, firmly, before he went more than five steps inside and dragged him down into the wine cellar to ‘pick out some wine.’ Isaac relaxed as the other werewolf was dragged off. Now Isaac could find something for him to enjoy.

His first move was rebuffed, and it stung a little. Isaac tried not to feel offended when he made eye contact with Heather’s friend. She threw up a hand and said, in a dismissive tone while stalking away. “Nuh-uh. I don’t get with people who are prettier than me.”

Isaac chewed on that for a few moments, until he was surprised by Stiles coming back up with the girl after only ten minutes. They were both smiling, but they didn’t have the same exuberance as they went down. Their clothing and hair were pretty much intact; nothing sexy had happened. Stiles kissed her chastely on the cheek and then motioned for Isaac to follow him out.

“What happened?” Isaac had never learned to thwart his curiosity.

Stiles shrugged. “She wanted to have sex, and I turned her down. We’re still friends though.”

Isaac paused on the sidewalk with a look of disbelief on his face. “She wanted to have sex and you turned her down. Aren’t you always bitching about your lack of sexual experience?”

“Lahey, one of these times I’m going to sit down and explain the difference between sarcasm and an actual expression of a real feeling. You may think you’re as good as I am at sarcasm, but you have faltered in the presence of the master. Yes, I want to have sex. No, I didn’t want to have sex tonight, nor did I want to have sex with her.”

“If you don’t mind me saying so, I think that you’ll regret this. I know you like her; what’s not to like? Are you telling me you aren’t sexually attracted to her?” Isaac reached the SUV and pulled the door open.

“She’s one of my oldest friends; to be attracted to her sexually when we used to take bubble baths together when we were toddlers would be creepy and wrong.” Stiles’ tone was blithe. “So, of course, I’m sexually attracted to her.”

“Then …”

“Isaac, I’m seventeen years old. I’m sexually attracted to anything with a pulse that wasn’t alive when Ronald Reagan was president. That doesn’t mean I’m going to have sex with anybody that matches that criteria. In fact, I’ve got plenty of reasons not to have sex with them.”
Isaac did a double take. “Does that mean you’re sexually attracted to me?”

“That’s not my point. My point is that I have reasons, very good reasons, not to have sex with her. You know my control is the worst out of all of us. I’m not upset about that; I understand why. It’s probably best that I don’t have sex for the first time with a human – especially a human who doesn’t know about us.”

Isaac didn’t quite follow that thinking, but he wasn’t trying to do so. He was still thinking about Stiles being sexually attracted to him. He was seventeen, too.

“And yes, I know I’m still a virgin, but I am mature enough by now to recognize that virginity isn’t some sort of curse. It’s a remnant of the patriarchal super-culture designed to ensure that the male reproductive drive is more valued than the female’s. The only reason it is important in things like magic is because people have been taught to believe it’s important. Deaton showed me that.”

Isaac raised both eyebrows, slightly weirded out. “You’ve put a lot of effort into thinking about this.”

“I once wrote a paper on the complete history of male circumcision. I put a lot of effort into researching everything. And, again, that’s not my point. As much as I want to have sex, I think we’ve all learned that we have to control our impulses and not let them control us.”

Isaac nodded. “Fair enough.”

“Also, I like someone else.” Stiles concluded lamely. “And I’m pretty sure that a mature and adult attitude will be far more attractive to this particular person than indulging in the teenage rush to stick my dick into any available hole.”

Isaac laughed. “You said ‘hole.’”

Stiles flipped him off. “Grow up, Isaac.”

Isaac grew serious for a moment as Stiles slammed the door to the vehicle. “And you’re trying to grow up too fast. I know we aren’t like all other juniors at Beacon Hills High. We can’t be, and that pretty much sucks. So, maybe you should try being a teenager when the opportunity arises? You and me, we’re supposed to have fun.” Isaac know this. He never thought he’d get to have fun like other kids, so he had determined that he’d have fun as long as he could, which, as a werewolf in this pack, might not be that long.

Stiles was glowering at him. It was Stubborn Stiles, so Isaac knew further discussion was fruitless. “So, now that we know that Stiles isn’t getting laid tonight, what do you want to do instead?”

Stiles perked up at that. “I want to stop by the bank.”

Isaac started the SUV with a shake of his head. “Derek will kill me and then he’ll kill you if we go there.”

“I can’t let it go. It means something, and if we try to pretend that it doesn’t mean anything, we’ll be totally helpless when the time comes and what it all meant becomes important. Anyway, it’s obvious that the Alpha Pack will be expecting Derek to come, but they won’t be expecting us to come without him. See?”

“No.”

“We can just drive past and see what’s up!”
“No.”

“C’mon, Isaac, aren’t you curious?”

Isaac took a deep breath; damn it, he was curious. “This is going to be a disaster.” He pulled away from the curb. “Tell me where to go.”

Stiles pumped his fist in triumph. “You won’t regret this. I guarantee it.”

~*~

Isaac regretted it almost immediately. He regretted letting Stiles talk him into coming to the bank in the middle of the night. They weren’t even inside yet and the bank loomed over both of them huge, empty and incredibly creepy. He looked over at Stiles while they sneaking around the building, and the other werewolf had this crazy smile on his face.

“We’re not going to be stupid and go in through the front doors, especially when there are two separate fire doors on the back side of the building. Since the building doesn’t have power, we can use a fire door without an alarm going off. It will be easy as pie.” Stiles pointed at an exterior light. “Those are security lights; if the building had power, those would be on even if the building was totally vacant.”

Isaac hissed. “We might be a little stealthier if you stopped talking so much.”

Stiles gave him a scowl over his shoulder. He put his finger up to his mouth as an exaggerated hushing gesture as they approached the rear fire door. The door was meant to be opened only from the inside, but Stiles extended his claws with a grin and began to pry it open. After getting a firm grip, Stiles gave the door a tug. Metal shrieked as he pulled, and both of them winced at the sound.

“Help me,” mouthed Stiles. Stiles could have gotten the door open by himself, but it would make a lot of noise. If they both pulled at same time, it would be much faster and hopefully it wouldn’t make enough noise to alert whoever happened to be inside.

Working together they pulled the fire door open; it made so much noise that they looked at each other in terror. Visions of a rampaging alpha pack danced through Isaac’s head, and from the look on Stiles’ face, he wasn’t imaging anything positive either. A few minutes crawled slowly by until it seemed, even for the most paranoid, that the alarm had not been raised.

“Let’s not do that again,” complained Isaac in a whisper.

Stiles nodded vigorously in agreement, but he pushes on none-the-less. They began to creep through the bank, trying to be as stealthy as possible. The fire door was in the back offices, but it did not take long for them to reach the main atrium. Stiles raised his hand, but Isaac was already stopping.

They could hear the hum of a generator and smell its exhaust. They could see the electric light shining around the edges of doors. It seems that the Alphas had set up some sort of headquarters here, and, for some reason, they needed to see beyond what their normal werewolf vision could give them. Over the hum of the generator, Isaac also heard people talking.

“What’s the answer for number six?” The voice was male and clearly frustrated.

“What’s the point of going to school if I’m going to do your homework for you? Figure it out.” This was another male voice, but it sounded so very much like the first one that it was hard to be sure. It must be the twins.
“There’s no point in going to school! The only reason we’re going is to fuck with Derek’s pack, but that means going to math. I hate, hate, hate math. I hate going to school. I hate everything about this.”

“Not everything.”

“Everything.”

“You like that boy you are flirting with. What’s his name?”

“That’s not important.” The voice was suddenly shy. The twins continued to bicker over schoolwork. Stiles and Isaac, meanwhile, waited in a hallway, out of visual range but not out of audible range. They didn’t have forever; eventually their scent would reach the twins, and they would be discovered.

Isaac motioned Stiles to head back out the way they came, because it was obvious to him why Aiden had used a blank bank slip. They were staying here, and he had picked it up because it was at hand. Stiles shook his head. He had that intensely focused look in his eyes.

Let’s go, mouthed Isaac, emphatically.

Stiles shook his head firmly. He wanted more.

Isaac sighed inwardly. The first moment that he heard footsteps, he was going to grab Stiles and flee no matter what the other werewolf wanted. The twins were alphas, and there was no point in getting into a fight with them. They would lose, and then they would either be dead or prisoners.

Time passed. All the twins did was rib each other about math homework and school. Isaac’s legs were getting cramped. He was about ready to drag Stiles out of here no matter what the other wolf said. They had enough. They knew that the bank was important to the Alpha Pack for some reason, and that just might be enough for Derek so he wouldn’t chain Isaac and Stiles to the radiator for going here without permission.

Isaac reached out and gripped Stiles by the shoulder when one of the twins spoke. “We need to feed her. It’s your turn to do it.”

“Nooooope, I fed her this morning; that makes it your turn. We stopped doing it by days and started doing it by feedings last week. Remember?”

“Yeah. I was hoping you wouldn’t.” The twin sighed. “You know that she’s going to try to bolt again. I don’t want to get scratched up.”

“It’ll heal.”

“Still hurts though.”

“I’ve got your back if she does try anything.”

Isaac and Stiles look at each other as they hear the sound of the vault door opening. There was a crash and a struggle and people shouting at each other. One of the twins was cursing. “That was my face!”

“C’mon, Cora,” the other twin complained. “You know you can’t beat us, and you have to eat.”

Stiles pointed at Isaac like he had just won a video game and whispered excitedly. “You are never
allowed to question me again. The note was a message; it was telling us that they had Cora.”

“Why would they do it that way? Why not just say – hey, we have your alpha’s sister? Who, by the way, isn’t she like dead?” Isaac whispered back.

Stiles shook his head back and forth. “We can figure that out somewhere else, but I’m betting that it was a trap. That being the case, let’s get the hell out of here.”

“You are quite right, it was a trap. But not for you.” A blind man with a cultured voice was standing right behind them. Isaac hadn’t had the slightest clue that anyone was nearby, let alone that close. “The trap was for Derek. The test was for Derek as well.”

Isaac scrambled to his feet. Derek had told them that the leader of the alphas was blind, and that he was the most dangerous. The fact that he hadn’t heard or scented Deucalion made it clear that Derek hadn’t been exaggerating. If he wanted to, the alpha could have walked right up to them and tore his or Stiles’ head off. From the flail and the look on Stiles’ face, he was just as freaked out as Isaac was.

“Oh, you have nothing to fear from me, unless you make the incredibly foolish decision to attack me.” Deucalion spoke breezily. “In fact, this is rather convenient. You can answer some questions I have.”

It had been a long time since sarcasm had been Stiles’ only defense, but no one tosses away the weapon that felt the most comfortable in their grip. Isaac winced when he saw Stiles get that look in his eye. He wanted to walk up to his pack mate, say ‘No, we’re leaving now,’ throw him over his shoulder, and run out the back door. He was too late.

“Yeah, Mr. I’m-So-Pretentious-I-Name-Myself-After-Greek-Mythological-Figures, we’ll be more than happy to answer any question you have, because we’ve been so excited to know why you’ve been creeping around our home for the last eight months. Would you like to know our locker combinations? Our favorite bands? I’m a Norah Jones fan but Isaac is into George Strait. That’s right, Isaac has a country soul!”

Isaac had no idea who George Strait was. He was keeping both eyes on Deucalion.

The blind alpha tilted his head slightly. “Actually, I wanted to ask the pair of you what you thought about Derek as an alpha. If either of you had ever considered leaving his pack?”

Isaac shook his head, slowly inching back. “No.” It was an honest answer.

“Why do you care? You certainly aren’t recruiting! But no, for your information I have never, ever, ever thought about leaving Derek’s pack. He makes a mean pastrami sandwich, he does the tarantella impeccably, and we’re splitting a Netflix membership. Any other questions?” Stiles’ heart was still beating fast, but anger was beginning to replace the fear.

“I have received much intelligence on Derek’s pack, and so I know all about you, Stiles. I know about your famed wit. However, I think you need to understand that I’ve met people like you many times before. You cover your insecurities with a façade of bravado and a sharp tongue. I’m sure it serves you well, but you need to careful. Some people don’t feel like being address in such a manner.” Deucalion spoke carefully and offered Stiles an insincere smile.

“Some people? So do these some people include blind egomaniacs who put together the evil Alpha equivalent of an 80’s hair-band super group?” Stiles actually took a step towards the blind alpha.

Isaac was sure that he never saw Deucalion move. He was just standing there listening to Stiles’ sarcasm one moment, and then the next moment he had struck Stiles once with his fist in the face.
The blow shattered Stiles’ jaw; Isaac watched with fascination as he saw the jaw deform. The second blow must have shattered Stiles’ nose and blood gushed out of it and down his shirt. The third blow must have shattered a cheekbone. Isaac would have sworn he heard the bone crack. Stiles dropped like a sack of potatoes.

Deucalion’s heart rate never changed.

The alpha drew a handkerchief out and wiped his hand clean of Stiles blood. “Some children believe that real life is like a movie, where the plucky comic relief can insult the villain and get away with it. I suspect he will not be making that assumption again.”

Isaac raced to see how badly Stiles was hurt. His face was deformed and swelling, and he was unconscious, but he was still breathing and he was still healing. He looked up at Deucalion in fear.

“Well, there is no need to delay, Isaac. Take him back to Derek and let your alpha know who we have and where we have her. I will be more than interested in seeing his next move.” Deucalion turned and walked away as if terrible violence hadn’t just occurred.

Without waiting for anything else, Isaac scooped Stiles up and carried him as well as he could out of the bank and rushed him down the alley to the vehicle. Putting him in the passenger’s seat, he double-checked Stiles to make sure he was still alive. The bones were resetting themselves grotesquely. Isaac was pretty sure that since Deucalion hadn’t used his claws, the wounds would heal fast but he had no idea how fast.

He drove immediately to Derek’s loft. He had to let the alpha know about Cora and about Stiles. Maybe there was something more that Derek could do for his beta, because Isaac had no idea what do in this situation. He didn’t even care that Derek would probably be incredibly, incredibly angry.

He parked the vehicle at the base and raced around to the other side, but when he opened the door, Stiles reached out and grabbed Isaac by the wrist. He was conscious and his face was almost back into the correct shape. “No.”

“Come on, Stiles, let me get you upstairs.”

“Not until I heal,” Stiles croaked. “Derek would lose his shit.”

“He should lose his shit!” Isaac responded. “That blind bastard could have killed you.”

Stiles weakly shook his head. “He could have, but he couldn’t lure Derek into attacking the bank if he had. He wanted to get Derek angry. Let me heal. Won’t take long.”

Isaac bit his lip. Yes, Derek would have indeed lost his shit if he brought Stiles back like this. “You want me to lie to Derek?” Stiles was probably thinking that Deucalion did it to provoke the alpha.

Stiles shook his head. “We just … ow … we just leave this part out. Just sit with me, okay?”

With a growl, Isaac did as he was asked.
The Sheriff has lunch with the Alpha of Beacon Hills. He pays a visit to his son's former best friend.

Cindy’s Diner had become the place to eat for the men and women of the Beacon Hills Sheriff’s Department. They could walk there on their lunch hour and still have plenty of time to eat and get back in time. It was never very crowded, as it wasn’t on one of the busier streets. And the food was spectacular; it was home to biggest cheeseburger north of Interstate 80.

Today, the sheriff had a light lunch – by which he meant he hadn’t ordered the French fries smothered in cheese, sour cream, and bacon. The half-pound mushroom-and-Swiss burger was making his mouth water, but he stalled. He was going to have a companion for lunch, and he wanted to wait for him to arrive.

Noah, as a grown-ass man, could manage his own diet. He understood his own body, and he had learned the difference between good cholesterol and bad cholesterol. As much as Stiles tried to protect him from the dangers of red meat and carbohydrates, it wasn’t his son’s call. Consequently, the sheriff ate as he pleased most of the time when he wasn’t at home.

After his son had become a werewolf and Noah had been initiated into the world of the supernatural, they had had some real screaming fights about his diet. It had become harder for him to pretend to play along with the Stiles’ diet plans, when his son could tell by scent what he was eating. Finally, he had had to sit Stiles down and say in very clear I’m-the-Dad tones that you couldn’t protect people by controlling them. Claudia, early in their courtship, had been the one to teach Noah this important lesson. If Stiles tried to do that with everyone he loved, he would end up with no one to love. People changed over time, they had a right to make their own decisions, and the only way to keep those people in your life would be to let them make their own decisions. In other words, if he wanted the curly fries, he was going to get the curly fries, but that didn’t mean that he loved Stiles any less.

Growing up, Noah tried to remind himself, was very hard. It was harder for some people than others. The person he was meeting for lunch was an expert on growing up in terrible circumstances.

Derek Hale slid in the seat across from him. Ever since Stiles had joined Derek’s pack, and Derek had forced his son to let him know what was going on, he and the alpha had met regularly to talk. To say that their first few were meetings were rocky was an understatement. It bothered Noah, no matter how many time and how many different people had explained the nature of the Alpha-Beta bond, that someone had more influence over his son than he did. However, Noah resolved to not be a hypocrite; Stiles had changed and Noah had to let him change. To the sheriff, that meant that not only would Derek have to work with him in order to protect the pack, but it also meant giving up a degree control over his son in order to protect him. It had been the right decision.

He had grown to appreciate the young alpha as well. He had already learned the story of the Hale House fire from a human perspective, and that had been a terrible tragedy. When he learned all the details from both Derek and Stiles, he realized how much more of a burden it had to be on Derek. He wouldn’t have blamed the kid if he had turned out like his power-mad uncle, but he hadn’t. The kid was often dour, frequently distrustful, and prone to over-reaction, but the alpha had also made a
conscious decision not to let the past dominate his life so completely. In this, Noah had subtly tried to become the alpha’s confidante – someone he could go to when the pressures of being a leader of a group of teenagers became too much.

There had to be secrets between Noah and Derek, as much as there were secrets that his son kept from him. Noah let it be. The sheriff couldn’t expect human rules to cover everything that happened in the supernatural world. It was a world of savagery and ancient tradition, and the only thing that would happen if he tried to apply human law to it would be tragedy. He just hoped those secrets were things with which they could all live.

Derek arrived only five minutes late. The sheriff couldn’t have been a cop for as long as he had without picking up at least some ability in reading other people: it looked like he had a good reason for being tardy. “Son, you looked like you spent the last week in the Devil’s guest room. What’s wrong?”

Derek slid into the seat opposite Noah, ruefully. “Plenty.” He looked around the room as if seeing if anyone was listening in. The servers were elsewhere and there were no other patrons close by. “Things are about to get bad again, sheriff. You deserve to know.”

“Kanima bad?” The sheriff asked, apprehensively. They had both paid a terrible price during those events, prices that neither would ever forget.

The alpha’s face contorted with worry. “Possibly worse.” Derek was about to go on when Noah interrupted him.

“Let’s eat first. You should always take care of what you can take care of before you move on to the stuff that might not have a solution.” The sheriff learned that in his first year on the force. Nothing, not even a potential crisis, existed in a vacuum. Neglecting the little things didn’t make the big things go away.

They tabled talk of the supernatural until they had a good start on eating their lunch. Given Derek’s sour disposition, Noah wished he had ordered a grilled chicken sandwich instead. As much as he loved Cindy’s cheeseburgers, he had the feeling he should have avoided anything that might give him indigestion.

Derek looked torn as he picked at his food. In previous conversations, the alpha had shared with Noah that he appreciated being able to go to someone who was older and had more experience. The younger man had used to go to his uncle before the fire, but tragedy had removed that as an option. Therefore, the fact that he looked reluctant to tell the sheriff about what was happening meant that it was going to be something pretty bad. “Come on, son. Drink your coffee and get it off your chest.”

“I have two problems right now. Your son’s involved in both of them as are the rest of the pack,” Derek began. “One of them I want to tell you about; I need your help. One of them I don’t really want to tell you about, but I still need your help.”

“Does it have anything to do with all the crazy animals?” Noah wondered. The number of dead animals he had seen in the last two days was extraordinarily disturbing. When Derek raised his eyebrow in a questioning manner, the sheriff began to list off all the strange massacres.

“I can’t be sure,” Derek admitted. “That’s part of the problem. I don’t understand much of anything right now.”

Noah laughed loudly. Derek looked at him strangely, as did their server. The laugh came from his gut. “Don’t sweat it,” the sheriff whispered conspiratorially, “I still don’t quite understand everything
about werewolves, so you’re in fine company.”

“The Alpha Pack has finally made a move,” Derek gritted out. They had both hoped that last spring’s warning had been a false alarm, considering how much time had passed since that odd bit of graffiti had appeared on the Hale House. Noah didn’t quite get how such a group worked, but he did understand the concept of people who had too much power and no compunction on how they used it. Derek explained to him what his pack had recently discovered.

“Oh. You can’t understand how they could have your sister.”

“I thought she was dead!”

Noah took a sip of his coffee as he searched for the most delicate way to put what he had to say. “There’s a possibility that this isn’t a trick. Contrary to what you see on police shows, errors happen all the time, even to the best forensic scientists. They reach most of their results not by positive matches but by excluding all other possibilities. In the case of your family’s fire, the heat and flames were so intense that a lot of the identification work was only accomplished due to exclusion. Your sister could still be alive. But that still leaves the question of how she got out and where she’s been.”

Derek took a deep breath across the table and mastered himself. Noah wanted to ask him if he had taken some time to process this on his own – that would be man-speak for having a good cry – but he knew the answer would be that Derek hadn’t. As much as Derek had become a more stable leader in the last months, the alpha still disregarded for his own needs, which Noah never understood.

“You can’t provide the leadership that other people need if you weren’t in a good place yourself.”

“It is so obviously a trap, Sheriff. They essentially invited me to come and to try to rescue her, and I still don’t know why the Alpha Pact are acting this way. If they wanted to ambush me, they could have done it by now with far greater ease than this elaborate set up. If they wanted to ambush my pack, it would have been even easier. The worst part is…” Derek shook his head, unwilling to finish that sentence.

“You know it’s a trap and you’re going to step right into it,” Noah concluded. “Of course, you’re going to do it. She is the perfect bait, and she should be. I’d do the same for Stiles. So, now that we both know what you’re going to do, why don’t you get to your real problem with the whole set up.”

“The pack wants to go with me.” Derek said in a quiet voice.

“Of course.” Noah felt three things at once: horror, pride, and determination. Horror that his son – and to a lesser extent, those other teenagers – were demanding to accompany their alpha into a snare set up by viciously werewolves who had deliberately killed their own packs. Pride that they would want to stand by their friends and that Derek would not want them anywhere near it. Determination that this whole mess would have the best possible ending that Noah could arrange.

“I don’t want them to go with me. I don’t want to be like my uncle any more. They’re not soldiers; I don’t want to treat them as soldiers. They’re my family, just as much as Cora is.”

“You were never like your uncle, Derek,” Noah admonished. “What did Alan say?”

“He’s doing that thing again where he separates what he feels from what he thinks an Emissary should tell me,” Derek nearly snarled. “I can tell he agrees with me that the kids should stay out of it, but he keeps reminding me that fighting something like this is why wolves form packs.”

“So, what do you want me to do?”

Derek sighed. “The full moon is in three days; that’s when I’m going in. It’ll make me physically
stronger.”

“Won’t it also make them stronger?”

“Sure, but the moon suppresses our intellect and our focus; an alpha pack is not a natural thing and under the influence of the moon, their instincts will work against them. I’m not looking for a fight; I’ll go in, get Cora, and get out.” He glanced out the window at his Camaro.

“What’s my role in this?”

“Honestly, you’ll most have the difficult part. I want you to trap my betas behind mountain ash for that night. I’ve already got enough from Deaton to do the loft.”

Noah frowned slightly. “Are you sure you’ll be okay going in by yourself?”

“No,” Derek replied immediately. “But this risk is mine to take, and mine alone. I’m not leading anyone else into a trap designed for me. I know you can work the mountain ash, but will you?”

“Stiles will probably not speak to me for months, but if it insures that he’ll be alive and not speaking to me for months, you can count on my cooperation.” Noah sighed. “I appreciate you letting me help, Derek.”

“Well, I’m glad, because …”

“That brings us to the second problem, doesn’t it?”

Derek sighed once again. “This one will make Stiles not speak to me for months, but I’m the adult in that room. There’s something he should have told you months ago - I wished he had – but he didn’t, and now it’s become a problem. Right now, I’m not sure how big a problem it will be, but you need to know.”

The sheriff felt a familiar disappointment stir beneath his skin; Stiles must have lied to him again. It wasn’t much of a leap to figure out the subject. “This is about Scott McCall.”

#*

The sheriff composed himself before he knocked on the door. He pushed away his misgivings and not a little anger. Most people, even criminals, want to be liked; more importantly, they want to be understood. Everyone has their own story and if an interrogator seemed sympathetic, everyone would eventually speak.

Most suspects never understood that it wasn’t the sheriff’s job to judge their actions; it was the sheriff’s job to find out what had happened and present that information to the prosecutor. That meant the sheriff only cared about the why if it led him to the how or the who; if it led him to preventing the crime or arresting the person responsible.

Hardened criminals understood this, so the friendly face didn’t work on them. They knew that they had to save the ‘why’ for the courtroom. Intimidation was more effective in their case.

Noah never thought he would have to use the techniques he learned during his years in law enforcement on the people who lived in this house. For a moment, he prayed that this was all a misunderstanding or a mean-spirited prank on him. But in his heart, he knew it was not.

Melissa came to the door, her smile bright and warm. Of course, she would be in a much better mood than she had been recently. Her son had come home after a long time away. "Hey, handsome. What
can I do for you?"

"I need to talk to Scott? Is he here?"

Melissa narrowed her eyes immediately. She didn't know the full truth of what was happening in Beacon Hills, and she had been very disgruntled when no one could tell her who attacked her son. "Is it something I should be concerned about?"

He paused for just a half-second. Noah liked Melissa; he always had. They were friends; they could have been something more, if he had been able to move on from Claudia. He didn't want to lie to her, so he twisted his words a little bit. "I don't know yet."

He knocked on the door to Scott's room and waited until he received an invitation. Scott was sitting at his desk doing homework as if none of this craziness had ever happened. Noah wished that could have been true.

"Oh, hey, Sheriff Stilinski."

"Hello, Scott. I wondered if I could talk to you." Noah spoke cautiously. "Do you mind if I sit down?"

Scott yanked the book bag off his armchair so the sheriff could sit down, then he returned to his own seat. Everything seemed perfectly normal.

"What are you working on?" The sheriff asked cautiously. He was stalling, but it wasn't meant to make Scott comfortable. It was meant to make Noah comfortable.

"Civics." Scott had not returned to the work on his desk. Instead, he was staring at the Sheriff as if trying to puzzle something out.

Noah stared back. He did not know what to say or how to breach the topic. It seemed too horrible, too inconceivable that what had happened had happened. He had watched this kid grow up.

Scott figured it out with a satisfied grunt. "I guess you didn't know."

"No, I didn't. I just found out today."

Scott turned back to his homework and picked up his pencil as if he was just going to let the topic drop. But he couldn't let it drop; instead, he angrily turned back around to face the sheriff. "What did you think happened to me? What did Stiles tell you back then?"

"When it first happened, I thought it was an animal attack. When I found out that werewolves were real, what had happened to the Hales, I thought it was Peter. Stiles told me what the animal attacks really were; he told me every ..." Noah dropped his eyes to the ground in embarrassment. "Almost everything."

Scott broke off the stare to look back down at his civics book. "My mom thinks it was an animal attack, too. An animal snuck into the house and attacked me in my bedroom."

It was supposed to sound stupid, and it was, and it killed the conversation. Sitting in that silence, Noah couldn't decide who he was supposed to be at that moment. Was he supposed to be an officer of the law here? If that were true, what was he willing to do to deliver justice and prevent vigilantism? Was he supposed to be the man that this boy had looked up to over the years? Should he offer comfort? Was he supposed to be the father of the person that this young man was threatening? Should he threaten him into behaving?
Noah used to know the boy across from him. Back then, Scott was an earnest, wheezing, kind little boy who for some unknown reason had become friends with his aggressive, secretive, excitable son. The sheriff remembered being a little jealous; he hadn't had a friend that close when he was growing up, and adults often didn't have close friendships like that. There simply wasn't time with all the things you had to get done. Now, where he had to get done was put a new name to Scott: Victim? Criminal? Threat?

There was only question he could ask. One question on which all the others would depend. "Are you going to hurt my son?"

Scott closed his civics book slowly and deliberately on the desk. "I think that's between me and Stiles, don't you think?"

"Scott, no matter what Stiles did ..."

"Did you even investigate what really happened to me after you discovered that monsters were real? Or was it easier to just let the lie stand? After all, I was gone. Out of sight; out of mind."

Noah couldn't answer, because both of them already knew the answer.

"You didn't. It wouldn't have made a difference if you did, because I know you. You would have burned the sheriff's station to the ground to protect Stiles, no matter what he had done to me, let alone to anyone." Scott scowled. "Now I know where Stiles got that attitude. Consequences are for people with last names other than Stilinski."

Noah thinned his lips in irritation. "That's not fair and you know that's not fair. Derek told me ..."

"You're friends with Derek now? Why doesn't that surprise me?"

"Derek told me that Stiles was out of control that night. It was the full moon, driving his insecurities and his anger. You know that a normal Stiles would never willingly hurt you."

"I think you overestimate him. I think a normal Stiles would never willingly hurt me this badly. When I think back, I'm pretty sure that he's the type of person who would inflict pain to teach me a lesson. He always demanded we do things his way, and when that turned out to be a disaster, it never turned out to be his fault. He had a luxury of a father that would protect him no matter what. I don't have that luxury."

Noah gritted his teeth. "Stiles isn't like that!"

"I think he is. I think that if something happened and you got hurt, and he thought I was responsible, he'd happily inflict pain on me, because he feels it's his right."

Scott raised his hand in defense. "I might be wrong, but then again, how would you know? I'm betting it wasn't Stiles who told you what really happened, was it? Stiles is a liar; you know this. His favorite lie is to ignore something until it goes away. That's what he did with me – pretended nothing happened until it was like nothing did."

"You're right and you're wrong, Scott. My son might act like nothing happened, but I know he has to feel bad about it every single day."

"Well, I guess that makes things perfectly okay. As long as he feels bad, that's as good as justice. But then, like father, like son." Scott ends bitterly.

"What do you mean by that?"
"Who was arrested for the murder of Jackson Whittemore? The murder of Lydia Martin? Gerard Argent? Matt Daehler? Peter Hale?"

The sheriff drew his mouth into a thin line. He wouldn't be lectured by child. "There is a difference between justice and the letter of the law."

"I get it. In other words, being a vigilante is only against the law when the target is your own son." Scott spat back.

"That sounds like something you rehearsed, Scott. Do you really think the Argents have what's best for you in mind?" The sheriff knew indoctrination when he heard it.

Scott shrugged. "What happens between me and Stiles is between me and Stiles."

"You know I'm not going to let that happen, Scott. You may think you know what I'd do, but you don't want me to show you what I'm willing to do to protect my son."

"I know what you'll do to keep him safe, and that's what I am counting on." Scott shifted away. "The Argents taught me a lot of things. One important thing I learned was that the best way of getting rid of an enemy is to get someone else to do it for you. Sheriff, I'm sure you know what the statute of limitations on attempted murder is in California?"

Noah did not like that question at all.

"It's six years," Scott continued. "Since Stiles didn't bother to tell you about his little accident, you didn't get a chance to destroy the evidence. The Argents have all the evidence. Everything from that night: my blankets, my sheets, the clothes I was wearing, my medical records, affidavits, and photographs. If you try to arrest me, if you try to tell my mother, if you try to interfere in any way, they'll take all of that evidence to my father. You remember, that asshole who thinks you're a drunk and shouldn't be a police officer? His badge is bigger than yours."

"You're going to blackmail me? What have they turned you into?" Noah demanded.

"Someone who isn't a victim." Scott opened his laptop. "I'm sorry that things have changed. I used to look up to you like a father."

When Scott said that, Noah could hear the sincerity in the phrase. He suddenly was irrationally angry with everyone -- with werewolves, with the Argents, with the whole world of which he was once wholly ignorant. His son and this boy should be friends, spending their nights talking about girls, not murder and magic and revenge. He left the room and the house.
Derek takes desperate action to rescue someone close to him.

Boyd figured it out.

Derek felt it when it happened. The entire pack had gathered around the table in the loft, studying the bank’s floorplans, when Derek glanced up to find Boyd staring at him. Derek had assumed that Stiles would have been the first.

Of course, Stiles was severely distracted holding forth on everything he knew and outlining various possible scenarios. In his element, the anxious beta relished the chance to demonstrate his worth to four people who had never doubted it.

It turned out they had discovered a lot of information. Three years ago, there had been a bank heist, and the sheriff told them everything he remembered about it. Isaac and Stiles went over how they had infiltrated the place themselves, a stunt for which Derek had not yet forgiven them.

After the pack decided to take a break for dinner, Boyd cornered him at the foot of the spiral staircase. "Derek, can we talk?"

There was no help for it, so Derek ushered Boyd into his bedroom and closed the door behind him. He had had the walls soundproofed as part of his ongoing restoration of the loft. "I'm guessing that you want this to be private?"

Boyd frowned. "No, I think that you want this to be private. You're not planning on taking any of us with you, are you?"

Derek paused, frowning. He could lie, or he could use his authority as alpha to make Boyd remain silent about what he had discovered. Derek found he wanted to do neither of these things. Above all, he wanted his betas to trust him, the way he had trusted his mother. That meant he wanted them to feel that they could come to him with their objections, though he would have preferred that not to happen in this particular case. "What gave me away?"

"All afternoon, you’ve simply let people assume that they would be going in with you. You never said they weren’t, but you also never said they were. Why do you think you have to do this alone?"

Derek took a deep breath. "You know the mistakes I've made."

“I was here.”

The pack seldom talked about the tragedies of the last year, but all of them knew what had happened.

"After last spring, I promised myself that I’d be a better alpha. Leading the pack means making decisions, taking actions, for the good of the pack as a whole. I haven’t always done that."

Boyd shrugged. "I know that."
"I don't know if that really is my sister in that bank vault. If it is her, I don't know how she’s alive, or where she’s been, or why the alpha pack has her. The only thing I am one-hundred-percent confident about is that this is a trap. While I might want to go rescue her so badly I can barely sleep ... it's too big a risk. As an alpha, the right decision is for us to ignore the bait.”

“But you're going anyway.”

Derek nodded slowly.

“If it's too big a risk for us, it's too big a risk for you."

“I'm not just an alpha. I'm her brother. I can't not go."

Boyd studied him. “Okay. What do you want me to do?"

Derek had believed that if any of them would understand, it would be Boyd. One quiet night over the summer, the teenager had shared with him the story of Alicia.

"When I'm ready, the sheriff will seal off the loft with the mountain ash, trapping you four inside and keeping you safe on the full moon. But I’m still going to need your help with the others."

"Why not tell us this? Why not just talk to us?"

Derek sighed. "If only it were that simple. We’re not human, and as much progress as you’ve made, all of you are just beginning to understand what that means. I bit you, Isaac, and Erica and because of that, you have an instinct to protect me. Those instincts will be the strongest tonight with the full moon. Stiles won’t feel it as strongly, because I didn’t bite him, but he’ll feel something all the same."

Boyd raised both eyebrows in surprise.

Derek was puzzled by the response. "What?"

"I think you underestimate Stiles' loyalty to you," Boyd observed quietly. "He'll be the angriest."

"Stiles doesn’t like to be told what to do. He'll get over it."

Boyd rolled his eyes. "Sure, that's all it is." Boyd turned to go away and then turned back, as if something had suddenly occurred to him. Reluctantly, he asked a question. "Derek, what happens if you die?"

Derek grimaced; he understood why Boyd had asked this question. "If it were a beta who killed me, they’d become an alpha. However, since they’re already alphas so ... one of you would probably become alpha." If the Alpha Pack was just trying to kill him for his alpha power, they had plenty of chances to do this already. Their goal must be something else.

Boyd blinked. "That's not good, Derek."

"You'd make a great alpha, Boyd." Derek said it with all the sincerity that he could muster.

"Okay, yeah, maybe in ten years! Couldn't someone else become alpha?"

From what he had learned from his family history, most of the time the alpha power transferred peacefully from the dying alpha to the new alpha. When the death of the alpha had been by accident or murder by someone who wasn’t a beta or an omega, the power had passed to the beta that the dead alpha had been grooming as the heir apparent. That is what had happened in Laura’s case.
Derek had been alpha for under a year. He hadn't really had time to groom anyone, but Derek considered Boyd the best candidate to receive that responsibility.

Isaac was too damaged. The memory of his father's abuse could make him alternately timid or brutal. There was always going to be a part of Isaac the equated fear and pain with power, either power over others or others having power over him. As an alpha, Isaac would either end up being walked all over by his betas or terrorizing them.

Erica was too wild. She wanted freedom to choose her own life, freed from the debilitating disease that had shackled her for so long. She would resent the burdens that being an alpha would lay upon her, and what might be worse would be if that resentment turned to neglect or abandonment.

Stiles was more intelligent than all of them, but he would be the absolute worse candidate. The incredible amount of guilt he carried from his mother, Scott, and Lydia manifested even now in his refusal to respect boundaries and his utter disregard for other people’s feelings. He would be a benevolent, bloody tyrant, dictating to the people he cared about because he finally could, and slaughtering anyone who even resembled an enemy. Stiles had already become unhealthily obsessed with the pack. Derek appreciated the over-whelming love that Stiles devoted to the select chosen few in his life, but he also understood that it was untempered. Love could destroy as easily and as quickly as hate; Derek knew that from first-hand experience.

Boyd was solid and sympathetic. He had experienced loss so he would be cautious, but he also appreciated doors opening to new opportunities. If Derek were to die, Boyd would focus on keeping the pack together and not revenge. He was what would be needed.

Derek considered carefully that the alpha spark might pass to Cora, but he couldn't imagine it. As much as he ached to see her again, he hadn't even realized she was alive. She would be the least likely candidate, if he understood anything about how the alpha spark passed from one alpha to another.

"It would be you, and I think that’s the way it should be. You would do what's best for everyone." He clasped Boyd on the shoulder. "Just as I am doing now."

Boyd seldom showed emotion, but he was suddenly shy. "Thanks."

They went downstairs where dinner was ready. All six of them - including the sheriff - sat down for a good meal. It would be after dinner where things got crazy.

Derek suggested that Erica, Isaac and Stiles clear and wash the dishes. Stiles immediately began complaining about Derek not having a dishwasher. "Would it totally hurt you to actually make this house resemble a livable apartment? I swear you have the Depression-Era Monastery aesthetic down pat."

"Maybe," Derek replied, but with his head he motioned for Noah to get the mountain ash. He gave a reaffirming nod to Boyd.

Boyd came over and gripped his shoulder surreptitiously. "I hope you know what you are doing."

Derek responded with a slight smile and a calm, "So do I." While the betas were in the kitchen, he pulled open the heavy metal door and paused outside of it. He took a long look back into the lost, into the life he had built for himself. He turned to the sheriff. "Do it."

"Hey, Derek?" Noah stepped forward and sealed the loft. "You be careful, do you hear? We need you."
In the background, he can hear his other three betas in the kitchen chatting about something trivial: a movie or a television show. Stiles held forth and the sound of his patter is like birdsong in spring. Isaac teased him unmercifully for his taste and Erica laughed merrily. Boyd was looking at him, seriously and with wide-open eyes to make sure he caught everything.

Derek hadn’t planned to be morbid, but if this was the last time he was going to see his pack, then this was exactly how he would like to remember them. "Don't worry, sheriff. I will."

~*~

The moon hung full and disturbing in the sky. It had been a long time since Derek had failed to control himself during one of them but tonight was going to be particularly difficult one to handle.

_Cora._ Stiles and Isaac had been sure that it was Cora in the vault, but they had never met her before. They had overheard her name spoken, and there was her birthday written on the bank slip. If it were Cora, there was nothing Derek wouldn’t do to get her back, which is probably what Deucalion was counting on. Even the thought of seeing her again nearly overwhelmed him.

If that wasn’t enough emotional turmoil, Derek couldn’t shake the terrible idea that he was failing his pack. He had known that making a pack would make him stronger, but he had had no idea how much it would change him. He remembered once having a singular focus on the regrets of his past: Paige, Kate, the fire. He couldn’t do that anymore; he did not have the time. His thoughts and his energy had to go towards what the pack needed, what kept the pack safe.

His thoughts came back, strangely enough, to Stiles. The bond to him should not be as strong as it was to the other three, but in some weird way, it was stronger. Even though Stiles was Peter’s beta, Derek wanted him in his pack for more than reasons of safety. Stiles made him laugh (on the inside mostly); Stiles made him happy. Stiles not only believed in him, but he wanted to be with him. There was no aspersions cast on the others, but it was nice to know that someone would want to be with him even without supernatural ties.

So he knew he could be throwing all of that away for someone who might not be his sister, but then again, he couldn't throw away his sister just for the thought of someone being nice to him.

The full moon took all the worry about these things and magnified them.

He crouched in the alleyway across from the bank, starting to count down from ten. He had memorized the path from the maps. He would head straight for the front doors, get through them, and then get to the vault without pausing. Speed would be the key - in and out before the other pack even had a chance to figure out what was going on. It was foolproof.

Derek imagined Stiles rolling his eyes. For some reason, it made him calmer.

When he reached ‘one’, he moved across the street as quickly as he could and ripped the chains off the front door with one hand. Derek refused to pause to see if anyone had heard it, keeping himself focused on the plan and pushing away the distracting influence of the moon.

The main vault was visible from the first floor. As he approached it, he could smell six other werewolves, but he could only hear the heartbeats of three of them. If one of the heartbeats were Cora's then he would only have to deal with two alphas. He hoped for the twins; while he had heard of their strange ability to morph into one giant alpha, they were the youngest and that meant they had the least experienced. Maybe he could trick them.

The moonlight flooded through the large windows at the front of the bank; even a human being
would be able to navigate through the lobby without lights. Derek kept moving even though he realized that the generator and lights that Isaac and Stiles had described had been turned off.

Derek reached the vault door without any trouble, but it didn’t last. A female alpha stood before the entrance, waiting for him, barefoot and ready to fight.

"I’m Kali. If you want your sister, you have to get past me," She's cocky, Derek thought to himself.

A few minutes later, Derek realized that she hadn’t been cocky at all. She had to be one of the best hand-to-hand combatants he had ever seen. He had another reason to be glad that he hadn't brought anyone with him, because he would have been embarrassed for someone to see him get his ass kicked this spectacularly. She was easily as difficult opponent as the kanima.

Derek wasn't going to give up though. Several times during the fight he had seen Cora through the vault door. She was obviously drugged or something more sinister, because while she was conscious, her eyes were completely unfocused and she hadn't said anything. He couldn’t spare a moment to double check, as Kali used her greater speed and the greater reach afforded by her kicks to keep him completely off balance.

After one particularly savage kick, Derek stumbled backwards and into a counter where customers used to fill out their deposit slips. He slid down it, losing his balance due to pain, exhaustion, and blood loss. He could still see the huge full moon witnessing his battle through the windows.

"That's enough, Kali," Deucalion’s smooth English accent slid through the fight. She stopped, giving time for Derek to catch his breath. "If you render him unconscious, we won't be able to have the discussion to which I have been so looking forward."

Great, Derek complained mentally, it looks like the two strongest alphas were on duty tonight. Thinking about it critically, he should have realized that the two strongest would be on duty as they would have the best control. Derek realized he should probably stop his mind from wandering and listen to Deucalion.

And he had to listen to him, because boy-oh-boy did the Alpha of Alphas like to talk. Deucalion went through his whole well-rehearsed speech about how he figured out he could become more powerful by killing his own betas. He talked about how enlightening the other alphas in his pack found killing their pack. He talked about how he wanted Derek to join him.

"Why do you want me?" Derek grunted. "I'm no one special." If he could keep Deucalion talking, he might be able to recover enough to grab Cora and get the fuck out of here.

"True. At your present level, you aren't anything special at all. But you could be," Deucalion observed. "Your mother was a talented woman, respected far and wide for both her wisdom and her ability to fully shift into a wolf. I want someone like that in my Alpha Pack. I want a Hale."

Derek shook his head. "I'm sorry to disappoint you. It took my mother decades to learn to do the full shift. Wisdom doesn't come easily for me."

"True. But your mother spent most of her time and energy managing a large family of wolves and protecting an insignificant little town. Were you to join our pack, the time you would gain and the power you would reap would push you much farther along much more quickly. Don't you want to live up to your potential? The potential she bequeathed to you?"

"My mother," Derek spat, "would put you down like a mad dog."

"Tsk. Words can hurt, Derek, but not as much as Kali here can. If you aren't willing to agree to
achieve your destiny, there is always another Hale. Cora has a great deal of spirit. Wouldn't you agree, Kali?"

"She's a fighter," Kali agreed. "Not like this poor sad sack."

Derek growled at her. "I hit you enough."

"I wasn't talking about fighting," Kali sneered. "I'm talking about spirit. You fight like you're just waiting for a chance to run."

"He is, Kali." Deucalion added. "His goal is the rescue of his sister. He's not a pure warrior, like you are. Do you want to save your sister, Derek? I'll let her go. All you have to do is kill one of your betas. Your choice as to which one."

"And if I don't?" Derek wasn't near as healed as he needed to be. Between Kali and Deucalion, he couldn't survive. "What happens then?"

"We kill you and I turn my attentions to your sister. I am sure she would be far more receptive to my message once enough time has passed. I will have a Hale alpha, no matter how many people I have to kill to get it."

Derek saw it clearly then. This was what he had to do. He would spit in Deucalion's face, telling him that he would never raise his hand against his betas. Then Deucalion and Kali would kill him.

Cora would be safe. As mad as the Demon Wolf was, he wanted what he wanted, and with Derek dead, Cora would be the only Hale in existence. He wouldn't hurt her, nor would he allow her to be hurt. It wasn't a life he had wanted for his sister, but it was better than no life at all.

His betas would survive, and that was most important thing. They'd be angry and heartbroken, but Boyd and Noah would steer them clear of pointless revenge. They could live and grow and be a pack.

Stiles would be hurt worst of all. Loss had torn pieces out of his soul, and Derek wished for nothing more but to give him all those pieces back. But Stiles would never be able heal if he died at the hands of the Alpha Pack, and that result was simply beyond Derek's ability to accept. He would die before letting that annoying kid perish.

Derek brought himself up to his full height, every wound sharp with pain and muscles strained from the rigors of the fight. He was going to spit right in that blind asshole's face. Before he could, though, his eyes caught notice of something very odd.

A red dot hovered near the center of Deucalion's chest, right above his heart. Of course, the Demon Wolf, being blind, hadn't noticed. Dully, Derek didn't comprehend what was happening until one of the bank's huge windows shattered and a single shot rang out.

Deucalion went down, but the bullet wound hadn't been fatal. Maybe the sniper had jerked their aim at the last moment or the bank's glass windows had changed the bullet's trajectory, but it caught the Alpha of Alphas in the left shoulder.

Derek sprang into action. Kali had not seen the laser dot so she was even more surprised than Derek was. He had time before they recovered, but the alphas weren't going to be stalled forever. He ran to the vault door and grabbed Cora by the arm. She grunted at him incoherently. She certainly had been drugged.

The sniper must have been using an assault rifle, because suddenly automatic gunfire tore into the
bank. Shards of glass flew everywhere as the bullets smashed every single window. Derek kept his body covering Cora as they ran - if he could get outside and to the car, he could get away. By the time he reached the door, he was half-carrying his incoherent sister.

He thought that he had a chance to get way when he made it to the front door, but a glance back showed an angry Kali charging up behind him. Derek pushed on, but he barely kept up with the other alpha when he had both hands free. He was a sitting duck unless he abandoned Cora.

He wasn’t going to do that.

He managed to get five feet out the door when he felt Kali’s claws rake his back. He had to turn, he had to fight, or he was going to die. Movement on the roof of the building caught his eye before he could. A figure stood up on the edge of the roof and tore the hood of a sniper’s poncho down.

It was Scott McCall holding the assault rifle. Bring the weapon up to his shoulder, he started firing at Kali. Derek couldn’t tell how many times the woman was hit, but it was enough to drive the alpha off.

Derek stumbled out into the street with Cora, desperation pushing him to go faster. In pain and frantic with worry, he didn't even see the car’s headlights until the vehicle had nearly run into him. Brakes screeched as it come to an emergency stop.

"Oh my god!" cried a woman's voice. "Are you two okay?"

Derek couldn’t see the woman’s face as blinded as he was by the headlights. He could barely hear her over another burst of automatic weapon fire and Kali’s snarls.

"Get in!" The woman ran around the wrong side of the car in her panic and opened the passenger–side doors. Derek hesitated involving someone else for a split second, but he could see both Cora and him surviving this for the first time. The woman help him put Cora in the back seat and he slid gratefully in the front. In a haze, he fretted that he would bleed all over the seat.

The woman ran back to her side as the automatic weapon fire ended. Scott must have emptied his clip. She started the car and pulled away quickly.

"I'm new here. Where’s the nearest hospital?"

"No!" He croaked. "Please. Take me home." He told her the address; he had to get Cora to the pack. He had to make sure she was safe. "Who ... who are you?"

The woman seemed terrified, breathing heavily, but offered Derek a timid smile when he asked who she was. "My name's Jennifer Blake."
Chapter Summary

What happened in the loft while Derek was fighting the Alpha Pack.

The moon beamed down through the loft’s windows, bathing him in the silvery light. Even if he
closed his eyes, he could still feel it. It stirred feelings that reminded Boyd of a line from *Shakespeare in Love*: “Like a sickness and its cure together.” He had believed it was a line that the Bard himself
had written, but Stiles had pointed out that it came from one of the screenwriters for the movie, Tom
Stoppard.

He wondered what event had inspired the quote, for he couldn’t stop thinking about. The paradox of
the full moon, which was both blessing and curse, gnawed at him. It was a freedom that he was
forced to accept. Even now, he felt as if someone had gone into his head and burst open every door
that Boyd had so carefully locked. His inner-most self spilled out through every opening.

He loved nights like this and hated them at the same time.

He envied Isaac who had understood this instinctively; he had found his anchor on that night when
Boyd and Erica had failed. When they had talked about it afterwards, Boyd could not, at first,
understand why. Isaac's father had been brutal and cruel at the end -- how could someone anchor
themselves to someone like that? His pack mate had tried to explain that even when Mr. Lahey was
at his worst, Isaac would sometimes catch glimpses of the man who had once cared for him as a
father should. Isaac had recognized that his father would always be the man who had once loved him
and whom he had loved, even if Isaac would never get to see that person again.

Boyd kept Isaac's specific words: *It reminded me that no matter what I became, there was still part
of the old me that remained.* He had repeated those words to his friend when Isaac's eyes had turned
blue. He kept repeating them even when he would catch Isaac staring at his face in the mirror.

Boyd's own anchor evolved differently. He had considered his parents. He had considered Erica. He
had even considered Alicia before his common sense told him that might have been the worst thing
he could possibly do. He had even considered Derek.

But in the end, he chose Beacon Hills as his anchor. Part of him thought it weird at first, but when he
explained his reasoning to Derek it had made sense to both of them. When he was just a little boy,
there had been a Dairy King on his block. He had loved going there; his parents had taken Alicia and
him as a reward when they had been especially good. Then, one cold and blustery fall, the restaurant
had closed. Young Boyd had been very sad, because that Dairy King had come to mean far more
than just ice cream.

The next summer, however, a Taystee Freeze had opened in the exact same place and while it was a
different restaurant, it was also very much the same. Their family had still visited it for the same
reason. Likewise, Beacon Hills would remain Beacon Hills no matter who came or who left; it
would only change a little bit a little at a time. He found that helped him when he had changed,
because now he was just a little different.

He focused on Beacon Hills right now because one of the ambivalent things about the full moon was
how it made the pack very sensitive to each other’s feelings. The walls that usually existed between people dissolved in its silver light, and they were already as close as any group of people could possibly be. That feeling was amazing, but the down side, of course, was that when most of the pack was unhappy, everyone was unhappy. Like a metastasizing cancer, which made your bones ache and your head throb, negative emotions could spread through them all.

This night found the pack definitely not being happy, because now the other three betas had figured out that Derek had gone to rescue his sister but left them trapped behind mountain ash. Boyd crossed his arms in order to keep himself calm, even as he could sense the frustration and anxiety pour out of the others. This was exactly why Derek had arranged this. Without that barrier, the other three betas would have been out the door and after him without a second thought.

"Dad," Stiles begged at the door to the loft. He had managed to undo most of his transformation, finally having been able to draw his fangs in. "You know it’s wrong to keep us in here. Let us out. Please."

His father sat on a chair on the other side of the mountain ash; he’d dragged it out there earlier. Something that struck Boyd as truly bizarre, the sheriff was playing Candy Crush on his phone. At the end of the level, he looked up at his son. "No."

Boyd could have said the sheriff was being petty in his refusal to elaborate, but he could smell the anger coming off the older man. Something had happened, and it was something big. Yet Stiles was still too keyed up to notice it. Stiles was already fixated on the idea of getting out of the loft in order to go help Derek.

"Dad, come on. Derek's out there against five or more alphas by himself. I know you’re trying to protect us, but we need to go protect him. He deserves that, doesn’t he?” Stiles slid his hands behind his back while he struggled to keep his claws in. Boyd had always noticed that even though his father knew he was a werewolf, Stiles hated for his father to see him transformed in any way.

Noah started another level and answered blandly. "He deserves to have his wishes respected."

“Not if they’re stupid!” Stiles’ yell echoed through the loft.

“I happen to agree with the reasoning behind Derek’s actions. He has a strategy, it’s a good strategy, and it happens not to include any of you children. “

Stiles’ jaw worked in frustration. He turned away from the door and started pacing. Stiles had to complete a complete circuit of the room before he could speak to his father again. "You agree with him. I can’t believe that he sat you down, told you his plan, and you said that it sounded like an excellent idea: Derek’s brilliant plan to get himself killed by taking on the alphas without his pack behind him. You helped him lie to us. Did you even think about what it would do to us before you agreed to this bullshit plan?"

Boyd was surprised that Stiles couldn’t detect the fury building under the sheriff’s deceptively calm surface. "Stiles, you know that Derek’s plan was certainly more than bullshit. I can’t really say if his observations about werewolves are true, but mostly I agree with him that you four shouldn't be involved in it. All of you are too young to fight against a pack of killers."

Erica and Isaac growled at the sheriff. Staying here went against every single one of their instincts. Derek must have warned the human of this reaction, but the sheriff didn't react to it. In fact, the way the man’s face settled into something of tired indifference, it must be a reaction he was used to in juvenile delinquents. He leaned back on the chair so the front two legs were off the ground.
"He thinks we're still young enough to get sent to our rooms without any dinner, yet old enough to be targeted by werewolf death squads?" Stiles snarked. "What's the point of being pack if he's going to treat us like children?"

"You are children, Stiles. That's the point." The sheriff paused when he finished a level. "He didn't want to bring you because you are being targeted. I agree with that one-hundred percent."

"We're not children!" Stiles was livid.

"You're certainly acting like it." His father replied.

"How can you think that? You know what we’ve gone through!"

"Do I?"

That brought Stiles up short. Boyd tilted his head to the side. That, right there, was the source of the sheriff’s anger.

After a few minutes, Stiles tried again. “This is wrong, and you know it. We have to sit here and wonder if he’s dying right now, and he didn’t have the guts to be honest with us.”

"Maybe he doesn't trust you." The sheriff replied glibly, starting another level of Candy Crush. "I certainly don't trust you."

Stiles paled as if he had been shotgunned in the abdomen. He blinked at what his father had said. "Dad ..."

Noah Stilinski leaned forward so quickly the legs of the chair made an audible sound when they hit the floor. "Why would I trust you? Give me one good reason. You keep lying to me, and I distinctly remember we agreed to no more lies between us. You said – you said this – that the only way this was going to work is if we stopped keeping secrets from each other."

Stiles swallowed and every werewolf in the loft could hear his heartbeat begin to race.

"You were already lying when you said that. You were lying when we made that agreement. You never had any intention to tell me the truth; you just wanted me to be honest with you." Noah pointed his finger at him. "Whose fault is that?"

"It's mine," said Stiles. Isaac and Erica retreated to other side of the room. Boyd did not move. He needed to be there for Stiles.

"No, as I said before, you’re a child. It’s my fault. I was so consumed with my own grief after your mother died, that I never got you the help you needed to confront your own grief. I should have, because that type of pain doesn’t go away. It festers; it rots. It has turned you into someone who can look me in the eye and lie to me. It has turned you into someone who thinks that they have the right to manipulate others in order to protect themselves. I raised a son who thinks he's smarter than his father and smarter than everyone else, so the rules don't apply to him."

"I just wanted ..."

“What did you want?” Noah snapped. When Stiles couldn’t answer, the sheriff stood up. “You wanted to manipulate me.”

“No! I wanted to protect you.”
“Protect me from what? Bullshit. You wanted to protect yourself.” Noah was shouting now. "I keep having to remind you that's it my job to protect you, but I can’t do that if you keep lying to me. I'm the father and you're the son, and the reason that you need to tell me things is because I know more than you. I know how to protect you if you did something terrible, but I can only protect you if I know it happened!"

"You found out." Stiles sounded like a dagger had ripped through him.

Boyd tried to usher Isaac and Erica way from this. Whatever the secret was that the sheriff had discovered, it was not something they should be witnessed to. But he couldn't. Isaac shrugged him off. Already irritated that Derek had left them behind, they weren't going to leave a pack mate when he was already in distress.

"Of course I found out. I'm the sheriff!" Noah raised his hands in exasperation. "You thought that I wouldn’t find out that my son was guilty of attempted murder?" He let his hands drop, suddenly, as if he didn’t know what to do with them.

“You went to talk to Scott.”

“Yes.”

“He told you what happened.”

“He didn’t have much of a choice, did he?”

Boyd noticed it, but he didn’t think Stiles did. The sheriff was lying somehow. It only took Boyd a moment to figure out that who actually told the sheriff.

“You must think I'm a monster.”

"I don't think you're a monster, Stiles. I think you're a criminal."

They stared at each other then, and Boyd knew that both of them were seconds away from crying. Stiles finally managed to choke out. "What ... what are you going to do?"

"There is nothing I can do, Stiles, so why should I even try? You don't respect me as a father, and your ... condition ... means I can't very well punish you as the sheriff without hurting innocent people. If I ground you, you'll just leave when you think it's the right thing to do. If I take away your car keys, you'll just get someone to pick you up. If I send you to military school, I'll just be endangering other people. So ... I give up.”

Stiles made a noise in the back of his throat.

"Do what you want; you will anyway. Hell, move in with Derek if he'll have you. Maybe he can get you to respect him the way you don’t respect me, but I doubt it."

Noah stood up and slammed the heavy metal door closed, cutting off the conversation.

Stiles stood there, focused on the door, keeping his back to everyone. Stiles never did like showing weakness when he could help it, but he couldn’t keep it to himself this time. The scent of misery poured off of him in a black wave.

Boyd went up to the other beta and laid a hand on his shoulder. "He's just angry, Stiles. It's a tense time for everyone. I'm sure he didn't mean all the things he said."
Stiles nodded to acknowledge Boyd’s words, but he didn’t meet anyone’s eyes. Boyd hesitated. He couldn’t decide whether to let Stiles settle down or to try to distract him. Finally, he went with the latter. "I knew what Derek’s plan was before your father put up the barrier."

While Stiles didn’t react to that, obviously still lost in the confrontation with his father, Isaac and Erica suddenly rejoined them. Of course they had been listening. "What did he say when you told him it was a bad idea?" Erica wondered.

"I didn’t tell him that, because it's not a bad idea," answered Boyd. "I'm not saying it's a good idea, but I understood why he thought it was. He didn't just run off without thinking. He knows what he's doing."

"Going alone? That’s what you call thinking? It’s suicide.” Isaac demanded and threw himself, roughly, onto the couch.

Boyd watched Isaac fume. "He made a decision. Part of being a leader is making decisions that not everyone is going to agree with, and we've got to support him when he does so. Especially when we don’t agree with him. This isn't like when we were first bit. This isn’t him being a tyrant; this is Derek being true to what he thinks an alpha should be and since none of us ..." He trailed off. His explanation was going to sound far too similar to what Stiles’ father had just said.

Of course, Isaac couldn’t let it die. While Isaac was in control of himself, the power of the moon amplified his natural aggressiveness, even toward Boyd. Isaac scowled at him. “None of us what?”

“Derek is the leader.” Boyd snarled defensively. “We’re all kids so we haven’t had to understand that when you’re a leader you have to make decisions that the people following you don’t like. We don’t have to like it or understand it, but we have to accept it. It’s called growing up.”

Erica sat down next to Isaac, still upset, but she looked at Boyd as if she supported and trusted him. This gesture diffused the tension between him and Isaac for the moment

“So we should be okay with Derek running off to die by himself?” Stiles whirled around. “You say it’s not like before, but it is. It’s exactly the way he acted in the past. He’s the big bad alpha, so he gets to determine who has the right to do what, even if it means he throws himself into a battle he can’t win. It’s the stupidest thing I ever heard, and you’re stupid for being okay with it.”

Boyd turned to Stiles at the Stiles, and for a moment, he thought about being kind and gentle in response. But he wasn’t a leader; he didn’t have those responsibilities yet, and he didn’t like to be called stupid. Stiles was too used to having people around who would let him insult them with no consequence. “Well, I guess you know how your Dad feels now, don’t you?”

It was probably not the best idea to indulge in his moon-spawned irritation, as his barb made Stiles lose control. He lunged at Boyd, claws out and eyes flashing, and Boyd responded by throwing him across the room. While Stiles was undoubtedly the most intelligent and sharp-minded of Derek’s betas, he couldn’t fight worth shit. He was fast but uncoordinated and spent half of battle practice wasting movement. During times like this, when he had lost the intelligence that made him dangerous, he was just flailing claws and snapping teeth.

Picking himself up off the floor, Stiles charged at him again. Boyd grabbed him by the throat and held him with his superior strength while Erica and Isaac caught ahold of his arms.

“Are you okay?” Boyd demanded as Stiles struggled against him.

Boyd slapped Stiles across the face before repeating his question. “Are you okay?”
Boyd wasn’t really expecting to get a response. He was trying to reach the part of Stiles that would think, that would be human. If he could force him to answer that question, Stiles could regain control of himself.

After a few minutes of holding him back, Stiles calmed down. In an effort to regain control of the situation, he resorted to sarcasm. “That was not cool for you to say.”

Boyd shrugged. “As if I care. We’re in this together, and that means your bullcrap could get me killed. So … handle your shit.”

Boyd turned and walked away. Maybe his control on the full moon wasn’t as good as he thought it was. He had meant what he said, but it was provocative and that’s not the thing you want to do on your pack mate in this situation.

Stiles had healed from the slap in his face, but he was still bleeding misery from every pore, and Boyd could tell that it wasn’t just for the fight with his father. Stiles was worried about that, absolutely, but he was also worried about Derek, worried why Derek didn’t think he could take them with him, worried about what his pack mates thought of him. Stiles had a bad habit of taking everything that happened to them and acting like he was personally responsible, even the things that were in no way his fault. It wasn’t healthy, and tonight Stiles found out that it could poison relationships as much as it could protect them.

But it wouldn’t do him any good, or anyone any good, if Boyd coddled him. He had to learn that caring about people didn’t absolve you from the need to own up to your own actions. You couldn’t deceive and hurt other people and defend yourself with the idea that you only did it because you cared.

Boyd wanted to be Stiles’ friend, and sometimes friends tell you when you are wrong.

Before he could go on with this train of thought, every one of the betas turned toward the door. Boyd didn’t want to think about how much that resembled dog behavior. They could sense Derek, and the presence of their alpha stilled most of their anxiety. He wasn’t alone either.

When the door opened, the sheriff was helping Derek carry a young girl into the loft. Her scent was so like Derek’s that Boyd felt this must be Cora. Following the three of them was … his English teacher, Miss Blake?

Derek had been torn up, but he seemed not to even mind that he had claw marks literally everywhere on his body. He was entirely focused on getting the girl with him to the couch, so much so that he ran into the mountain ash, and the sheriff was busy helping the weakened alpha carry Cora.

Boyd took the initiative. “Miss Blake? There is a line of black stuff on the floor right there – could you break it please?”

She came right forward and looked at him, and he pointed once again at the line. She broke it with her foot, and Boyd noted that she must be in shock, because she didn’t even ask why. It was enough for the others to surge forward and take Cora off Derek’s hand and get Derek to sit down on a couch as well.

“What happened?” Erica finally said out loud what all of them were thinking. She could be the boldest of them.

Derek seemed exhausted and he was bleeding, but he certainly wasn’t in any dangers. “There were only two alphas. I was able to get in and get out with Cora.”
“And get the shit beat out of you,” Stiles spat. “What if there had been another alpha there?”

The sheriff and Stiles were on opposite sides of the room. Noah was examining Cora. “I’m not sure what’s wrong with her, Derek. She seems drugged; can you be drugged?”

Isaac sniffed at her. “It smells like wolfsbane.”

“Probably is,” Derek sighed. “It’ll work out of her system, but we need to keep an eye on her.” He struggled to stand up only to be pushed back down by Boyd. His eyes were on the teacher. “Thank you.”

“I was just driving by,” Miss Blake said. “And suddenly you were out in the street and … I was afraid at first with the claws and the glowing eyes and the assault rifles.” She seemed a little out of breath. “But then I saw you were hurt. I’m glad I could help.”

Noah stood up. “Let me walk you to your car. We can talk on the way.” He gave Derek a nod. No matter how angry he was with his son, Boyd knew he would keep the teacher calm and help protect their secret. Noah would never stop protecting his son.

Isaac stood over Derek, a mixture of anger and concern. “I think I can speak for all of us, Derek, when I say you can’t do this again. We don’t care that we’re teenagers, you can keep us out like this. That’s not going to work.”

Derek relaxed on the couch. “Can you be mad at me tomorrow? I want to sleep. Keep watch.” He looked over at Cora. “Everything turned out fine.”

Boyd stepped in and started to work with Isaac and Erica to get Cora up to a room where she could sleep, so Derek would go to his bed. He looked to see where Stiles was only to find him staring at Derek from across the room. The anger and sadness were still there, but there was something else, something deeply powerful. It made Boyd wonder.

Stiles had a look on his face that they had seen before only seldom. It was the look when something just didn’t add up, and he was determined to get to the bottom of it.
Isaac Lahey

Chapter Summary

Isaac’s pretty fed up with Scott's attitude.

Chapter Notes

**Trigger Warning:** Scott says a rather vulgar thing in order to provoke Isaac. There is also talk about suicide.

“Today,” Miss Blake addressed the class, “I would like to discuss the purpose of literature. Who would like to offer a suggestion as to what that purpose could be?”

The sky outside the repaired windows was dull and gray. It was the beginning of a cold and blustery February, and there wasn’t any better place to be than first-period English. Isaac leaned back in his chair with zero intention of volunteering. He was definitely not enough of a nerd to answer questions in class.

Or maybe, keeping quiet as to not draw attention to himself was a habit he still couldn’t shake. Before Derek, it had always been better to avoid doing anything that could draw his father’s notice. Isaac frowned. He should have gotten over this by now.

“Mr. Stilinski? Do you have an idea?” Jennifer’s tone was a little direct. She had no doubt been provoked by how often Stiles fixed her with a dead-eyed stare. Experience had taught Isaac that making eye contact was big mistake when trying to avoid attention.

Stiles remarked drily. “Literature’s pretty helpful when you’re trying to fall asleep.”

The class tittered, but Miss Blake and Stiles locked eyes in silent challenge. Finally, the teacher smiled at his joke, but her voice carried disappointment. “Well, that’s certainly a purpose, but let’s look for some less sarcastic reasons.” She turned to the rest of the class to get their opinions.

Isaac spoke so softly that most people wouldn’t be able hear it. Stiles and Boyd would be able to pick up on it, though. “Stiles. Are you okay?”

“Just peachy,” Stiles replied in the same low voice, but with as much sarcasm as he had replied to Miss Blake. It wasn’t convincing to Isaac. From the look on his face, Isaac saw it hadn’t convinced Boyd either.

“How was last night?” Boyd asked quietly.

At first, Stiles acted as if he was going to ignore the question, pretending to concentrate on Miss Blake as she discussed ‘literature as entertainment’ with a girl in the third row.

“The locks on the door weren’t changed,” answered Stiles as grudgingly as possible. “But other than
that, I don’t know. We didn’t talk to each other."

Isaac kept the sympathy frown off his face. “Well, that’s something right?”

Boyd added, encouragingly. “I told you. Everyone gets angry. He’ll get over it, eventually.”

Stiles shrugged. “We’ll see. Just because he’s not tossing me out in the street doesn’t mean that we’re okay.” Stiles sighed and shifted in his seat again.

Isaac could understand Stiles’ unhappiness on a certain level; Stiles was afraid that he and his father would never be okay with each other again. Isaac, unkindly, thought this was stupid; he had spent time around Mr. Stilinski. He was a good dad, even if he could get emotional from time to time, as Stiles could get emotional from time to time. Yet no one -- not him, not Boyd, not Erica, not even Derek -- could get Stiles to believe that the sheriff would eventually forgive him.

Boyd changed topics. He wanted to know, just as Isaac wanted, to find out why the sheriff was angry. Derek had refused to talk about it, and Stiles and the Sheriff hadn’t been in the mood to discuss it. Boyd might seem the silent type, but he could be crafty when he put his mind to it. “How do you think he found out?”

Stiles answered before he realized that it was a trap. “Scott told him, of course.” He bit his lip when he realized what he had done.

Miss Blake’s lecture intruded on their conversation. “One of the things that literature can do for us is embody the concerns of the culture in which we live. Fiction can be instructive in that regard. Maybe you’ve heard of novels like *The Jungle* by Sinclair Lewis, which exposed terrible conditions in the meat-packing industry at the turn of the 20th century.”

Isaac was far more interested in what was going on between the three of them than in Sinclair Lewis. It all made sense now, and when he glanced at Boyd across the room, he tried to avoid Stiles’ gaze. Boyd gave him a nod showing that he understood as well.

Stiles closed his eyes and then whispered in the most sarcastic tone he could muster. “Okay. On my second full moon I hurt Scott real bad because I was an idiot and so now he is a hunter with freaking automatic weapons and a grudge and that’s what I didn’t tell my dad and so he hates me now and thank you ever so very much for sticking your nose into my private affairs. Because I didn’t go the last year not telling you about this because I secretly wanted you to know how big of a fuck up I am.”

Sarcasm didn’t work as well on werewolves as it worked on humans, especially when the user was trying to cover up feelings of sadness with the sarcasm.

Isaac stared at his book. He had completely lost the train of Miss Blake’s lecture. “Stiles, did you really believe we would think less of you?” He wouldn’t at least; Stiles couldn’t be as big a ‘fuck up’ as Isaac was.

Stiles didn’t answer. Miss Blake’s voice interrupted. “Would someone like to bring up an example of an aspirational text? Sydney.”

Sydney was a girl that everyone saw but no one knew. She was eager to be a player, eager to stand out, but her enthusiasm made her a little too eager. “Stories about King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table.”

Isaac rolled his eyes at the safety of that answer. Sydney had probably never read an original Arthurian story ever; she probably chose it because it sounded impressive without being verifiable.
Yet not everyone shared Isaac’s dismissal of that answer. He blinked in surprise as Scott McCall snapped his pencil in half in reaction to the girl’s suggestion.

He looked over at Stiles; Stiles was still lost in his own thoughts, embarrassed and sad, so he had missed the reaction. Boyd was completely focused on Stiles, so he had probably not noticed it as well. It was sheer luck that Isaac had seen it. Suddenly, King Arthur had become interesting.

Miss Blake hesitated for a moment. “The tales of King Arthur and his knights have served to inspire readers for a very long time. They’ve also had a profound influence on our culture. Can anyone give examples of this?”

A girl in the fourth row that Isaac didn’t actually know the name of raised her hand. “Well, a lot of the ways we talk about heroes and heroism come from Arthurian romance. Also, a lot of sexist ideas about women.”

“That’s a good summary,” Miss Blake smiled at her. “Now, who would like to talk about what it meant in terms of what we were talking about earlier. Mr. Lahey?”

Isaac gaped a little bit. He always had that expression when the teacher called on him. “I’m afraid I don’t know.” He had only been paying the slightest bit of attention.

Miss Blake didn’t call him out on it. She went to the board and wrote several key vocabulary terms that Isaac promptly ignored while she continued to talk. “While modern people like to think of the Arthurian legends in terms of adventure stories, they also served as models of behavior for contemporary readers. King Arthur and his knights represented new ways of thinking about the world: the shift from pagan to Christian theologies and the idea of the rule of law as opposed to might makes right.”

Boyd shot up his hand. “I’ve read a little bit. Might makes right seems to be a big part of the stories.”

“That’s true,” granted Miss Blake. “It didn’t change the world overnight. The idea that martial prowess indicated God’s – or the gods’ – favor was old, but the idea that even the bravest, most formidable knight or even a king could be held accountable for his actions was new.”

Miss Blake went on to talk about the way this represent the clash between feudal culture and the emerging concept of nationhood. She seemed fascinated by how truth of the world could be transformed into stories and then into legends.

One of the boys in the front row asked a question. “So what were these stories saying? That a supernatural force determines the difference between right and wrong? Or that kings and knights and people do?”

Scott suddenly barked out. “Both. It’s both.”

The entire class fell quiet at the hostility of the answer. Miss Blake studied Scott coolly. “We usually raise our hand before speaking, Scott. But since you have such a strong opinion, why don’t you elaborate on it.”

Scott looked mutinous. “It’s not one or the other. Excalibur was a magic sword that proclaimed Arthur the true king, but that’s only because Arthur was trying to be just and wise. It’s a balance. The universe balances itself.”

Miss Blake nodded. “It does. Now, let’s talk about a modern work in the context of reflecting
Isaac barely listened because he was still focusing on the would-be hunter. As Miss Blake moved the topic to modern literature and the next assignment, the other boy had grown more and more agitated. Isaac was too far away to get his scent, but he could tell by the hunch of his shoulders and the clench of the misshapen jaw that he was paying even less attention than Isaac was. Isaac wondered why, but he was going to do more than wonder. He was going to find out.

When class ended, instead of following the other students out, he stalked over to Scott’s desk and positioned himself so Scott couldn’t get up from it.

Scott frowned up at him. “Please get out of my way.”

“Nope!” Isaac grinned back. He was confident that McCall wouldn’t be stabbing him in the middle of a classroom with Miss Blake watching from the desk. “All that King Arthur stuff hit a bit close to home, didn’t it?”

“How would you know and why do you care?” McCall asked suspiciously.

Isaac leaned his head down close to Scott’s ear. “If you’re a big bad hunter, you know exactly how I know that you’re upset.”

“You’re an asshole.”

“Yep.” Isaac pushed his nose so it was touching Scott’s ear to provoke him. “I’m an asshole who wants to know what the fuck you think you’re doing. You think I’m going to let you just walk around and threaten my pack?”

Scott reached up and pushed Isaac’s head away from him. “Get out of my way before I make you get out of my way.” He said it loud enough so everyone could hear him.

“Oh. I’d like to see that.” Derek was going to be so pissed at him, but this punk had stabbed him, had threatened Stiles, and had made himself an irritating mystery.

Scott forced his way into a standing position, while Isaac didn’t fall back, so they were right in each other’s personal space. Isaac clenched his fist; so may there were going to come to blows in about a second.

“You’re going to do this right in front of me?” Miss Blake demanded from the front of the room. “That’s pretty bold of both of you. We’ll talk about it in detention this afternoon.”

Isaac smirked at Scott. Inside though, he winced. The alpha twins were still attending school, and he’d be inconveniencing everyone by getting detention. They were supposed to go straight back to the loft after classes were let out, so the Alpha Pack couldn’t get to them while they were alone.

It didn’t matter. Isaac was going to use this opportunity to get answers out of McCall. If he was in for a penny, he could be in for a pound.

~*~

The clock ticked off the seconds of detention with excruciating slowness. Especially because Isaac was so burning with curiosity that he couldn’t focus on the homework he should have been doing. Scott, on the other hand, quietly finished his algebra homework. Another thing that made Isaac claw at the underside of the desk. He don’t know why he hid it – everyone in the room knew werewolves were real.
As the clock struck four-thirty, Miss Blake let them go with a warning. “Gentlemen, it would probably be best if you resolved your problems with each other when you aren’t on school grounds.”

Isaac grunted an acknowledgement and then hurried out after the other boy. Scott walked fast, trying to outdistance Isaac, but that wasn’t going to be possible. Isaac was a werewolf after all. “Scott, are you stupid?”

“Uhh, no?” McCall answered without slowing down or looking back.

“You can’t outrun me. Look, I’m not going to hurt you. I just want to talk.”

At that, Scott called back behind him. “I know that you aren’t going to hurt me. But I don’t want to talk to you.”

Once they got outside, McCall headed straight toward his motorcycle, but he had parked it as far as it could be from the school. It was at the very south edge of the parking lot, near the trees that marked the edge of the Preserve. Most people with bicycles or motorcycles parked them near the school.

Isaac ambled to a stop after McCall had reached his motorcycle and started packing stuff on it. “You’re pretty weird, you know that?”

Scott didn’t look up at him. “I’m weird? You’re the one following me.”

“Because I want to talk, like I said. Look, whatever you have against Stiles, you …” Isaac attempted to think of the right words to say. “Something else is going on, because if you’re here to hurt Stiles, saving Derek wasn’t the right way to go about it.”

There was no answer. Scott snatched his helmet up. Isaac was beyond frustrated. “Will you look at me?”

Scott sighed and put down his helmet, turning around. He had his hands behind his back. “What is between me and Stiles is between me and Stiles. I don’t get why none of you understand that.”

“If you’re a hunter, and I’m not sure you are, because you certainly aren’t acting like one, then you have to know pack doesn’t work like that.” Isaac shook his head. “You can’t expect us just to step aside.”

Scott grimaced. He probably did know that.

“And you helped Derek get away from the alphas two nights ago. Why would a hunter do that?” Isaac accused. He knew he was on to something.

“How do you know I wanted to help Derek? Maybe I’m just a crappy shot.” Scott protested.

“You pegged Deucalion from four hundred feet away at night through a plate glass window. You’re not a crappy shot.” Isaac counted and took another step forward. “I want to know what you’re up to. I want to know what you’re really up to. What freaked you out so badly in first period?”

“I want to know a few things myself. Tell you what. You answer a few of my questions, and I’ll answer a few of yours. Deal, Isaac?”

“Deal.”

“What did it feel like?”

“What did what feel like?” Isaac was confused.
“Lydia’s blood. When it spilled out, all hot and sticky, over your hands. I saw the autopsy photos. You clawed her up pretty good. What was it the coroner said? He had seldom seen such savagery.”

If Scott was trying to push his buttons, he had succeeded. His eyes flashed their electric blue and he lunged forward. “You really wanna watch your mouth.”

“I heard it, you know. Back in freshman year, when you tried to talk to her, and she mocked you. Something about bikes and chains?”

Isaac growled at the memory. It hadn’t been like that! Yes, he had done it. But this jackass didn’t know anything.

“Did it excite you? To get revenge on a pretty girl because she said she wasn’t interested in you? Did you taunt her as she died? Did the light leaving her eyes get you hard?”

Isaac lost control, lunging, fangs and claws out, but too late he realized that Scott had maneuvered him so the bike was between them. While he tried to compensate Scott pulled something off the bike and struck him with it.

He howled, but it died in his throat as his muscles locked up under the power of an electric current. He fell to the ground twitching.

“Yeah. That’s what I thought. When I heard that Lydia was dead, I knew it was you, Lahey, who had done it.”

Scott picked Isaac up by the shoulders and rolled him out of the back of the parking lot and down the hill, which moved him out of the direct line of sight of both the school and most parking lot. Isaac couldn’t make himself move; he couldn’t make himself speak. Luckily, the hill was relatively gentle as he rolled to stop at the bottom of it.

McCall had the taser out, and he pulled hunting knife from the saddlebag. “Did Derek ever tell you why your eyes are blue? Did you care? I think you didn’t. If you did, you wouldn’t be so quick to throw your weight around against someone you think isn’t as strong as you are.”

McCall followed him down the embankment to where Isaac was lying at the bottom. Isaac strained to take control of his body, and he could feel it settling down. His heart shot into his throat. It wasn’t going to be quick enough.

“I’m sure Derek took the blame. Did he say that you were doing what you were doing to protect the pack? Did he say the same thing when you guys murdered Jackson Whittemore? Did Jackson beg for his life? I bet he did. Did you smile as he died?”

Isaac growled but that was all he could as he concentrated on healing quick enough to get away. Derek had accepted the blame for everything. Strangely enough, it was this that had cemented his loyalty to Derek, because the alpha wouldn’t let up trying to convince Isaac that it had been Derek’s fault, not his. Isaac didn’t believe Derek, but he appreciated the man not wanting him to shoulder the blame.

“‘So tell me, Isaac. How did he justify it? Did he give you the ‘shades of gray’ speech? Did he tell you that it was okay that you killed an innocent person, because you thought you were doing the necessary thing? Is that how you live with it?’ Scott stood over him, furious. “Did you say, well, I tried my best, I just hit the wrong target?”

“It was a mistake.” Isaac gritted out. He was going to be able to move soon, but he didn’t think he could stop Scott if he got serious.
“Well, that’s convenient. It was a mistake. You werewolves certainly have a lot of those. People get hurt, people get killed, but you get to go on with your lives. Consequences are for humans aren’t they?” McCall shouted the question at him. “Aren’t they?”

Isaac didn’t answer. He was beginning to wonder if McCall wanted to kill him at all, or if he was just trying to talk himself into doing it.

“Me? I’ve always considered myself a black-and-white man, but it’s a hard way to live, isn’t it? I thought there weren’t instructions for what to do when some monster has an accident. But there are; it’s called the Code. It’s pretty simple; you murder an innocent person, I murder you. It sounds fair, doesn’t it?”

Isaac was terrified he was about to die if he answered ‘yes.’

Before he could answer though, a figure hit McCall from the back, knocking him over Isaac. It was Stiles. The two of them tumbled over and over on the ground. “No, I don’t think that’s fair.” Isaac rolled over, bringing himself up to one elbow.

Stiles pinned Scott’s hand to the ground over his head, keeping the weapons out of play. Scott glared up at him as he did so. “Well, this seems like old times.”

“Stop, okay?” Stiles shouted back. “Just stop! Drop them.” He gripped Scott’s wrists so hard that tips of his claws drew blood. His eyes were gleaming yellow. Slowly, Scott let the knife and the taser fall from his hands.

Isaac got to his feet, shakily, and kicked the weapons away from the ex-friends.

“Going to finish what you started?” Scott demanded not taking his eyes off Stiles’. “And now you don’t even have to worry about it changing your eyes. This is clearly self-defense.”

“What the fuck is wrong with you?” Stiles pleaded. “What do you want?”

“How much time do you have?” Scott gritted out. His heartbeat was racing but Isaac realized that McCall wasn’t even thinking about him anymore. His focus was all on Stiles. “What’s wrong is that when I finally woke up in the hospital, I couldn’t move my arms. I panicked and that triggered an asthma attack, so I couldn’t move and I couldn’t breathe. I remember how that felt, every night. That’s just one thing that’s wrong with me.”

Stiles growled in frustration. He clung to Scott.

“Another thing wrong with me is the days I spent waiting for my friend, but he never came because he was off murdering innocent people with his pack.”

“It wasn’t like that!” Stiles burned yellow, but tears slid out of his face. “Something had to be done. Sometimes you have to do things you don’t want to do.”

Scott said quietly. “So we agree on something again.”

“You’re a liar!” Stiles promised the man he had pinned to the ground. “You’re lying to yourself. You could have killed Isaac long before I got here, Scott, but you were stalling. You were begging someone to come along and stop you.”

“I’m a liar? It takes one to know one.”

“I do know you, Scott, and you’re not a killer.”
Scott suddenly snarled. “You knew me. You knew someone who had a future, who had a best friend, who had just found a girl who liked him. Then you took it all away, because you had to be the smartest person in the room!”

“I know what I did. I know what it cost me. Why do you keep trying to make it worse?”

“You don’t know anything. You don’t know what it feels like to wake up in pain and realize that the pain is all you have left and not go mad. You don’t know what it feels like to understand that this is now your life yet still not put a gun in your mouth and pull the trigger! You can’t possibly know what it takes to get up and try to make it right.”

Stiles shook him. “What do you want me to say?” Isaac realized that both of them were crying. He wondered if they were just going to hurt each other until the other snapped. “You want me to say that I don’t know what it takes? I don’t.”

“You want me to tell you?”

“For fuck’s sake, Scott, yes!”

“It takes power.” Scott’s eyes turned a pure glowing white. “Power like this.” With those words, Scott threw Stiles off of him and the werewolf landed on a car, twenty yards up the side of the hill.
Alan Deaton had long ago realized that most people would never understand the sacrifices being an Emissary demanded. In order to be the voice of prudence and restraint for a pack of werewolves, creatures governed more often than not by their passions, an Emissary had to act as if they had no personal desires of their own. It was quite a burden, which was why the best Emissaries took time and effort to develop lives away from the packs that they advised. Talia, in her gently perceptive way, had understood this, which was why she kept knowledge of his identity to herself and a few select others. The distance this created allowed him to maintain the degree of objectivity he required.

Fate had conspired, however, to make it difficult for him to keep the same objectivity with her son Derek. Not only did Alan have to deal with his own guilt at failing Talia so profoundly, but he also had to deal with the resentment he felt towards the current pack for interfering in his personal life. It made objectivity difficult, and so he found himself reluctant to speak as often as he should. Alan was sure it annoyed the Derek to no end.

This evening was no different. He leaned against his stainless-steel examination table listening to two betas give their account of what had happened at the school earlier that day. He had yet to ask any questions because he wanted to hear their whole story undirected.

“So,” Stiles said breathlessly, “after flinging me maybe thirty feet through the air and smashing me into Mr. Harris’s car – the only good thing that came out of this whole fiasco – he just left. Ran off into the woods without another word.”

Isaac grimaced and turned apologetically towards Derek. “I went to see if Stiles was okay. Maybe I should have …”

“No, you did exactly what you were supposed to do.”

The compliment highlighted Derek’s growth as an alpha, Alan couldn’t help but observe. For all his love of violence, Isaac needed reinforcement the way the other betas did not.

“He did stop to pick up his stun gun. We left his bike where it was.” Isaac continued. “Given how scared I was, the way it ended was … pretty anticlimactic.”

Stiles grunted and rubbed at his jaw. “Every time I think I’ve got a handle on this bullshit, it gets worse. I’m so fucking screwed I can’t believe it. We have to figure out who is using him.”

Alan folded his arms of his chest. Possibilities churning through his mind, but he refused to speculate. There were still too many things that he didn’t know for anything he could add to affect the situation positively. There were also his own feelings to consider.

Derek scowled at Stiles as if what the teen had just said was the most obvious thing in the world. He then turned to him. “What do you think?”

Alan weighed his options. He recognized that what had happened to Scott’s eyes occurred during
manifestations of only the most powerful druidic magic. Beyond that was all speculation. He certainly couldn’t have done what Scott had accomplished. “I think that Stiles is most likely correct.”

When all three werewolves in his office glared at him, Alan stared peacefully back.

“Are their awards for Most Unhelpful at the Annual Emissaries Convention?” Stiles snapped. “Do you take workshops in being enigmatic? Because we just sat here and explained to you the freakiest shit that have ever happened to us – and we’re werewolves! – and you are standing there like … like … like we’re talking about NBC’s Tuesday night comedy lineup!”

Deaton only raised his eyebrows in reply. “Was there a specific thing you wanted me to say?”

Derek intervened before Stiles could build up a full head of steam. “Do you understand how Scott did that?”

“At this time, I have nothing but speculation. What Stiles described shares certain characteristics with advanced druidic magic, but without more information, anything I might say could be misleading. I try not to mislead my Alpha.” Deaton had learned to speak around the truth a long time ago.

Isaac rolled his eyes in exasperation. “Would you like to give us anything? Anything at all?”

Deaton fixed Isaac with a stare. “If you insist, but I will not be scolded if you discover later that I was wrong and it leads to disaster. I would guess, if I must, that the magic being employed suppresses Scott’s asthma and the nerve damage to his back.” Deaton glared at Stiles and Derek; he knew very well what had happened. “I take it none of the pack have seen Scott employ his inhaler?”

No one had.

“To compensate for such a serious injury and a previously-existing significant medical condition, it would require a significant expenditure of power. If I had to guess, again if I must, Scott probably fled after using some of that magic against you, Stiles, because he only has a finite amount available to him, most of which is probably dedicated to keeping him mobile.”

Stiles glanced down at the table as if he was studying it for answers. Alan read the tension in the posture. Good, he thought uncharitably.

“There’s no way Scott is doing this by himself, is there?”

“I don’t see how it’s possible. Scott received no training in the arts while he worked with me. If I had known he was capable of such magic, I would have definitely started to do so.” Alan could not help but allow the bitterness creeping into his voice. “But back then, I had no idea he would have to learn how to defend himself from the supernatural. In any event, it would take far longer than a year for him to learn this level of practice.”

Stiles winced at the subtle jab, while Isaac and Derek shot the veterinarian glares that if looks could kill would have slain him outright. Alan didn’t care. This was his place of power, and he wasn’t going to be intimidated by werewolves. “What might be helpful in identifying the specific type of magic is if you could tell me if you noticed any other odd behaviors. Did your senses pick up anything out of the ordinary?”

Stiles grumbled. “To be honest, I spend most of my time at school trying to ignore him.”

Deaton bit his tongue. Of course, Stiles would try to pretend that nothing was wrong.

Derek shook his head as he thought about it. “I didn’t sense anything out of the ordinary that night.
outside the McCall House. Though I think I might have overlooked something. Scott kept talking about his medicine, but he didn’t smell like he was taking any.”

Today was the first time Derek had mentioned that meeting with Scott. Derek had become much better at many things, but utilizing his Emissary by sharing information was not one of them.

Alan couldn’t completely blame the alpha for that. The two of them had gotten off to a rough start—a very rough start. It had been both their faults and the problems had not yet been totally resolved. Now it seemed that they wouldn’t have time to resolve them before things became tense once again.

Alan moved past it for the present and tilted his head to the side. “That could be significant. Any other details, no matter how small?”

Derek glanced over at Stiles. “He had a tattoo. I didn’t know him very well, but it seemed out of character.”

“I don’t remember him having one. Stiles?”

Stiles had been lost in thought. Alan tamped down his irritation. “What? Oh, no.”

“Tattoos can bear meaning in mystical rituals.” Alan went and got a pen and some paper. “Do you think you could draw it for me, Derek?”

Wordlessly, Derek accepted the paper and started drawing on it.

Isaac craned his neck to watch his alpha’s efforts. “I got nothing … well except for that weirdness in class.”

“If you could be more specific, Isaac?” Alan kept his voice neutral.

“Sydney brought up King Arthur and his knights – I didn’t pay much attention – but it seemed to freak him out.”

Alan was so surprised that his expression much have slipped. He had heard of several rituals connected to that particular set of myths. Arthur’s tale and the stories surrounding them represented a merger between the older druidic culture and the incoming Christian culture. Times of change could produce great magic, but it would take a real druid to enact rituals like that. When he realized that the wolves were watching him, he responded with a nondescript answer. “That’s very interesting.”

“And it means?” Derek asked impatiently. He thrust his drawing into Alan’s hands.

“Now, I certainly have suspicions about what it could mean, but I couldn’t possibly give you anything approaching a definitive or useful answer. I will have to look into it personally. As soon as I know something concrete, I will get back to you, Derek.”

Derek did not like that evasion in any way, shape, or form. “Stiles and Isaac, could you give me the room with Deaton for a moment?” It sounded so very alpha-like that Alan smiled at the corner of his mouth.

Stiles and Isaac left without saying anything else, which was a big surprise to him. Stiles did like to needle him when he has the chance.

When Derek was confident they were far enough away he turned back to him. “Is this going to be a problem?” It was an accusation and very similar to a tone that the alpha would take with his betas.
Alan bristled at the tone. He wasn’t a beta and he wasn’t going to be treated as such. His response matched the alpha’s anger. “Derek, it is already a problem.”

“You’re my emissary; I need to know if I can trust you.” Derek explained, immediately on the defensive.

“Of course you can trust me, Derek. Did I or did I not follow your explicit order not to visit the boy? Even though you knew how much he meant to me.” Alan stepped to one of the racks he kept; his eyes swept over it, though he was actually thinking of something else. “Have I ever given you any reason to doubt my advice?”

“No. Never. When you choose to give it.” Derek grated.

That much was true. The veterinarian had chosen to avoid the initial conflict in Beacon Hills caused by Peter’s awakening from his coma. He had regretted it.

“I choose to give advice and succor when I feel it’s necessary. I am loyal to you, but I am not your servant; I am your advisor. I am under no ethical compulsion to dispense advice if I feel that my advice would be incomplete, inaccurate or …” Alan let the anger seep into his voice. “… unheeded.”

“I did what I did because it was best for my pack.” Derek defended himself.

“You did what you did because of your paranoia concerning the Argents.”

“The Argents burnt my family alive. I don’t think a little paranoia is out of the question.”

“Kate Argent burnt your family alive, most likely on her father’s orders. I told you that Chris and Victoria were not like Kate and Gerard, yet you refused to listen.”

Derek sneered. “An Argent is an Argent.”

“And a werewolf is a werewolf. Would you like to be held responsible for your uncle’s murder spree simply because you’re the same family and the same species? You’d be offended if someone tried to tar all werewolves with that brush.”

Derek didn’t say anything in answer. There wasn’t anything he could say.

“So instead of heeding my advice, or allowing me to act as I wished for the benefit of your pack, you chose to isolate a defenseless and wounded child. And, beyond that, you threatened me.”

Derek crossed his arms and glowered. “I know what I did.”

“Then you also know that your actions may have created a hunter ideally situated to destroy your pack from within. His very presence puts Stiles into emotional turmoil. Furthermore, his presence strains our relationship, which was never very strong to begin with.”

“I did what any Alpha would do.”

“We both know that’s not true. Your mother would never have been so cruel.”

Derek looked up at that, though his face seemed to collapse in on itself.

Alan spoke honestly and openly. “I promise you that when I have answers for you, I will share them with you, immediately. But, since groundless speculation might lead you to act rashly and do more damage than you’ve already done, I choose to withhold any information that I have at the present. Which is my right.”
Derek’s eyes flashed red, but Alan could tell that the alpha was trying to master his emotions, not intimidate him. “I’m sorry, Alan. You were right, and I was wrong. I know this has to be difficult for you.”

Alan sighed. “An apology is better than nothing, but I can’t help but think that if I had been present in Scott’s life after the accident, what’s happening now would never have occurred.” He turned back to Derek. “If it helps you feel better, I think that Stiles’ and your other observations about Scott’s behavior are most likely true.”

Derek looked up. “You think he’s conflicted.”

“I think that he is in a very dangerous place, and I don’t think it’s the Argents’ doing. They wouldn’t send a young hunter alone into Beacon Hills and place him between two feuding packs after only a year of training at the most. While they could recognize someone employing druidic magic of this caliber, they would be reluctant to use it, considering our ties to your kind. Something else is going on, and I think from his behavior, Scott has been maneuvered into opposing us.”

Stiles burst into the room with a bashful Isaac following him up. “I knew it; we’re being Yojimbo-ed!”

Derek’s eyebrows conveyed his extreme annoyance with the pair of them. Alan’s irritation — of course Stiles wouldn’t give them the privacy they had requested — warred with the recognition that Stiles was probably correct.

At Derek’s befuddled anger, Stiles rolled his eyes. “Yojimbo? 1961 movie directed by Akira Kurosawa and starring Toshiro Mifune? Come on? Don’t you guys watch anything?” Stiles barked in exasperation. “A ronin comes to town torn apart between two gangs. He plays the gangs off against each other in order to free the villages! Wait, that makes us one of the gangs!”

Derek sighed. “I thought I asked you to wait outside.”

“I did,” Stiles replied. “For like five minutes!”

“Derek, I think there may be some truth to Stiles’ assumption. You said that the night at the bank, Scott was originally aiming to kill Deucalion. Maybe you were wrong. What if his goal is to destabilize both sides of this conflict?”

Derek lifted up a hand in refutation. “That would only work if both sides are equal – the alpha pack could crush us at any time.”

Alan had been waiting for that admission from Derek that he thought they couldn’t win. Alan could sense that everyone was beginning to feel that way, but they hadn’t spoken about it out loud. As the leader, an alpha had to give not only inspiration but also clarity. Hope was important, but so was reality. “Derek, the alpha pack’s goal is not to destroy your pack, but to get you to destroy it. While they are far more powerful, they are also at a tactical disadvantage – they can’t win without your cooperation.”

“That was one reason they held Cora. They imagined it might force me to cooperate. When Scott helped me escape, he shifted the balance of power back to a stalemate, undoing all their work. They still need my or Cora’s cooperation, but they don’t have the means to get it.” Subconsciously, Derek looked at Stiles. Alan had noticed that Derek had begun to trust in Stiles’ perceptions.

“Don’t look at me! I didn’t talk to anyone!” Stiles defended himself. Everyone scowled at him in exasperation.
“No one was accusing you of treachery, Stiles.” Alan sighed. “I think, Derek, that while you still have a serious problem here, you now have room to maneuver. You still have to play defense – the present situation will only last as long as you can keep yourself or Cora out of the hands of the alpha pack – but you know that someone is trying to manipulate events. To what end, I can only speculate.”

Derek had become better at taking his time when deliberating a course of action. He no longer went with the first plan that occurred to him. “Our only lead to what that could be is Scott. He’s demonstrated that he isn’t in the mood to share with any of us.”

Alan frowned; Derek wasn’t going to get him to volunteer. “I think there is someone he might want to talk to.” He glanced at Stiles. “His behavior indicates the desire for a reckoning.”

“He wants to skin me alive!” Stiles exclaimed. “I know he won’t do it, but he still wants to. How the hell am I supposed to talk to him like that?”

“Couldn’t you do it? He used to work for you,” asked Isaac. The boy had never gotten over his penchant for saying things at inappropriate times.

“I am loathe …” Alan started, only to be interrupted by Derek.

“I know what you’re going to say, and I know how much you cared for him. But if he is being manipulated by someone to get between two werewolf packs, he’s in danger.”

Derek reasoning was sound, and that angered Alan even as it pleased him to see Derek’s growth. “I will try my best.”

Derek decided to leave to meet up with the rest of the pack. He wanted to share with them what they discovered and plan how to protect everyone from the plans of the alpha. The three of them left, but moments later, Stiles returned.

“Is there something else I can help you with, Stiles?” Alan really did not want to speak with the boy at this time. He was still a little bit angry at Derek and the whole situation.

“I thought I might be able to help you,” Stiles answered with confidence.

Alan always felt that the best approach when confronted with arrogance was to stare blankly at it.

“You don’t think I could help you figure him out?” Stiles protested. “Look, I’m not trying to toot my own horn here, but I’m not stupid. There are things I can tell you about Scott that could be helpful.”

Alan thought for a moment about allowing Stiles to continue, but in the end, he was still angry. It got the better of him; he felt he had controlled himself long enough. “I think I’ve heard everything I need to hear from you.”

Stiles looked massively offended by that.

“The truth is, Stiles, I don’t like you. I’ve never liked you.” Alan felt it was about time someone expressed a few truths to the young werewolf. It wasn’t like his father or his alpha was going to do it. “You have several qualities that I find highly obnoxious. Since I have been able to exist effectively in the past without your guidance, I’ll think I’ll pass on receiving it now.”

“What the fuck is wrong with you? I’m just trying to help. Did they give you asshole lessons when they taught you to be vague and mysterious?” Stiles spat back at him.
Alan was almost ashamed. He knew he was taking his feelings out on a teenage boy, but he was
tired of bottling up his emotions about this whole subject. And, he reasoned, it would do good for
Stiles to know that his behavior, while understandable for a teenage boy with no responsibilities, was
no longer appropriate for a beta werewolf. “You see, that is one of those qualities that make me
dislike you: your over-reliance on sarcasm. Sarcasm is not a defense; it is an attack. When you use
sarcasm in response to another person’s words, you are essentially saying ‘I don’t care what you
think’ and ‘I don’t care what you feel.’”

Stiles opened his mouth to say something. Alan didn’t let him start.

“And since you obviously do not care how I feel, why should I feel obligated to listen to your
amateur prattling? I am more than twice your age, and I have far more experience than you in many
different fields. I have a responsibility to your pack as a whole and I have a duty to your alpha in
particular, but that is where your influence on my behavior ends. I’ve met more than one person in
my life who acted like you do, and I have no interest in enduring a repeat performance.”

Stiles had wilted under Alan’s assault but he suddenly found strength within himself.
Alan wasn’t
surprised. Beneath his brash exterior, Stiles was someone who didn’t think much of himself.
Contrary to adolescent fantasy, however, this did not make him lovable, especially when Stiles
overcompensated for it.

“I don’t care what you think of me. I have enough people in my life that care about me. I’m trying to
help protect my pack. Can you understand that?” Stiles was defiant.

Alan nodded; defiance was much better than arrogance. “I can understand that; I simply doubt you
can be of much help. How could you possibly help me reach Scott?”

Stiles continued to be outraged. “He was my best friend. I … I loved him”

“No, you didn’t. I’ve observed you; you don’t love anyone. You’re possessive of them. It’s easy for
teenagers to get those two emotions confused. Love requires acknowledgement that the target of
your emotions has a life and feelings separate from your own.”

Stiles sneered at him. “I think I’m glad that you don’t share that much with us, if this bullshit is what
you really think.”

“You turned on Scott, by your own admission, because you realized that he might be starting to shift
the focus of his life away from you. How dare Scott have a girlfriend! You lied to your father, by
your own admission, because he might judge your actions. It never occurred to you that Scott or your
father are independent people with the right to their own thoughts and feelings. You’re not a bad
person because you accidentally hurt others, Stiles, you’re a bad person because you only care about
hurting people if it means you won’t get what you want.”

Finally, Stiles had had enough. “Are you getting off on this? Do you love twisting the knife? Is that
how you secret get your jollies, oh wise Emissary? If that’s all, I can go torture myself a lot better
than you can.”

“I am not getting off on this, as you put it. No problem improves unless you start first with the truth.”
Deaton held up a hand. “The truth is you hurt more than just Scott that night. You hurt your father.
You hurt me. You hurt Scott’s mother. You hurt yourself. Nothing in your life will improve until you
face that reality and stop pretending that it doesn’t matter because you didn’t mean to.”

Stiles got up in his face. “You can go to hell. What makes you think you can judge me?”
“Experience. Training. You’re a child, who thinks that they have a right to control how other people see them. You’re the type of person who would kill someone by accident and then hide it from your friends and family so they wouldn’t think badly of you, never even stopping to consider that indulging in lies and deception make you exactly the person you’re afraid they think you are.”

“For someone who didn’t want to talk to me, that was a lot of advice strung together.” Stiles turned away and headed out the door.

“The truth is that until you realize that other people’s feelings are just as important as yours, you’re going to hurt them more than you help.”

Alan watched as the young wolf left, satisfied. Depending on how angry Stiles was, there was a strong chance that Stiles would try to solve things himself out of spite.

Which, of course, was what Alan wanted.
Noah Stilinski

Chapter Summary

Sheriff Stilinski tracks down the Argents to get some answers.

Noah Stilinski parked his car in the street, wondering if it would be towed if he left it there. His destination was a beautiful house in Belvedere, hidden behind a stone wall and a screen of trees. The Victorian house had to cost at least seven figures, and the grounds were meticulously well kept. Yet, an air of melancholy gloom hung over it.

He had taken a day off. While there were days when he didn’t wear a uniform and never went into the office, Noah was always considered on call unless he had made special arrangements. Today was one such arrangement. He had left Beacon Hills early in the morning and, depending how this meeting went, he might not get home until late that night.

He hadn’t told Stiles where he was going, which had been very easy for him to do because they still weren’t talking. Noah’s anger had cooled considerably, but as much as it hurt for them to float around each other in an otherwise empty house with this thing between them, he had yet to find a way to approach his son.

Once he got past the anger, the truth could only be that Noah did blame himself. The sheriff knew his son better than anyone. Stiles understood the severity of what he had done, and he had to be aware of the dangers. Noah couldn’t believe that it had gotten to the point where Stiles thought that he couldn’t bring such a tragedy to his attention. When did he lose his son’s trust so badly that he would rather hide than let Noah protect him?

Noah looked at himself in the rear-view mirror. “Maybe it’s because when you finally found out, you told him you were giving up on him.” He closed his eyes. He had spoken so much in anger that it brought back echoes of his own father to him. He had never wanted to be like that.

But what was he supposed to have done? It wasn’t like Stiles had done something minor, like broken the neighbor’s window with a baseball bat! His son had done something that could have landed – that could still land him – in jail for twenty years or more! Noah reasoned that he had used the anger to make Stiles see that he couldn’t hide things this big from him and expect him to be protected.

Not for the first time, he wished that Claudia was still alive. She would have figured out a way to teach Stiles without alienating him. Noah always felt lost when it came to actually being the father Stiles needed.

If he couldn’t reach his son, he could intervene to make sure that Stiles was safe. Derek would do everything he could to protect Stiles from physical harm; the alpha took that part of his title very seriously and his recent behavior had only reinforced the Sheriff’s high opinion of him. But there were things that Derek couldn’t do that the Sheriff of Beacon County could, which was why he had driven down to San Francisco this morning.

Noah Stilinski walked up and knocked on the front door of Chris and Victoria Argent’s house. He felt a little vulnerable, because he wasn’t wearing his uniform. He couldn’t have, in good conscience, worn it. He was here as a father, not as an officer of the law.
Victoria opened the front door. She looked almost as she did when he had seen her last seen her. She had appeared formidable that night in the parking lot of the high school during the night of parent-teachers conferences, when her husband had shot down a marauding cougar. Yet Noah was a trained investigator, and he noted new lines around her eyes. The last year obviously hadn’t been particularly easy on her, either.

Before he could reintroduce himself, she opened the door wider, welcoming in. “Sheriff Stilinski. It’s strange to see you so far away from Beacon Hills. Why don’t you come in?” Noah couldn’t help but notice that she didn’t say it was a pleasure to see him.

“Thank you, Mrs. Argent. Is your husband home?” He stepped onto the marble tiles of the foyer. Honestly, the house looked like something that had been done up for one of those fancy magazines.

“He ran to the store, but he should be home in a while. However, I am almost completely sure that I’m the one you wish to speak with. Why don’t we go into the living room?” She guided him through the house to a gorgeous parlor, decorated in grays and greens and graced by a fireplace topped by a hand-carved mantle. Noah stopped for a moment when he passed a wall of pictures. Displayed prominently in the center was a picture of their daughter, Allison. Its prominence and the black border draped around it made it clear that no one here had forgotten her death.

Noah couldn’t imagine what that felt like to walk in your own house every day and see the picture of your loved one, gone beyond return. He had carefully wrapped and put away every memento of Claudia, even though he could describe to a stranger exactly where each portrait and picture was. He had barely survived her passing, and he knew he would not survive it if anything happened to Stiles. But then again, that was why he was here.

In the far right corner of the wall of photographs, there was a picture of Scott McCall. It must have been taken at the hospital where he was recovering from the attack because it had a picture of Melissa, Scott, and Mrs. Argent by his bed. Melissa was looking happy and relieved, Scott was smiling, and even Mrs. Argent had the corners of her mouth turned up.

Noah and Stiles should have been in that picture, but they weren’t.

“Can I get you something to drink, Sheriff?” Mrs. Argent asked. “Coffee, perhaps?”

“I’m off the clock today, Mrs. Argent, so please call me Noah. I wouldn’t mind a cup.” The delay might give him time to go over one more time what he wanted to say and how he wanted to say it. There was no way this was going to be a comfortable conversation. He sat down on the couch.

He had thought about threatening them, but the Argents weren’t people who allowed themselves to be threatened. They answered violence with violence. There was only one path to what he hoped to accomplish here, and that was if he told the truth.

Mrs. Argent came back into the living room and handed him a cup of coffee. She had one for herself. “Please, Noah, call me Victoria.” She smiled at him.

“Thank you.” Noah had never seen someone whose smile made him as anxious as hers. “I’m sorry for showing up unannounced, but there are things going on in Beacon Hills that I need to talk with your family about.”

“This is about your son,” she replied. “Stiles, wasn’t it? Derek Hale’s beta. I think that would be the only reason you would have to come and talk with us. What’s he done now?” Noah heard the condemnation in her voice.
“My son is doing well, thank you for asking.” He bristled, and it showed in his voice. He could be mad at Stiles, but no one else had the right to be. “I want to make sure that he keeps doing well.”

Victoria stared at him as if trying to intimidate him into going on. Finally, she took a sip of her own coffee. “We have not heard of any further … accidents that might require our attention.”

“There haven’t been, and there isn’t going to be, though that’s not my point. Who would be telling you if there had been any accidents?” Noah demanded.

“Don’t be disingenuous. If you don’t know who we have keeping an eye on things in Beacon Hills, Noah, you must have a guess.” Her eyes glanced to Scott’s picture on the wall. “He’ll let us know if we have to intervene.”

“So you know what’s going on there now?” Noah demanded. “And you aren’t doing anything about it?”

“If opposing packs of werewolves want to kill each other, then it’s not our problem, Noah.” She kept the same pleasant tone with she had met him at the door with. “It’s only when werewolves start killing innocent humans that my family gets involved. And given the way their squabbles tend to spill over into the human population very often, we certainly will get involved.”

“So you haven’t sent Scott to hunt my son?”

“No. Your son is not a target. Not only was he very young, but he did not actually kill anyone.” Victoria explained it simply. “We don’t hunt children unless they’ve purposefully taken a human life.”

“Then you might want to tell Scott that because he’s implied that he is going to do so.”

Victoria smiled. “Has he claimed that I’ve authorized it? Has Scott attacked Stiles?”

Noah winced. “No. There’s been no direct threat. There’s been no assault that couldn’t be construed as self-defense.”

“Perhaps Scott is simply indulging in a little psychological revenge. More than a little justified, don’t you think?” Victoria said nastily. She obviously didn’t think much of Stiles. “Would you want me to speak to him? I could tell him to back off Stiles. Unless, of course, Stiles is a legitimate target.”

“And why would my son be a legitimate target?” Noah demanded, his voice rising.

“One of Derek Hale’s betas killed Lydia Martin in a misguided attempt to stop the kanima. It wasn’t in the heat of the moment – it was the execution of a defenseless girl by a werewolf. By our Code, when I get confirmation of which one it was from Scott, I will do what I must.”

“You will?”

“You may not know this, but the Argent family is matriarchal. I’m the eldest Argent female, so the decision on which werewolves to be killed is mine.” Victoria could have been talking about knitting patterns for all the concern in her voice.

Noah put his untouched coffee cup on the table. “That didn’t seem to concern Gerard.”

Now he had done it. Noah almost went for his revolver that he wasn’t wearing when he saw the look on Victoria Argent’s face. She looked like she was about ready to leap over the coffee table and kill him.
Her voice was ice cold. “My father-in-law forgot his place. He forgot the reasons we do this. I am sure that in his arrogance and selfishness, he believed he was perfectly justified in abandoning the Code. He damaged his family with his behavior and endangered a legacy of justice and service that was centuries old. You’ll find that there are no tears for Gerard Argent in this house. Indeed, I nearly sent Derek Hale a flower arrangement in thanks.”

Noah was taken aback. He had only seen such venomous hatred from common criminals.

“Forgive me, Noah.” And suddenly, the polite suburban housewife was back. “You may not have been taught the whole history of my family, but much of the trouble that has come to your city and to my family is due to my father-in-law’s behavior. It was he who inspired Kate to her outrageous acts of slaughter. It was he who inspired other hunters to take matters into their own hands and take my daughter away from me. Even now, your city suffers from his inability to follow the Code; it was he who burnt out Deucalion’s eyes, turning him into the Demon Wolf.”

Noah blinked; that was important information. “Have you ever wondered why your family causes so much pain?”

“No in the slightest, Noah. Because, along with that, I’ve seen the pain that werewolves create. I’ve watched individuals, families, towns torn apart by uncontrolled monsters running through the streets. I know how the Code came to be, and I intend to follow it.”

“As a sheriff, I’m not a fan of vigilantes.” Noah said. He wasn’t trying to be confrontational; he wanted to reach a common ground to protect his son.

“As a citizen, I’m not a fan of corrupt police officers.” It was obvious that Victoria did not have the same goals.

Noah frowned. “There is a difference between justice and the law.”

“You weren’t elected to determine what was just. You were elected to enforce the law. If someone else’s son had done what your son did to Scott and wasn’t a werewolf, would you have let him walk free? How many people have you brought to trial for the events that happened in your city?”

“I haven’t brought my son up on charges. I haven’t brought Derek Hale or any members of his pack up on charges. If I was forced to do so, I would have made sure that during the trial the circumstances of the accident would have been known – that a child wasn’t in control of himself and did something when he couldn’t tell between right and wrong.”

“Of course. That’s fair. You didn’t follow the law in the case of your own son, because you understand that some things operate outside the boundaries of the law. So do I. There is no central authority for werewolves, Noah. Each pack polices its own member and controls its own territory. They may act differently, but one thing remains true. If we tried to hold them accountable to human laws in human courts, it would be a bloodbath on both sides. Do you want that to happen?”

“No one wants that to happen.”

“You’re right. But someone must stand between the wolves and the flock. Someone must hold the wolves accountable when they kill innocents. If you think I might not understand all the possible ways I could abuse the power I claim, you’re wrong. You and I, we live with the consequences of the decisions that ours to make every day.”

“I have a badge.”

“I have a Code, and a centuries-old tradition. You want to protect your son, no more than I wanted to
protect Allison. I know it’s tempting to try to use your authority to prevent my family from following our calling, but you won’t succeed. Be content in the idea that if you can keep your son from killing humans, your son is safe from us.”

Noah ground his teeth. “Are you sure Scott understands that?”

“Of course. He argued for your son.”

Noah blinked. “What?”

“He wanted the chance to resolve the problem between him and your son without our interference.” Victoria frowned. “I was against it, honestly, because Scott is no match for your son as it stands now. He’s barely trained and physically unable to compete against a real werewolf. However, in the end, I relented, because it’s his choice.”

Noah filed that information away for future use. He hadn’t sensed any lie from Victoria. He may not be able to listen to heartbeats like a werewolf, but he was still a pretty damn good detective. The Argents didn’t know about Scott’s special ‘medication.’ “Why are you so involved in his life?”

“He loved my daughter, even for so brief a time. He’s one of the few ties I have to her. Even I have my weaknesses.”

“I see.” Noah only had one more question to ask. “Scott warned me that if I interfered ….”

“That we have sufficient evidence to ruin your career and make things very uncomfortable for your son? That’s not an exaggeration. You’ve done your best to protect your city without involving mundane law enforcement in supernatural matters, Noah. We hope you will continue to behave in that manner, even if the outcome is something you don’t like. Especially if the outcome is something you don’t like.” Victoria could make everything sound like an accusation, and she was very good at veiled threats. Like that one.

“Today, all I care about is that you aren’t coming after any children in my town. If you do, you understand that I don’t give a damn about your blackmail.” Noah promised right back.

“I wouldn’t expect any less of you. Right now, the Argent family has no interest in your city, other than to identify the werewolf that killed Lydia Martin and being ready should the war between the packs claim innocent lives. We hope that the latter doesn’t happen. The former is only a matter of time.”

“I was going to say something about us working together to prevent deaths before they happen, but then, that’s not really what you want, is it?” Noah chuckled grimly.

“Exactly, but not for the reason you might think. I don’t relish the idea of werewolves slaughtering each other; it’s simply none of my business. On the other hand, my sister-in-law and my father-in-law believed that werewolves should be prevented from ever taking lives, and it led them to slaughter and treachery.”

“Would you do me a favor then?” Noah had a plan. “Would you speak with Scott? I think he’s needlessly antagonizing the pack. You don’t want that.”

Victoria frowned in response. While she had stated time and again her commitment to the Code, Noah could tell that she divided the world into two sides. Scott was on one side, her side, and he was on the other.

“I think I could spare enough time to run up to Beacon Hills and take a look into things there,” said a
man’s voice from behind him. Noah nearly jumped. He had no idea when Chris Argent had arrived or how long he had been listening to the conversation. He said as much.

“Long enough.” The man offered him a fake smile. “Sheriff, if you wouldn’t mind, I’d like to speak to my wife alone? Victoria, could you join me in the kitchen?”

Victoria excused herself. Noah thought momentarily about sneaking closer to the door and eavesdropping, but he changed his mind. Neither of them seemed hostile to the idea of getting Scott to back off. If he could take this pressure off of Stiles, if he could let Derek and his pack focus on removing the dangers of the alpha pack, his son could be safe.

That was the only thing he cared about right now.

Noah patiently sat on the couch. The room, the house, which had so impressed him when he had entered, had taken on a different air now that he was used to it. It was beautiful, but lifeless. A mausoleum to a dead daughter.

If they hadn’t been such a threat to his son, he might have felt sorrier for these Argents. As much as the tragedies of Beacon Hills had robbed others of their futures, this couple had suffered as well. Noah had had the whole story from Stiles – to have a father so vile as to try to steal their daughter away and threaten his own son. Noah had experienced with terrible fathers.

Chris Argent came out of the kitchen. “I’m glad you came up here, sheriff. I’ve wanted an excuse to go and visit Scott, and you’ve given me one. Would it be too much to ask if you could give me a ride up to Beacon Hills?” He asked the question with such a sincere smile.

“I don’t see why not? I won’t be able to bring you back.”

“We have a vehicle up there at our warehouse I need to bring it back anyway. I’d considered it a favor.” Chris certainly sounded completely sincere.

So that was how the sheriff found himself driving Chris Argent back to Beacon Hills. They sat in silence for most of the trip. He was uncomfortable, but he felt like he had accomplished something.

It was a long drive and eventually he couldn’t bring himself to remain quiet. “Did you train Scott to be a hunter?”


“You think that’s why I did it?” Chris had a firm way of speaking that echoed Victoria. “I didn’t train him because I saw a possible hunter. I saw a child who needed to reclaim some part of his life. His mother couldn’t give what he needed …”

“Melissa’s a great woman. Why do you think she couldn’t?”

“Because she doesn’t know the truth. Scott didn’t want her to know the truth. I’m sure you understand why.” Chris said plainly. “Your friends with her aren’t you? Why didn’t you tell her?”

Noah snorted. “Because until a week ago, I thought Peter Hale had hurt Scott. Telling her about werewolves wouldn’t have made what was happening any easier.”
“That’s exactly what Scott thought. Melissa couldn’t help him without learning everything. His father was certainly not much help.”

“I could have told you that.” Noah shook his head.

Chris said quietly. “It would have been easier for him if you had known. He assumed you did, and you just didn’t care.”

Noah frowned at that. “So this is my fault?”

“It’s really no one’s fault, not even your son’s. I gave Scott a way to move on past languishing in a hospital bed. I gave him a way to transform what had happened to him into something positive. You might disapprove of hunting, but I gave him a way to be something else other than a victim.”

“I think he’s gone beyond your training, though. Did you know he tried to kill Deucalion?” Noah wasn’t going to tell the Argents everything, but he needed to see if he could catch them in a lie.

Chris examined Noah’s face, probably to see if he was lying as well. “That would be stupid. In his condition, he’d be no match for an omega, let alone an alpha of that caliber. I will have a talk with him.”

Noah kept driving for another forty-five minutes before speaking again. “I’m sorry for your daughter. I’ve had to consider the possibility of losing my son in the last months, and I don’t know how you did it.”

“I didn’t lose my daughter; she was taken from me.” Chris snapped back and then mastered himself. “We’ll survive. We always have. And I understand how much fear you must be in. Your son didn’t choose this, and now he has to live with it for the rest of his life. As do you.”

“It’s be easier if there weren’t a list of people threatening him.”

“The alpha pack is an anomaly. I know my wife made it seem like we weren’t concerned about it – she has to be like that. But we are concerned. It’s one of the reasons I helped Scott go back. He was supposed to watch for me, but he wasn’t supposed to get involved.”

The sheriff replied simply: “Teenagers will do what they want.” He kept the car pointed in the direction of Beacon Hills. As much as the topic of conversation was dark, he couldn’t help but feel better. He had actually accomplished something.
Jennifer Blake

Chapter Summary

Jennifer Blake is going to have what she wants, no matter what she has to do in order to get it.

It was nearly two in the morning. In the sky above the school, the waning gibbous moon hovered over the city, its power resonating with the currents that moved through the earth. If a person knew how to listen, they sang to each other.

If a person didn’t know how to listen, Beacon Hills High School was deadly quiet at night. After all the mysterious animal attacks in the last year, the school district had decided to rely solely on daytime janitors and private security doing spot checks after hours. All extra-curricular activities had to be finished by nine o’clock. That meant for most of the night the place was deserted.

Jennifer Blake knew how to listen. The school had been built on a strong junction of telluric currents. She had practiced hard enough so she could draw on them, enough to cover her face with a glamour. You could call it vanity, but the glamour made her feel … right. It made her feel like herself. On the few occasions when it would drop, it would send her into a downward spiral for days. She’d have to force herself to eat, to dress, to leave the house. She couldn’t afford that emotional indulgence.

It had become so important to her that she had trained herself to subconsciously maintain the glamour. Even when she slept, even if she went unconscious, the spell would not drop. Thankfully, this was a lot easier in Beacon Hills, where the earth sang.

Even so, she preferred to do her grading in the place she felt most safe – other than the Nemeton. Being alone in the middle of the night hadn’t hurt her yet; she believed she could handle minor threats. If things took a turn for the worse and the alpha pack discovered her identity, she would have to be a lot more careful.

The attention she paid to her grading was real. Even though Jennifer Blake was an alias, she wasn’t a complete fraud. As Julia Baccari, she had been a licensed teacher in the state of California. It hadn’t take much effort to transfer those credentials over to her new name. She was amazed that she was still any good at it; she was even more amazed that she still enjoyed it.

Once their tasks were over, maybe she would stay in Beacon Hills. All of the teachers and many of the students liked her. It was entirely possible that she could keep her job at the high school. She could simply become … a teacher. It was so very tempting. The supernatural world had given her much but it had also taken much as well.

Jennifer put those thoughts away and returned to grading the paper in front of her. It was by a student named Greenberg, and it was, simply put, the most boring paper she had ever read. It had zero original thought. This student was a living Xerox copier – he had taken her ideas from class, memorized them, and then reproduced them, supporting them with citations. His grammar and spelling were flawless, but that couldn’t help the paucity of the ideas showcased in it. There was no trace of the student’s personality in his writing; it was as if he didn’t exist.

Papers like this – students like this – drove her crazy. She wasn’t teaching mathematics or physics or
civics; she was teaching literature. Literature allowed your creativity and your soul to come forth. She didn’t want regurgitated facts or someone else’s cribbed opinions; she wanted her students to engage the material and come up with their own conclusions, guided by the standards of literature that she taught in class.

She paused with the red pen poised to write on the sheet. Yes, it was bland, but maybe she was just transferring her frustrations with her present situation to this paper. To her mind, things weren’t going particularly well with the plan. Jennifer hoped that when her visitors arrived, she could change that.

Almost as if on cue, Jennifer felt him enter the hallway. For as long as they were going to work together, she was always able to sense him, though the range of that depended on other factors – the time of day, the strength of the telluric currents in their vicinity, and their emotional states. They were linked by something more than common purpose, after all.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing?” Scott McCall demanded the moment he opened the door to the classroom. His eyes blazed with anger; she could feel the surge through their link.

“You are going to have to be more specific, Scott. Right now, I’m grading essays.” Jennifer wouldn’t allow herself to be intimidated by him, no matter how important he was to the plan. He could handle a little sarcasm, and if he was unhappy with her behavior, then he could make the effort to understand why she was dissatisfied with his. In other words, if she was unhappy with the situation, she was damn well going to make sure that he was unhappy with it as well.

Scott sighed and his demeanor shifted from anger to confusion; the teen was very uncomfortable with confrontations. She had always felt he wasn’t made for the life that had been thrust upon him, but then again, neither had she been ready. “You let Sydney talk about the Arthurian cycle forever! Stiles isn’t an idiot, you know!”

Jennifer sighed. “I think it would have been more suspicious if I had just cut off the discussion immediately. She talked for maybe four minutes, which is not … forever. Stop exaggerating. Besides, do you really think that Stiles Stilinski knows ancient and obscure Druidic rituals?”

“No, he doesn’t know them, but if he gets enough clues, he’ll know who to ask. You don’t think Deaton won’t be able to tell him and Derek everything?” Scott stepped forward and dropped his book bag to on side. Jennifer smirked back at him.

“And that makes a difference why? The outcome will be the same.” She asked insouciantly. “And if you’re really concerned about dropping clues, let’s talk about how your little display of temper definitely revealed the existence of your power to them already. If they see you as a threat, will it really matter to them how you became one? In the end, they have only a limited number of possible reactions to the truth.”

“You ever think that it may lead them back to you?” He was trying to be reasonable. “All three of us have to be careful if this is going to work. You still want it to work, don’t you?”

“Of course I want it to work.” She narrowed her eyes at the mention of their other partner, who should have been there by now. “And if it is going to work, werewolf hunter, you might have to kill a werewolf at some point. You’ve gone zero to two.”

“We don’t have to kill anyone. That’s never been part of the plan.”

“So you keep saying.” Jennifer shook her head. “But the pieces have begun to move on this board, and we’re no closer to the destruction of the Alpha Pack.”
“The whole point of my plan – our plan – is for us to do what they cannot bring themselves to do,” Scott scowled at her. “Find a way other than killing. We’ve already succeeded at doing that once. We undid months of work by Deucalion by helping Derek rescue Cora.”

“Months of work,” Jennifer repeated. “I keep forgetting how young you are. Months of work means nothing to the Demon Wolf. He’s been at this for over a decade.”

Jennifer stood up to emphasize her point; Scott meant well, but he didn’t really understand. “You haven’t seen Deucalion at his full power. I have. You got the drop on him once, but that only means it’s going to take a hell of lot more work to get the drop on him again. And you know as well as I do that we cannot risk a straight-up confrontation with the Alpha Pack the way we are. I don’t know why I let you talk me into this.”

“Because while you may not be afraid of the Alpha Pack, you are afraid of the day after they’re finished. You let us talk you into because when this is over, if we stick together and only if we don’t let our anger get the better of us, we’ll all be able to look at ourselves in the mirror.” Scott’s voice took on a pleading tone. “Your old plan was a terrible plan.”

“My old plan was much simpler, which is obviously what’s wrong with this plan. Too many things could go wrong, and it requires people to react exactly the way we expect them or need them to react. You’ve missed the irony that what got us into this mess in the first place were the people we loved not acting the way we thought they would.”

“Your old plan,” Scott stuttered in outrage, “required murdering fifteen innocent people!”

“Sacrifice is not murder,” Jennifer countered. The modern world had obscured the difference. “You will come to understand that in time, if you survive this. You’ll have to.”

“I understand that what we’re doing now, what we’re doing together, may not be as sure as the raw power you would have gotten from your sacrifice, but I think those fifteen people might appreciate the risk we’re taking instead.” McCall took a seat at the desk in frustration. “I don’t understand why you’re so angry now. You managed to balance the scales with Derek. It’s something you wanted to do.”

Jennifer had helped save Derek, yet she wasn’t sure that it was enough. She would never tell Scott this, but she believed she had to make sure Derek had the same chance that he had given her. Derek’s sacrifice of Paige had healed her when she was at the point of death, and she was going to make sure not only that the alpha had a chance survive this, but also he would have the opportunity to be happy. Honestly, there was a part of her that hoped he would be happy with her, but it wasn’t necessary for her to reach her goals.

The only way for Derek Hale to be safe and happy – the only way for anyone to be safe and happy – was the absolute destruction of the Alpha Pack. That required McCall to play his part. If McCall thought that she wanted the destruction of both packs, well, she didn’t need to dispel that delusion yet.

“I’m not angry because you took a shot at Deucalion and missed. It probably scared the shit out of him and that’s something I can totally get behind.” Jennifer walked around to the front of the desk and leaned up against it, invoking the teacher-student dynamic. “I’m concerned that when it comes down to it, you’re not going to be able to let anyone die.”

Scott blinked ones and then answered, defensively. “What makes you think that?”

Jennifer looked down at him. “We’re in a classroom, so I’m going to ask you to get out a piece of
paper and a pen. You’ve got some in your bag, so why don’t you do that now.”

Scott cocked his head to the side. He decided to play along.

“We’re going to do a creative writing exercise. Speed writing.”

“I’m not getting it.”

Jennifer smiled. “You will if you try. No one’s around; we’re perfectly safe. So, in the next ten minutes, write me a brief story about what you would do if you came across Stiles’ dead body after the alphas had killed him.”

Scott stared at her. A little triumphantly, Jennifer walked around the desk and sat down. She made a great show of picking up the pen and going back to grading her papers.

Minutes passed. She finished a rather good paper from a wonderful student named Danny Mahealani. If only every student was like him. She heard Scott crumple up the paper and toss it away.

Without looking up she began. “If I picked that piece of paper up and read it, it would be blank, wouldn’t it?”

Scott didn’t say anything.

“That you understand what they’ve done.” Jennifer began. “You have it etched into your flesh, just like me.”

“Every morning, before the spell kicks in, I feel it.” He bit his lip. “I know why they’re monsters. Not because they have claws and strength and healing and glowing eyes, but because they believe that those things make them the wolves, and that the rest of us are just sheep.”

Jennifer nodded. “They do more than believe, don’t they? We are sheep to some of them. Every alpha that follows Deucalion killed every member of their pack, human and werewolf. If an alpha refused to do it, they would eventually kill them. So much blood, for Deucalion’s twisted dream.”

“Derek and his pack will kill and maim out of fear.” Scott answered her. “Gerard may have deserved it, but who were they to determine whether Matt needed to die? Or Jackson? Or Lydia?”

“You don’t have to convince me.” Jennifer said. “I don’t doubt you know the danger they represent. You know that most of them – perhaps all of them – are going to have to die, but I certainly don’t think you have the will to make that happen, and I doubt you’ll have the will to let that happen.”

Scott stood up out of his chair. “I know you’re a lot older than me, but when did it become so easy for you to kill another person? When did the idea of snuffing out another person’s life become ... routine?”

Jennifer tossed her head. “When the person I pledged my service too left me for dead in a forest because she wanted out of her responsibilities. When someone you love does that to you, it changes the world – it cheapens the world. You figure out that most people don’t give a fuck about you, and you can’t help but start acting the same way. You should know what it feels like to be betrayed on a fundamental level. You’ll feel the same eventually.”

Scott didn’t answer her, but Jennifer knew that she was right. She could tell with the look passing over his face that he felt similar to him. Stiles’ actions still stung.
Jennifer watched him sink into himself as he stood in the darkened classroom. She had expressed her anger at him for his failure to do what was necessary. Now was the time to push him in another direction. “Scott what do you think destiny is?”

Scott got that puzzled look on his face. “I’m not sure …”

“Destiny is a form of energy, just like life is, and it obeys certain rules. It flows around us, channeled by the choices that people have made even as it limits the choices they will make. It doesn’t affect mundane humans as much as it does supernatural creatures and humans, like us, who interact with the supernatural. We three were destined to meet, and we were destined to work together.”

Scott raised an eyebrow. “That can’t be true. I don’t want it to be true. None of this had to happen.”

“You should want it to be true, Scott. It was destiny that saved both of us. It was destiny that I was close enough to the Nemeton to reach it before I ran out of strength; it was destiny that Derek killed that girl in the root cellar which give me the power to survive. It was destiny that the girl you loved found you before you could bleed out. When destiny moves like that, to save you, you gain a powerful responsibility.”

Scott listened carefully, head tilting slightly to one side. “I don’t get what you are saying. You’re saying we’re puppets?”

“Why did you come back to Beacon Hills? You know your mother would have moved away if you asked her to. You didn’t have to come back.”

“I came back because … I wanted to come back.” Scott shrugged helplessly. “I am not lying. This is my home. I would have come back even if I hadn’t met either of you.”

“But you did meet both of us. You made the choice to listen to us. You made the choice to undergo the ritual, didn’t you?” Jennifer pushed.

“What was I going to do? You told me what the Alpha Pack was and she told me what you were going to do and what they were going to do. A …” Scott hesitated. Jennifer understood that he been about to say something derogatory about himself. “Someone like me couldn’t do anything to stop it. I was in the right place at the right time.”

“Of course you were. It’s destiny.”

Scott narrowed his eyes and looked at her. She could see the wheels turning behind his eyes. “You’re saying that in the end, I was always going to do this?”

“Exactly. Because of who you are and what’s been done to you, you were never going to be able to avoid becoming exactly what you are now. Not because you didn’t have a choice, but because you were always going to make this choice.”

Scott grimaced.

“You could always walk out that door and leave Beacon Hills to the Alpha Pack. You could always let me do things the way I wanted to do them in the first place.” Jennifer argued.

“You know I couldn’t.” Scott said sharply. “I couldn’t let you or anyone kill all those people.”

“You prove my point for me.” She smiled. “You agreed to be my power source. I will use anything and everything - not only the power from the ritual but also what little training you received from the Argents as well as the insight I can gain from our friend - to stop the alphas. What I need you to do
now is realize a simple truth – when humans like us get involved with the supernatural, we have to stop playing by the rules made for humans who aren’t involved. We have to play by the rules of the world we are in.” Jennifer said this firmly. “You want to be involved, but you don’t want to kill, but that’s not possible.”

“So I should be like you? Willing to kill people to get what I want?”

Jennifer shook her head. He was still so young and couldn’t understand the truth of things. “What I want is justice. Is that so wrong? You offered me a different path, so you need to prove to me that you’re willing to make that plan work.”

“No, he doesn’t.”

Both of them looked up to see Marin Morrell enter the room. “Don’t worry. I wasn’t followed. I told Deucalion I was going to investigate something that happened at a confluence of telluric currents. Which is completely true.”

“Yes, it is.” Jennifer gestured to the Alpha Pack’s emissary. “Scott and I were having a difference of opinion. I don’t think he’ll be able to let anyone die.”

Scott opened his mouth, but Marin interrupted. “Of course he will.”

“You sound pretty confident.”

“Scott’s plan is sound because it’s insightful. He understands the nature of the people we are dealing with. And he’ll let people die, because as much as it will hurt him to see them die, he won’t act to prevent it.”

Scott turned to her. “Right now, you’re more confident in me than I am.”

Marin cocked her side to the head. “My brother’s told me all about you. Why do you think I agreed to work with you two? I understand Deucalion. I know that he’s going to do exactly what the plan requires him to do, because that what he does. Scott understands Derek Hale and his pack. He knows that they’re going to do exactly what the plan requires them to do, because that’s what they have done. You, Jennifer, are here to keep us from wavering. Your hatred will make you our guardian.”

“Your brother?” Jennifer narrowed her eyes.

“You’re … you’re Doc’s younger sister!” Scott sputtered. “He said he had one, but … I didn’t realize.”

Jennifer was a tiny bit peeved that Marin hadn’t informed her of her connection to the Hale Pack. It did, however, settle her nerves. “And what did Deaton tell you about Scott?”

“I’m right here, Ms. Blake.”

“My brother told me that Scott has the strength of will to possess power without abusing it. He would never use that power to coerce another person unless he had no choice. When it comes down to it, the packs will destroy themselves because of their own internal flaws, and Scott will only have to make the choice to stand aside.” Marin looked at Scott. “No matter how much it hurts him.”

Scott frowned. It looked like he wanted to protest, but he didn’t. “I need to get home.”

“Before you leave, Scott, there’s another reason I came here tonight.” Marin said placidly.
“Deucalion has decided to up the ante. One of Derek’s betas is going to be targeted.”

Scott and Jennifer were suddenly interested. “Are we going to interfere?” Jennifer demanded.

Scott said nothing.

“No. The plan is to push both packs into a conflict neither can win. Derek won’t allow one of his betas to die unavenged. So we will do nothing.”

“Good night.” Scott snatched up his bag and left, leaving the two women looking after him.

“He’s too soft, Marin. He might be able to let Ennis or Deucalion die, but what will he do when it’s Isaac’s turn? Or especially when it’s Stiles’ turn? He doesn’t hate them enough.”

“I think you underestimate his resolve. He’ll destroy himself trying to do the right thing, and the right thing is to bring murderers to justice and keep them from killing others. Which is exactly what is going to happen if we succeed.”

“We’ll see.” Jennifer could do nothing more to wait. Marin told her a few more interesting bits of information, but nothing she didn’t know and then she, too, left.

Jennifer to herself smiled after she was alone. She believed she had got her point across, but she wasn’t truly worried if she hadn’t. If Scott couldn’t do what was necessary, she’d make him do it. It wasn’t like he didn’t have every reason to do what she wanted and she could be very persuasive when she needed to be.

She believed every word she had just said to her co-conspirators. She felt it in her bones that she was alive in order to stop the Alpha Pack from hurting anyone else. But even though that was her destiny, she understood that there were things that happened to people that were not destiny. There were things that people could do only for themselves.

She sat back down at her desk and contemplated the phone before her. She had Derek’s number. She could call him; she had a perfect reason to call him. She had ‘happened’ to be there outside of the bank when he had rescued his sister. She could call him, inquire how he and his sister were doing, and ask, oh so innocently, for him to meet her at a coffee shop – “just to talk.”

Jennifer shook her head. She should wait. Impatience would earn her nothing. If they started seeing each other, and he discovered her relationship to McCall or Paige, it would look like she was using him. That would never do.

But that didn’t mean she couldn’t keep an eye on him. She knew that her initial feelings for Derek Hale had been residual echoes of Paige’s, but she was more confident that her feelings for him now – while nowhere near love – were hers and hers alone. He could understand her, and she could understand him. Both of them had been torn apart by those who valued power over love.

Also, he was pretty damn easy on the eyes. She’d have to be blind not to see that.

She day-dreamed at her desk as night came to the school. She could imagine a time after the alpha pack had been destroyed and justice had been served. She would be a teacher and he would be the local alpha, and she would brazenly ask him out on a date and he would blush and say yes and then things would go on from there. They’d go to movies and dinner and dancing and ice skating and they’d celebrate Yule together. It would be wonderful. It would be peaceful. It would be normal.

She laughed at herself. She knew what she was thinking were the fantasies of a teenage boy like Scott who didn’t know any better. She’d never be normal again; the best she could hope for is for
someone just as terribly damaged as she had been. Which was also Derek Hale.

The world was cold and cruel. Happiness came only when you had the power to win it for yourself and the power to defend it when you had it. Those were the lessons she had learned; the lessons Kali had taught her.

She turned back to the stack of papers on her desk. Everyone was going to learn that lesson.
Ethan Steiner

Chapter Summary

Ethan doesn't want to do this anymore, but it seems he doesn't have any choice.

“What is wrong with you?” Aiden snagged Ethan by the sleeve and pulled him to the side before they entered Harris’ fourth-period class.

“What’s wrong with wanting something more than what I have now?” Ethan answered querulously.

“Nothing.” Ethan’s answered rang hollow to even his own ears.

Aiden stared at him. He twisted his neck slowly until it cracked.

“Nothing, all right? We’ve got to get to class.” Ethan broke out of his brother’s grip and walked into the classroom. He sat down next to Sydney in the last row. In order to ignore his brother, he focused on the student he had met the other day in the third row. Danny glanced back and smile bashfully at him.

Ethan didn’t smile back. His stomach began to hurt instead.

Aiden followed him into class and stood looming over him from behind. He turned to Sydney, they locked eyes and the girl quickly picked up her books and moved to a different seat in a different row. His brother sat down and spoke so quietly that no one else in the room could hear him unless they, too, had supernatural hearing.

“You’re having second thoughts.”

Ethan didn’t answer, instead getting out his chemistry book and looking at his notes.

“Aren’t you?”

“What’s wrong with it is that you won’t have more than you have now. You’ll have less. We’ll have less. We have power, money, and security.” Aiden hissed. “What are you going to do, go back to high school so you can screw that stud over there? You can do that without giving up what we have, and you don’t have to go back to high school, which you hated, by the way.”

“Security?”

“Yeah. You remember when we were omegas? I sure do.”

Ethan tried to focus on Mr. Harris’ lecture about electrical currents, but he couldn’t avoid his brother’s intense stare. “You want to talk now?”

Aiden shrugged. “It’s better than talking in front of the others.”

“You know what they told us to do today? Of course you did, you were there. And it doesn’t bother you?”

“Nope.” Aiden said smugly.
“He’s four years younger than us!” Ethan’s voice raised above the sub-vocal level.

Mr. Harris cleared his throat. “Mr. Steiner, are you and your brother having a problem that precludes you from paying attention?”

Aiden looked up. Visible only to Mr. Harris and his brother, the twin flashed red eyes and fangs. “No, sir.”

Mr. Harris paled and went back to his lesson.

“See, Ethan, I told you he knew something.”

Ethan bent over his book. He began taking notes about the lecture focusing on that and ignoring the glares Aiden sent his way. He pushed the pencil so hard into the paper he tore it.

“You think this makes us the bad guys?” Aiden finally snarled under his breath.

“I think we’ve killed enough people not to be the good guys.”

Aiden pulled out his own pencil and slapped his notebook down on the table between them. “I know you hate math, but I like math. Pay attention.”

Ethan nodded.

“There were twelve people in Deucalion’s pack when he was blinded. Three were killed by Gerard. Marin survived.” Aiden wrote down nine. “There were nine people in Kali’s pack.” Aiden wrote down eight. “There were seven people in Ennis’ pack. Hunters killed one.” Aiden wrote down five. “There were eight people in our pack, not counting us. Burt killed our mother. We killed the rest.”

The number seven joined the rest.

Ethan closed his eyes. He can still remember the night when Burt, their alpha, killed their mother in front of them in a last-ditch effort to save his own life. It didn’t work. He opened them again.

“Two packs refused to join us completely. We didn’t kill their Emissaries, so that’s …” Aiden tapped the pencil on the table. “Sixteen. You add those up and how many is it?”

Ethan chuffed. “Forty-three.”

“Forty-three people in eight years. Wow-wee, that’s a lot of corpses.” Aiden smirked.

Ethan wanted to acknowledge that it was a lot of corpses, corpses that haunted his dreams, and maybe he didn’t want to add any more to their number. But he didn’t.

“Now, let’s talk about the Hale Pack. From January to mid-April of 2011, how many people did they kill?” Aiden began writing down names, one after another. Ethan already knew those names. He had read the reports that Deucalion had put together on everyone of significance to their targets. Deucalion had a fetish for preparation. He liked to know everything about everyone, and he made them learn it as well. “The Hale Pack is responsible for twenty-one deaths in three and a half-months.”

“Nine of those were killed by a kanima under the control of Matt Daehler, who was not in the Hale Pack. And you shouldn’t count him at all, since he was killed by Gerard Argent.”

“None of those deaths would have happened if Derek Hale hadn’t bit Jackson Whittemore and then abandoned him.” Aiden pointed out, seriously. “And that old bastard only killed Daehler to take
control of the kanima itself. But sure, let’s be conservative. We take that out Daehler and his victims, that’s still eleven. To be more generous, let’s give them the whole year. At this rate, if they had been doing this for eight years, their total would be eight times eleven -- eighty-eight -- which is over twice the number our pack’s killed in the same period of time.”

“Seriously? Those numbers prove nothing.” Even if they were hard to argue with.

“I’m not done, yet. Of the forty-three people we killed, three of them were Emissaries, and therefore, human. Of the twenty-one people that the Hale Pack is responsible for, eighteen were human, most unaware of the supernatural and therefore defenseless.”

Ethan looked away. “Still meaningless.”

“It’s not meaningless. The Hale Pack isn’t any better than we are.” Aiden sneered. “They’re just weaker.”

Ethan managed to ignore Aiden for the rest of the class. He could pretend, at least for a little while, that today wasn’t the day. But the bell rang, and all daydreams ended.

As he left the room, he saw Aiden slide his phone back into his pocket after sending a text. Aiden grabbed his arm. “Come on. Let me show you.”

They headed into the cafeteria, Ethan following his brother, wondering exactly how Aiden intended to show him. The mass of students in there screamed childish drama, people judging how much they were valued by what table they sat at. Growing up as the lowest members of a werewolf pack, Ethan had had little patience for this type of bullshit the few times they were allowed to go to school.

After grabbing the frankly unappetizing school lunch, the twins headed to sit down. Aiden steered them into sitting directly across from Stiles and Isaac. The two betas eyes watched them in growing disbelief.

“Uhm.” Stiles began, less eloquent than usual. “You can’t sit here.”

Aiden made a great show of looking to the left and to the right. “I don’t see anyone else sitting here.”

Ethan sighed and put his tray down on the table.


“Come on, Isaac.” Stiles stood up. “We’ll go eat somewhere else.”

“No.” Isaac didn’t move.

“That’s the spirit,” Aiden goaded.

Ethan glanced over at his brother and rolled his eyes. “This is what you wanted to show me? That you’ve watched too many after-school specials about bullies?”

Stiles looked down at Isaac and nudged him with his foot, but Isaac didn’t budge.

“No. I was just trying to figure out how big of a coward Isaac here is.” Aiden popped one of his French fries into his mouth. “We know by now that he can’t really take anyone if he goes head-to-head, but he can glare from the sidelines pretty well. Can’t you?”

Ethan turned away in disgust. His brother always had a cruel streak, and now it was on fully display. Everyone else in the lunchroom was ignoring them, mostly because their voices were low yet
probably also because they knew how to keep their heads down when things got tense. The only student staring at them was Scott McCall, sitting by himself at a table near the window.

“Isaac is not a coward.” Stiles said, slamming his tray down and retaking his seat in solidarity.

Aiden’s voice dropped so that only the werewolves could hear him. “He’s not? That’s not what we were told. Of all Derek’s betas, I was worried the most about him, until I found out the real reasons he has a killer’s eyes.”

“Shut up.” Isaac’s growl had to have been heard by the other students. Focusing on some of them sitting at nearby tables, Ethan heard their heart rates increase, but they still feigned ignorance.

Just like Mr. Harris, they knew how to survive in Beacon Hills.

Aiden’s voice was still in the sub-vocal range. “He killed a defenseless girl, shredded her like moist tissue paper. I wonder if he felt like a big, bad monster when you decided to do it. But, did you cry afterwards? Did you cry after your daddy died?”

Stiles eyes widened; it would have been comical, if the situation wasn’t so dire. He opened his mouth and spat venom. “Look, monobrow, you don’t know a single thing about what happened here.”

“What else do I need to know? You see, my brother here was –“

“Aiden, stop.”

“It’s true. He was having second thoughts and I wanted to prove to him he had nothing to worry about. He shouldn’t be ashamed of gutting your mongrel pack; you’ve got as much blood on your hands as we do.”

“We are …” Isaac growled again. “Nothing like you.”

“That’s right.” Aiden leaned over the table. “When we come to kill someone, we look them in the eyes.”

Ethan grabbed Aiden by the shoulder and pulled him back down. “Are you trying to start a fight in the middle of the cafeteria?”

Ethan realized what Aiden’s plan was. He let go. He wished, silently, that the Hale wolves wouldn’t take the bait.

“I’m not trying to start a fight. I’ve got nothing to worry about, it’s broad daylight, and I’m not helpless. That’s not the way they do things here. Lahey, at least, needs to make sure they don’t see him coming.”

Aiden stood up, slowly, deliberately, provocatively, keeping his eyes fixed on Isaac. Isaac went to stand up but Stiles put a hand on his shoulder.

“Come on, dude. Are you going to fall for that?”

Isaac shrugged the hand off, watching Aiden as he stalked away. Ethan picked at his lunch.

“Yeah, Stiles. I’m going to fall for that.” Isaac stood up and headed for the door.

Stiles put his face in both hands. “Give me strength.” He moved to get up and follow his pack mate.

Ethan hesitated for a split second. If it had been anyone else in his pack, he would have stalled until it
“That’s not what’s going to happen. You don’t want me to let you go, because if I do, you’ll rush after both of them, and then I’ll rush after you.”

Stiles, nostrils flared, but then he moved on anger and into trying to puzzle out what was happening.

“Two alphas against two betas – especially when those two alphas have been fighting together for years? It’s not fair. Isaac has much better odds on his own.”

None of this was a lie. It just wasn’t the whole truth.

Stiles yanked at his arm, but he wasn’t strong enough. He could probably get free – if he started a fight in the middle of the cafeteria and was willing to expose werewolves to the whole school with incontrovertible proof.

Stiles wasn’t stupid.

Ethan kept a hold of the hand. “You’ve heard about what my brother and I can do, right?”

“I’ve heard rumors.”

“It’s true. When we were young ome-betas, we learned that we could merge together.”

Stiles’ eyes glittered with malice. “Gross.”

“It had its perks, but we didn’t know how to control it until Deucalion showed us. When we do it now – now that we’re both alphas—“

“Which you got by killing your own alpha.”

“He was a monster. He was a brutal thug. He beat our father to death in front of us. He murdered our mother out of spite. He killed when he wanted and tore apart anyone who objected. Hate me and my brother all you want, but don’t hate us for that.”

Stiles’ fury softened a little bit.

“You haven’t seen us when we fight together, and you don’t want to. As long as the fight is between Isaac and Aiden, he has a chance to win.”

“What’s it like?” Stiles said suddenly, his curiosity overwhelming him.

“We’re better together. It’s not just strength. Aiden’s more focused than I am. He’s better at
analyzing things and drawing conclusions. I’m a better tracker; I’m better figuring out people. The only person who can really stop us in that form is Deucalion.”

“Then why not let me go? We can catch up and you can kick both our asses!” Stiles said brightly. It was clear he didn’t understand what was going on.

“They don’t want you interfering.” Scott McCall sat down at the table next to him. He sat on Ethan’s the right side, the same side as the arm holding Stiles’ wrist.

Ethan stared at the boy. Of course, he knew what the Alpha Pack had discovered about all of Derek Hale’s betas, so he had been told the story of how Stiles had shredded his best friend. Deucalion was confident that while the Argents had had a hand in Scott’s rehabilitation, he’d be serving mostly as a spy. The other alphas had been told to simply keep their actions concealed from him.

Stiles, on the other hand, stared at him in bafflement. He tried to jerk his arm away from Ethan once again. He wasn’t ever going to be strong enough.

“Interfering in what?”

Scott looked over at Stiles and shook his head. “They’re killing Isaac right now.”

“You don’t know that.” Stiles shot back.

“They provoked both of you.” Scott took a sip on his drink. “I watched them sit here. I know your angry face, Stiles, and Isaac isn’t very subtle. When Aiden left, I watched Isaac chase after him, but Ethan stopped you. Why’d you stop him, Ethan?”

Ethan spoke without turning his head. “Why don’t you mind your own business?”

Stiles looked at Scott, his face showing suspicion. “Apparently, Ethan says they wanted a fair fight.”

“You believe that?” Scott’s face was solemn and serious. “If they wanted a fair fight, why would a pack of alphas target Derek’s pack? Four of his five betas have just now been werewolves for a full year. No. They separated you two, because they only want to kill one of you.”

Ethan couldn’t do anything to Scott without reaching over with his other hand. His eyes went to the other tables; no one seemed to hear his words for now, yet. To shut Scott up he’d have to release Stiles.


“No one.” Ethan answered. It was probably Ennis though.

“You’re lying.” Stiles tried to stand once more, and Ethan squeezed so hard that he heard a bone crack.

“You’re really good at puzzles, Stiles, but you’re no good at people,” Scott took another sip of his pop. “They want Derek to kill you five. How are they going to do that?”

Stiles eyes twitched. He would heal, but fractures were still painful. “Derek would never do that.”

“He might, especially if he thinks one or all of you have been convinced to kill him. Imagine it. You, Boyd and Erica find Isaac’s horribly mutilated corpse. Deucalion makes it clear that as long as he still has a chance to get a Hale alpha, he’s going to keep doing things like this until Derek decides to join him. What possible solution could Derek fear might happen?”
Ethan felt that this conversation had happened before. About a different topic, he was sure, but it had the same feel as the conversations he and his brothers had had before they became important.

Stiles looked down at the table top and then up, and there were tears at the corner of his eyes. “That we’ll kill him to save ourselves.”

“He probably wouldn’t care if you tried to kill him,” Scott observed, “but to be truly safe, you three would have to kill Cora as well. So, in the end, he’d have to make a choice: pack … or family.”

Stiles was very quick. He nodded, agreeing, to his former friend’s logic. “So what are you going to do about it?”

Ethan wondered. “Me?”

Scott had the same confusion. “Me?”

“Yes, you, Scott. Or is this what you came back for? To see me and my friends …” Stiles let the word hang. “… get murdered by people more powerful than us.”

“No.” Scott faltered from his confident tone. “I don’t want that. But it’s not what I want that matters.”

“What does matter?”

“What you choose, Stiles.”

Ethan snorted. “I think you’re both forgetting the elephant in the room. It’s not either of you making the decisions. Deucalion will get what he wants, and I haven’t seen anything here that can stop him.”

“We’ll see about that.” Stiles promised, darkly.

“Yes.” Scott added. “Let’s.” He dropped his hand below the table, there was an audible snick, and before anyone could react, Ethan felt the switchblade puncture the meaty-part of his thigh.

“Those are my good pants.” The blade wasn’t in deep. Ethan didn’t worry about it.

“Wait for it,” Scott added.

Soon enough, a burning sensation began to spread. “What did you do?”

“The blade was dipped in wolf’s bane,” Scott stated quietly so only the werewolves could hear him. With his other hand he reached over the table and held another one up so Stiles could see this. “So is this one. Maybe enough to even the odds between a beta and an alpha.”

The fact that he had underestimated McCall hit Ethan square upside the head. “I’m not letting go.”

“You know, I wanted to be a veterinarian, so I learned a little bit about anatomy. Somewhere near where I stuck my poisoned knife is the Great Saphenous Vein. Cutting it wouldn’t be as spectacularly bloody as an artery, but it does go straight to the heart. So you be a good boy and let Stiles go.”

Stiles was looking at the offered knife. “You want me to use this?”

Scott hesitated. “No. I want you to defend Isaac. That’s all.” He took a deep breath. “Okay, Ethan, on the count of three, let go. One. Two. Three.”
Many things happened at once. Ethan did indeed let go, snarled, and shifted his hand down to his thigh. He expected to rip the knife out with easy – Scott was human, after all, and a crippled human at that. But he met surprising resistance.

Stiles grabbed the other switchblade and sprinted out of the cafeteria, leaving his food and his book bag behind.

“Ah. Don’t move. I don’t want to actually hurt you anymore than I have to.”


“No.” Scott looked him straight in the eyes. “Not until your brother gets here.”

“How do you know about that?”

Scott shrugged.

Ethan shifted uncomfortably, but the knife’s poison was doing its trick. “Why are you helping them?”

“I’m not.”

“From where I’m sitting here, stabbed in the leg, it certainly looks like you’re helping them.”

Scott glanced to where Stiles sat. “You understand that Isaac is probably already dead.”

Ethan glanced at the clock. “Yeah.”

“So what do you think Stiles is going to do about that?”

“There’s nothing he can do.”

“He can seek revenge.”

“Against Ennis and Aiden?” Ethan shook his head. “Poisoned knife or no, he can’t win.”

Scott kept his grip on his own knife firm. “Aiden won’t be there; he’ll be coming for you. Stiles will find Isaac, maybe dead, maybe dying. What do you think he will do?”

“I don’t know. He’s your best friend.”

“He was my best friend. Now he’s a werewolf. Given what you are and what you know, what will he do?”

Ethan sighed. “Revenge.”

“Exactly.” Scott pulled the knife out. “He’ll go for the kill. Because in the end, that’s what you do isn’t it?”

Ethan watched Scott as he folded the knife away.

“We thought you weren’t going to be a threat.”

“I’m not a threat,” Scott promised. “I’m not killing anyone. You have plenty of time to get the antidote.”

Ethan glanced down at the wound in his leg. It was closing but it was still far more painful than the
wound should have been. He looked up. “Why do you think I won’t kill you for this?”

“I don’t. I assume that any werewolf could kill me at any time. That’s the only thing any of you seem to care about – how much blood you can get on your hands.” Scott shook his head as he zipped up his bag.

Ethan grunted. What was he going to say? Aiden had already done the math.

Speaking of which, Aiden finally reappeared in the lunch room. He rushed over to his brother, and Ethan shook his head. “I’ll explain later. Just get me out of here.”

The twins managed to look moderately normal, walking slowly out of the lunchroom. Ethan kept most of the students, he hoped, from seeing the slight bloodstains on his leg. As they walked down the hallway and out of the school, Ethan filled his older brother in on what had happened.

~*~

Stiles stumbled back towards the school. Blood covered his hands. The world was louder; he had had to become used to his increased senses. He had had to practice so he could operate form day to day. Now they had been jacked up again.

He stopped, the school was in sight. He couldn’t go there, he realized, slowly, through the fog of his mind. There would be too many questions, and he had to … he had to talk to his dad. He had to talk to Derek. They could fix this. They could fix everything.

Stiles headed directly to his jeep. He’d go to the loft, talk to Derek. Tell him … tell him about …


“He’s dead, isn’t he?”

Scott McCall stood by his jeep, Stiles’ backpack slung across his shoulders, arms crossed.

Stiles sniffed. “Yeah.”

His former best friend nodded. “And you avenged him.” The words were full of contempt.

“What was I supposed to do?” Stiles snarled. He felt the power surge through his body, and he felt the anger that came with it rear back and threaten to tear Scott apart. “Let them get away with it?”

“You’re not supposed to do this.” Scott shook his head. “None of you are. Do you think Isaac cares now?”

“Go to hell, Scott.”

Scott opened his mouth but he didn’t answer. “You know what this means, don’t you? The sides are more even. That means things are going to get even more dangerous.”

Stiles went to the Jeep pulled open the door. He turned and flashed his eyes at Scott.

“Congratulations, Stiles. You’re the alpha now.”
Chris Argent

Chapter Summary

Scott’s new mentor makes him deal with his old mentor.

Chapter Notes

This chapter has violent imagery that may be disturbing.

Chris Argent had not yet reached out to one of the nearby trees to steady himself, but his right knee still ached. It always did when rain was threatening ever since he had hyperextended it when running from a pack in Idaho. He glanced around him, checking the forest for anyone approach this glade. He didn’t want anyone else to witness this horrific scene.

He was a werewolf hunter. He had seen his fair share of victims in his life. There had been victims of unhinged omegas. There had been victims of murderous alphas. There had been victims of prejudiced hunters who had ignored the Code. There had been his own victims.

He had seen far more death than the average human being. After a while, he had gotten used to it, just as homicide detectives and soldiers did. He hoped he it was because he was capable of compartmentalizing his emotions in order to do what had to be done and not because he simply didn’t care anymore. He hoped he would never stop caring, but there was another danger that he began to face every day.

He was growing tired of death.

The boy was only seventeen. The wreck of his body lay tossed aside like spoiled meat on the forest floor, partly covered by a few ferns. From his injuries and the tracks that Chris could read, he had been lured here and then beat to death. Chris shuddered at the strength, the focus, the depth of cruelty required for a werewolf, even a roided-up alpha, to beat another werewolf to death with his fists. Werewolves healed far quicker than humans, yet their bodies could be taxed beyond endurance.

Chris recognized the victim, even in this state. Isaac Lahey had been quite handsome, though no one would be able to tell that after this brutality. He was Derek Hale’s second bitten beta, and the only beta that Chris knew of who possessed blue eyes. The hunter tilted his head to the side, filled with regret. If Chris had gotten to him, the teenager wouldn’t have suffered as much as he obviously had.

There had been considerable debate between himself and Victoria over the boy’s fate. Isaac had, after all, murdered Lydia Martin in a misguided attempt to stop the kanima. Victoria had been adamant that since Isaac had killed an innocent human being, he therefore needed to be hunted by the Code. Chris had argued that he was a child manipulated by Derek Hale, and that holding him responsible for fulfilling Derek’s orders was not right. After Chris had suggested that it was impossible for their family to be objective in this case, he had spent many nights sleeping on the couch.
The other body was Ennis Clark. This one engendered no remorse in Argent. Ennis Clark had slowly evolved from a hot-headed and territorial alpha into a brutal enforcer who glori ed in Deucalion’s mission of destruction and reformation-by-force. It would have been better if Chris had gotten to him first, but it was a moot point now.

What was more disturbing was the knife protruding out of the man’s chest. It was one of his. He could recognize it by the Fleur de Lis engraved on the hilt. He also recognized it as one he had given Scott McCall.

That didn’t make any sense. Chris and Victoria had supervised Scott’s entire hospital stay and almost all of his rehabilitation. The boy should barely have the arm strength to plunge a knife into a watermelon, let alone plunge a hunting dagger into the heart of an alpha enhanced by Deucalion’s cannibalistic rituals.

Chris carefully made his way to the body. He had to retrieve the weapon before the police arrived, if they were going to arrive, or before either of the packs arrived. The last thing he wanted was to have his family drawn into another war, especially one between the Hale Pack and Deucalion’s Alpha Pack.

With a gloved hand, he pulled the knife free. He was being so careful to leave as little trace of his passing as possible that he almost missed the movement in the woods. Someone else was approaching the murder scene, and they were moving stealthily. It could be any number of people that he did not wish to be exposed to, so he concealed himself behind the tree. In the distance, he could hear the sound of students. School was out, but there were plenty of activities that kept students at the school. The person approaching could be one of them or it could be a member of either pack, in which case he would have to move quickly before his scent gave him away.

The figure entered the clearing and stopped dead in his tracks at the sight of the carnage. Scott took a deep breath, shuddering, as he looked down at the corpses. Chris stepped out from behind the tree; this was the person he had driven all this way to see. “Scott.”

“Mr. Argent.” Scott jerked as he was startled, pulling his stare away from the bodies of Isaac and Ennis. “What are you doing here?”

“I came to see you.” Chris kept his voice steady. “I heard some things that have me worried.”

Scott shrugged. “I didn’t want you to worry about me. That’s why I didn’t tell you what was going on.” The boy’s eyes returned to Isaac’s corpse. He blinked twice and then rubbed at his eyes. Scott’s jaw tightened and he turned to Ennis’ corpse, searching it.

“Looking for this?” Chris held up the knife.

“Yeah. Don’t worry. I wouldn’t have let anyone find it.” Scott’s eyes narrowed. “How did you know about … this?”

“I didn’t. I checked out the Hale House, and then I was crossing through the Preserve to catch you when school was let out.” Argent waved the blade at Scott again. “I gave this knife to you to protect yourself, not to hunt werewolves.”

Scott looked up at him. “I didn’t.”

Chris took an angry step forward. “Don’t lie to me. This didn’t find its way into an alpha’s chest by itself.”

“I … I lent it to Stiles.”
“Why?” The older hunter narrowed his eyes. “It’s a pretty odd thing for you to do, to lend a poisoned knife to the werewolf you hate.”

Scott’s mouth fell open. “I don’t … I don’t hate Stiles.”

“Well you’ve convinced everyone in Beacon Hills, including his father, that you do. So much so that the sheriff paid Victoria and I a visit.”

Scott bit his lip and then turned away angrily. “I gave it to Stiles because he was going after Ennis, and this evened the odds. Stiles won by the way. He’s an alpha now.”

The hunter sighed. “Well, that’s fantastic.”

Scott nodded still not looking at him.

“I was being sarcastic. A brand new alpha frequently destabilizes a situation, which is why?”

“When hunting entire packs, you kill the alpha last.” Scott recited.

Chris didn’t need to explain his worry with the emergence of a seventeen-year-old alpha? Especially one with noted control issues. Chris put a pin in it, as it was a worry for another day. He was here to talk to Scott. “Did you lend someone an assault rifle? One that you borrowed from our supply cache without asking?”

“No. That was me.” Scott hesitated, sounding contrite, but then he plowed on. “I helped rescue a kidnap victim. Isn’t that a good thing?”

“You helped rescue Cora Hale from the Alpha Pack. You’ve attacked werewolves. You’ve threatened them.”

“I’ve defended myself.”

“Scott, you can’t walk into the enemy camp, flash your gun, and then say I was defending myself when they attack you.” Chris walked over to Scott and grabbed him by the shoulder. “I didn’t teach you so you could go off seeking revenge.”

“Revenge.” Scott shrugged the older man’s hand off his shoulder. “You think I’m after revenge.”

Chris grabbed his shoulder again and pulled, but Scott was stronger than he remembered. He tugged once and then Scott relented and allowed the hunter to direct his gaze.

“Look at him.” He pointed at Isaac’s body.

“I see him.” Scott’s voice lost its combative nature and dropped to a whisper.

“He’s your age. He was in your class at school. He was on the same lacrosse team you played on. Now he’s dead.”

Scott yanked out of his grip and started walking away. “Well, that’s his fault.”

“It’s his fault?”

“No one forced him to join the Hale Pack. No one forced him to take the Bite and become a killer.” Scott was moving away, but it wasn’t simply to end the conversation. Lingering here longer was foolish.

Chris followed him up. The words he was going to speak next felt a little surreal. “It’s more
complicated than that, and you know it. He was recruited by Hale because he was being abused by his father. He was vulnerable and Derek took advantage of that.”

“A father who just happened to be killed by another one of Hale’s bites. Convenient how that turned out.” Scott was moving quickly through the forest, just as Chris had taught him.

“You’re oversimplifying and that’s dangerous.”

Scott turned to him. “Yeah. I am. It’s been simple for me ever since I saw Lydia Martin’s autopsy photos.”

“How …” Chris bit his lips. “Victoria.”

“Yeah. Your wife thought I should know the type of people that Stiles chose to hang around. The first thing that Lahey did was clap his hand over her mouth so Lydia couldn’t scream. He used so much strength that she had already started to show bruises before she died. Then he grabbed her by the arm and pulled her into the school’s boiler room.”

Scott looked at him, fiercely, eyes blazing. Then he turned and walked along the path that lead into the Preserve. Chris followed.

“I can only imagine it. The fear. The dark. Did she think Peter had come back? He dragged her down those steps and into the boiler room. He didn’t wait long though. The moment he thought that he wouldn’t be discovered, he slashed his claws across her throat, like this.” Scott mimicked it on his own body.

“I saw the pictures.”

“Then you know he fucked it up. This was his first kill after all. The cuts weren’t deep enough to cause immediate unconsciousness, so, in her panic, she tried to fight. And that’s where your innocent victim lost control. I never heard, did they ever find her left eye?”

Chris crossed his arms. “Scott, stop. I’ve seen the results of a werewolf frenzy before. Far more often than you have.”

“I guess that’s the problem then, isn’t it, Mr. Argent. This is old news to you. But I remember Lydia Martin. She didn’t give Stiles or me the time of day. She ruled the school. Stiles said she was secretly smart, but all I ever saw her do was cling to Jackson’s arm and destroy anyone who threatened her position. Neither intelligence nor popularity did much against a werewolf, did it?”

“I’ve heard stories about victims like her for years. I know that she didn’t deserve what happened to her. But neither did Isaac.”

“He didn’t?” Scott spat. “He tore her apart not only because Derek Hale told him to do it, but because he hated her. I don’t care if his dad beat him and locked him in a freezer. He doesn’t get to kill other people to make himself feel better about that.”

“You said this wasn’t about revenge.”

“Because it’s not. Revenge would be me dosing Stiles so full of wolf’s bane that he can’t move, taking him to an abandoned building, and peeling his back with knives. Revenge would be me putting a bullet right between Derek Hale’s eyes.”

Chris Argent snapped. “Stop. I’m not here for your justification. I’m here to find out the truth. What are you doing?”
“I’m letting nature take its course. I’m letting the monsters kill each other.”

“Letting?”

Scott shrugged. “Encouraging. But I’m not forcing anyone to do anything.”

“No, you’re trying to manipulate the situation to a certain outcome, and all that is going to do is get someone hurt.” They had reached the road. Chris could see his Tahoe. “You don’t have the experience or power to pull it off.”

Scott shrugged.

“That leads to my next questions. How are you moving? Where’s your asthma?”

“I’m not going to tell you that.”

Chris Argent could move fast when he wanted to, and while he had taught Scott a lot, he hadn’t taught him everything. In a moment, he had pushed Scott up against the tree, his forearm pushing on Scott’s chest and his other hand grabbing him by the chin. “Try again.”

“Or you’ll what?”

He didn’t have anything to say. Scott slowly pushed himself free.

“You have a lot of guilt over what your sister did and what your father did. I get that. But I don’t have any guilt over what your family did.”

“Where does this end?”

“It ends when they choose for it to end. When they stop. But they won’t stop, because every werewolf in this city is a killer. Every member of the Alpha Pack. Every member of the Hale Pack. Even the ones with yellow eyes, because they know what Derek was doing and they went along with him.”

“I think you need another lesson, Scott, so you’re coming with me.”

“Where.”

“To someone you’ll believe, if you don’t believe me. Someone without … guilt. Someone who can tell me how you can do what you shouldn’t be able to do.”

“I don’t want to see him.”

“Scott, even if I didn’t have a responsibility toward you, you have a responsibility to me. You’ve been using weaponry and training I gave you in a way it was not intended and without my approval. I won’t make you go, but if you don’t go see Deaton with me, then I’m going to go see your mother.”

Scott looked like he was going to put a fight, but he didn’t. He let Chris frog-march him to the place where the SUV was. He slide silently into the seat next to him.

“I’m doing this because I’m worried about you.”

Scott shrugged. They didn’t say anything else all the way to the animal clinic.
Chris made Scott remove all his weapons before they entered the clinic, while he did the same. Scott didn’t argue, but he kept glancing at the front door like it was the gallows.

“The sanctuaries of Emissaries are considered neutral ground.” Scott’s voice was sad but still firm. “Why would hunters care about that?”

“Emissaries are human, and their role is to help keep packs connected to their humanity and their role in their communities. Both of those things help our purpose as well.” Chris used his lecturing tone, the same one he used when he was first training Scott. “A werewolf who is invested in living with the humans around him has more reasons not to give in to their homicidal urges.”

Scott didn’t answer. He was still staring at the front door.

“Come on. You brought this on yourself. You didn’t expect me not to intervene, did you?” Chris stood directly behind Scott.

“No.”

Chris held the door open for Scott; they both heard the bell ringing. No one was in the outer room, but at this time of the day, it wasn’t a surprise. There was only a half-hour before the clinic’s regular closing time.

“I’ll be right out!” Deaton called from the back room.

Scott fidgeted nervously, staring at the counter. He was far more nervous than when Chris caught him out by the dead bodies.

“How long has it been?” Chris asked.

Scott didn’t answer but Deaton did. “It’s been little more than a year. Hello, Chris. Hello, Scott.”

“Hello, Alan.”

Scott didn’t say anything. He fidgeted once again, trying to decide where to put his hands. He couldn’t look at the veterinarian directly.

“Chris, would you mind turning the sign on the door to Closed? I don’t want to be interrupted during our discussion.” Deaton opened the gate. “Would you two like to come on to the back?”

The back room was clinical and more importantly private. Chris hadn’t been there before.

“To what do I owe the honor of this visit?” Deaton’s voice was gentle and kind, but his gaze rested on Scott.

Chris hesitated, trying to think how to phrase. “There are a number of issues that I would like to have your advice on, but I also have … significant news for your pack. Derek may know of it already. He may not.”

“If you are approaching me as Emissary to the Hale Pack, I should contact the alpha first.” Deaton delivered the words with both reluctance and certainty. It was an interesting trick, to convey both of those emotions.

“Do you have to?” Scott asked. “He has other things to worry about right now.”

“Scott,” Chris voice as reproof enough without an additional lecture. “You do what you have to do, Alan. It wouldn’t hurt for me to talk to the alpha.”
Deaton took out a smart phone and placed call; he didn’t leave the room, so all Chris and Scott were able to do is stare at each other. Or, rather, Chris stared at Scott who spent the conversation looking for a spot on the wall where he could focus his gaze.

“Why am I here?” The boy asked. It was rhetorical, but Chris chose not to take it that way.

“I want to know what you are doing and how you are able to do it. You’re also here because avoiding the people important to you is no way to live.”

The phone call with Derek was short. With a sigh, Deaton hung up and turned, squaring himself to the pair of them. “Regardless of the circumstances, Scott, it is good to see you again.”

“Yeah.” Scott’s gaze doesn’t leave the wall. “It’s been a long time.”

“Too long.” Deaton left the words hanging. “Chris, it might be helpful if you told me what type of advice you needed.”

“Scott, here, is demonstrating some disturbing abilities. He’s regained his mobility and he’s suppressed his asthma.” Chris explained. “He refuses to tell me how. He shouldn’t have the ability to do that; I know about his medical conditions.”

“I can’t make him tell you that.”

“No, he can’t.” Scott interrupted. “Can’t you just trust me?”

“No, Scott. You chose not to tell me what you were doing. You’ve used my resources to pursue that end.” The hunter turned back to the druid. “Do you have any idea how?”

“I have suspicions but not evidence.” Deaton took a step towards Scott, his voice softening. “Would you tell me how you managed to throw Stiles through the air?”

Scott looked at the door. “No. It doesn’t matter how I’m doing what I’m doing. It matters why I’m doing what I’m doing, but I’m sure both of you already know why I’m doing what I’m doing.”

Deaton made a small sound. “Actually, it matters a great deal, especially if my suspicions turn out to be true. Are you taking mistletoe?”

“It sounds like you already know the answer. Why do you want to know?”

“Because you know, even if you’re angry with me, that all I want to do is help, Scott. Among the great regrets of my life is not being there for you when you needed it.”

“What?” Scott suddenly sneered. “Did Derek order you not to talk to me, too?”

“Yes.”

Scott’s mouth dropped open but then he recovered quickly. “I don’t remember him being that intimidating.”

Deaton glanced at Chris. “He presented it as a clear choice between being able to help him and his pack and being able to help you. I made the decision reluctantly, but I made it because I knew you weren’t alone.”

In the silence that followed, Chris waited patiently. He’d seen many hunters react like Scott had to the tragedy that pushed them into hunting, and it always ended badly. The Code only went so far – his sister and his father were glaring testament to that.
Scott took a deep breath. “So he took everyone away from me.”

Chris opened his mouth to speak, but Deaton shook his head. “Derek told me that you had a tattoo. May I see it?”

“I should have realized when Mr. Argent told me you were Talia Hale’s emissary that you’d figure it out.” He shrugged and pulled up his shirt.

The tattoo covered his chest right above the heart. To Chris’s eyes, it looked like heraldry – a shield with a chalice emblazoned it, yet surrounded by the Celtic runs favored by druids. Scott shifted his position, and it looked like – maybe it was an optical illusion – some of the runes glowed red.

“Scott. Do you understand how dangerous that is?”

“It was explained to me by people who know. It was my idea to get it.” Scott pulled his shirt down.

“Who is the fated one?” Deaton asked.

“You know who.”

Deaton frowned. “Scott, I know I don’t have any right to offer you counsel …”

“You don’t.” Scott turned to Chris. “Dr. Deaton can tell you everything you want to know, but I don’t want to talk to Derek and I don’t have to. So, I’ll be waiting at home. You want to talk more, come to me there. Or don’t.”

“If you wait, I can give you a lift home …”

“No, thank you. I know the way.” Scott disappeared out of the bark room, the front door bell ringing to announce his departure.

“It’s called the Rite of the Maimed King.” Deaton began. “It’s also known as the Dolorous Stroke.”

“That’s … Arthurian?” Chris sounded shocked. “I thought the Grail was a Christian concept.”

“The Arthurian stories always existed in an era of transition from one culture to the next. Symbols were held in common. Lessons were held in common. Arthurian stories adopted pre-Roman cultural iconography and transformed it into Christian allegory.”

“Fascinating, but not remotely why I am interested.”

“The Right of the Maimed King was created by druids to enable humanity to protect themselves against powerful supernatural creatures.” Deaton leaned up against the table. “During the Dark Ages and before, it was not unheard of for a supernatural creature of power to abuse human communities, especially those that were isolated or poorly defended.”

“Our histories confirm that.” Chris had read stories of whole towns that had served as nothing more than larders for voracious werewolves or malicious fae.

“That abuse could become atrocity, and a druid could be persuaded to aid a human community. A champion would be chosen, one who was personally harmed by the supernatural, and their life force and fate would be tied to the supernatural creature harming the town.”

“Life force and fate. I don’t like the sound of that.”

“The ritual uses the principle that the universe balances things out. The supernatural creature was
using its advantages to an unjust end. It would make the champion the supernatural creature’s match.”

“How come I’ve never heard of this?”

“It’s an old ritual and very few Emissaries would use it on a human being. There are far easier ways to prevent unjust actions by supernatural creatures these days.”

Chris raised an eyebrow. “What ways?”

“Honestly, you and your family. The hunting families arose out of the need for humanity to have an answer when supernatural creatures abused their power. That is why Emissaries stand between the hunter and the werewolf, because we recognize that you’re just as natural as they are.”

“So what does this mean for Scott? He couldn’t have done this himself, could he?”

“No. The ritual is advanced, far beyond anything I’ve ever attempted.” Deaton looked serious. “It will make Scott a match for the person he chose as his nemesis.”

“Stiles.”

Deaton shoulders sagged a little. “I was afraid of that.”

“Stiles is now an alpha. He killed one of the Alpha Pack. Will that increase Scott’s power as well?”

“Yes. The stronger Stiles becomes, the stronger Scott will become, until the injustice between them is addressed.”

“Until Scott kills Stiles.”

“No!” Deaton’s object was empathic. “It’s not necessarily an eye for an eye. It’s about injustice – a peaceful solution, a fair and equitable judgment, will also end the ritual. Druids are servants of life – we can kill, but we don’t seek that end above all others.”

“You told Scott that this was dangerous.”

“He’s set himself in opposition to a werewolf pack in the middle of a war. Violence is inevitable. He’s stronger with the ritual, but he’s no match for a pack. Mistletoe helps focus his power, which is why he must be taking it in some form. Yet, the herb is both a poison and a cure. It gives him a vulnerability – you can use it, but it can be used against you. Finally, Scott’s life force and fate is tied to Stiles’.”

“I heard that before.” Chris looked grim. “Does it mean what I think it means?”

“Most likely.” Deaton sighed in regret. “When you call upon the universe, it makes sure you follow its rules. This ritual was never meant to be a short-cut to power. If Stiles dies by any hand but Scott’s before the injustice is balanced, Scott will die, too.”
Derek decides that it's time to stop being afraid and do the right thing -- for himself, for
the pack, and for Stiles.

Silence reigned in the animal clinic. Alan consciously took control of his breathing. It was a
meditation technique that his own mentor had taught. Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe
out. It did not help. His mind kept returning to mistakes he had made in the past and promises he had
failed to keep.

*How did it come to this?*

“I am going to make some coffee. Would you like a cup?”

Chris Argent looked up. “Sure.”

Alan retrieved the coffee maker from the front room and plugged it in. He had not been sleeping well
recently, so he had dug an old Norelco out of his attic and brought it to the clinic. It was promising to
be a long night, and he didn’t want to be yawning in the face of other people’s tragedies. Brewing
something hot also gave him some way to kill the time until Derek arrived.

He came back with two cups and handed one to the hunter. “I only have honey.”

“I take mine black.” Chris took a sip of his cup. “You’re being very friendly.”

“If you’ll forgive me for saying so, I have no reason to be unfriendly toward you. You aren’t your
father.” Alan took his own cup and leaned against the examination table, mirroring Argent’s posture.
“As an Emissary, I understand the role that hunters play in our world. I have no problem with them if
they obey their own ethical guidelines. It’s much preferable to what would happen to werewolf
packs if their existence became general knowledge, which is exactly what would happen if there
were no means to check werewolves who indulge in unnecessary violence.”

“That doesn’t seem to matter too much to the Hale pack, and I’m not sure it should. I’ve done terrible
things.”

Alan sighed. “Every single human being who manages to live a full life will do terrible things. It is
delusion to believe that anyone’s hands can be kept clean with the necessities existence requires of
us. Even if a person were entirely passive, inaction can have terrible consequences in itself. I know
the difference between someone who has made a mistake in good faith and those who disregard
mistakes as a small price to pay to get what they want.”

Alan looked up at the clock. Scott had been gone for forty-five minutes. “After all, I have made my
fair share of mistakes. There was my treatment of your protégé. He used to be mine.”

Chris opened his mouth to ask a question, but closed it tight as the front door of the clinic opened,
even with the closed sign.

“We’re in here, Derek.”
Derek entered the backroom cautiously as if he were entering an enemy lair than the work room of his Emissary. Alan had been noticing with deep regret that ever since the Alpha Pack had made its recent move, the alpha had started exhibiting the same behaviors that had created so many problems during the first months after Peter’s death. Derek’s face collapsed even further when he saw Chris and his claws slid uncontrollably from his fingertips.

“What is he doing here?”

“Mr. Argent had important news he wished to share. I called you immediately, Derek. I thought you understood that when you said you were on your way.”

Chris Argent remained silent, arms hanging loosely at his sides, but one hand never went too far from his thigh holster.

Derek remained on the other side of the room, his stance tense. “I thought he’d be gone and you’d tell me what he said.” The alpha scowled at the hunter. “I don’t need to listen to anything that an Argent has to say … personally.”

“Derek,” Alan chided. After the death of Gerard Argent, it had seemed that the Hale-Argent feud was over, but the alpha was being needlessly antagonistic.

“You’re going to want to listen to what I have to say,” Chris didn’t move; his steel gaze didn’t waver.

“I doubt that.”

Chris huffed. “I came to town at the sheriff’s behest to talk to Scott McCall …”

“Came to give him more targets?”

“Derek,” Alan intervened, “this isn’t helping.”

“No,” Derek put up his hands. “Scott McCall being here isn’t helping anything at all, and I have you to thank for it. You trained him. You put weapons in his hands.”

“Scott was meant to keep an eye on Beacon Hills and that was all,” Chris replied calmly.

“Well, he’s not.” Derek pointed out. “He’s making a bad situation worse. If you want me to think that you’re not trying to make it worse as well, you’ll do something about him.”

Alan and Chris looked at each other. “Alan knows more about what’s happening with Scott, but that’s not the news I need to tell you. Have you talked to Stiles?”

Derek’s body tensed into preparation for a lunge. Alan’s suspicions had been correct. Derek had grown quite attached to the beta he had inherited from Peter. Perhaps more than attached.

“No. If you did something …”

Chris rolled his eyes. “Stiles is an alpha now.”

“Explain.” Derek growled openly.

“I was coming through the Preserve toward the school. I wanted to catch Scott and talk to him about what he’s been doing here. Before I could do so, I came across two bodies. One of them was … your beta. The other was Ennis Clark.”
Derek’s face crumbled and then he pushed it away. Suspicion replaced it. “That’s ridiculous. I would have felt one of my betas …”

“Stiles is now an alpha, and he’s going to be a target for the Alpha Pack. They won’t like that he killed one of their pack. I’m proposing that we work together to put an end to this.”

Derek didn’t seem to hear that last part. “Did you just leave them there?”

“The last thing I wanted to do was give you reasons to suspect me in your beta’s death.”

“We can see to the bodies as quickly as possible,” Alan soothed. “Until then –“

“Until then, thank you for your suggestion about us working together against the Alpha Pack, which will never happen. I don’t believe you about one of my betas being dead, so why would I believe in your good intentions? So you can go now.”

Alan sighed and Chris stood up straighter. His voice was colder now. “Derek, I think you’re making a mistake.”

“I’m not making a mistake. I’m making a decision. Just as your family did when they murdered my entire family.”

“Fine.” Argent had enough. “Do as you like, alpha, as you have been doing since you took those red eyes. The only thing you’ve managed to do is keep getting innocent children killed, but that’s no skin off your nose, is it? Not when you can make it all my fault. Derek, you can spend the rest of your life blaming every mistake you make on what my sister did to you, but it’s not going to influence Deucalion at all, and it’s not going to make Isaac Lahey any less dead.”

Derek growled at the man’s retreating back. Alan hooded his eyes and waited until the alpha turned back to him.

“What.” Derek snapped.

“Regardless of whether Stiles is an alpha or not, you are still overmatched by the Alpha Pack.” Deaton picked up his lukewarm cup of coffee and sipped it. “Deucalion and Kali are two of the most dangerous werewolves that I have ever known. And, yet, you just rejected an offer of aid from the oldest hunting family in the world.”

“You want me to trust them?”

“I want you to stop feeling and start thinking, Derek. Why do you think that Chris made that offer?”

Derek shook his head as if he had been punched too hard. “I don’t know and I don’t care.”

“You should care. Victoria and Chris virtually adopted Scott after the death of their own daughter. Chris taught Scott everything he knows about hunting. This isn’t principle with Chris – it’s personal. He wants to make sure that Scott comes out of this alive.”

The alpha folded his arms. “Then all he needs to do is get the boy to stay out of it.”

“Not possible, which I could have told you about if you hadn’t reacted to Argent’s presence in my clinic as an ambush waiting to happen.” Alan then went on to explain the nature of the Rite of the Maimed King to Derek.

Derek was staring at the floor at the end, somewhat chagrinned.
“Chris Argent has every reason to want to insure your victory over the Alpha Pack. If you fail, and your pack dies, his own protégé will share a similar fate.”

“What do you want me to do?”

Alan came over and stood before Derek. “What Kate Argent did to you and your family was terrible. What Peter did to you and Laura and Paige – “

The alpha’s head shot up.

“I was your mother’s closest advisor. She told me everything, and it didn’t take me long back then to figure out who really was the motive force behind your approach to Ennis Clark.”

“I asked Ennis.”

“Let me suggest how that scenario played out. Peter noted that you were in love with Paige, and he began to prey on your fear of losing her. He kept the pressure on you until you did something that you never would have considered in the first place.”

Derek took in a deep breath.

“I suspect that is exactly happened because that’s how manipulators work. The find a weakness and they press.” Alan shook his head. “Fear is your weakness, Derek, and that’s what the Alpha Pack is going to use to destroy you. That’s what Scott and the druid working with him might use to destroy you. You have every right to feel pain and remorse for what happened to Paige and your family. You have every right to feel fury and disgust about what Kate did to you. You have zero right to allow those emotions to color the judgments you make about others.”

“Fine. The next time Chris Argent wants to help me, I won’t turn him down. But that doesn’t get me one step closer to resolving the real problems going on in this city.”

“Do you want my honest advice?”

“No, I want your dishonest advice.” Stiles wasn’t the only person to whom sarcasm was a defense.

Alan doesn’t allow himself to react. “Open the vault. Take the money I know is there. Take your pack and leave. Don’t tell me where you’re going.”

“Run away?”

“Yes. Far away. I would suggest somewhere in South America where your family has ties and Deucalion does not.”

“This is my territory, I can’t just abandon it.”

“Listen very carefully to me, Derek.” Alan says quietly. “Fuck your territory. Wolves instinctually form territories to make hunting easier, but when a territory can no longer feed a pack, they move on. Werewolves haven’t had a real need for territories since the invention of the steam engine. It’s still practiced today more as a function of ego and dominance: this is mine; this is not yours. You have to suppress your ego.”

“My family help found Beacon Hills.”

“Your family is dead. Your pack is not.” Harsh truths had to be spoken. “Are you a match for Kali?”

“No.”
“And if you’re not a match for Kali, you’re not a match for Deucalion.” Alan tried to make his voice sound reasonable. “If you put all your betas, Cora, Stiles and yourself in a room with Kali, Deucalion, and the twins, you might win. But the odds would be against you, and the odds would be even greater that more of those children would die.”

“You want me to take them away from their families?”

“It’s better than giving them back to their families to bury, Derek.”

Derek was resisting; Alan could tell by the gathering of his brow and then tenseness in his shoulders. He was arguing with himself.

“Deucalion will just track us down again.”

“Maybe. Maybe not. You can’t match him physically, but there are people who while not as strong as he is are just as clever. There’s no mystical connection they can follow, no sense of smell strong enough to track an airplane.”

“If you’re right, there is one person who could follow us.” Derek looked up at him.

Alan had never lied to an alpha he had agreed to serve as an Emissary. “Yes. Someone who knew that Scott had invoked the Dolorous Stroke and who had access to the proper rituals could use the bond to track your pack down.”

“I could—”

“Derek, I sincerely hope you weren’t going to finish that sentence the way I suspect that you were. I abandoned him once because you ordered me to do so. If you even try to contemplate killing Scott, we’re done. There’s a limit to my loyalty.”

Derek blinked. “What the hell am I supposed to do about him, then?”

Alan sighed. “I think that the answer is pretty simple. If you put your mind to it, you could probably work it out yourself, but it’s only one problem among many, and you’re running out of time.”

~*~

Derek stood outside of the Stilinski home later that night. It was drizzling, but he wasn’t uncomfortable. Stiles was inside, by himself. Derek had grown to trust and even rely on Stiles, but tonight, he really didn’t know what to do.

Deaton’s advice to him was sound. Intellectually, Derek couldn’t argue with it. He had plenty of money, enough for five people to live on for years anywhere in the world. He could take Cora, Boyd, Erica, and Stiles to Argentina, Australia, Hong Kong, Canada, or New York – the world was so much larger than Beacon Hills.

Derek could tell himself that he didn’t want to take Boyd, Erica and Stiles away from their families, but the truth was – he didn’t care about their families. Boyd and Erica barely mentioned them, anyway. They were still not eighteen, but they would be soon enough. And Stiles? The Sheriff was more than an ally, he was a friend. Derek was completely certain that he’d have Noah’s blessing if taking Stiles away from Beacon Hills would save his life.

The only obstacle was, as the veterinarian had said, ego. He had been driven away once from his home, and he didn’t want to run away again. He wanted to prove his worth as a Hale alpha. Deucalion saw him as a prize; the Demon Wolf wanted someone capable of the full shift. He didn’t
want Derek for his skills as a leader or his qualities as a person, but simply to claim the family legacy for the Alpha Pack.

Every time he thought about it, Derek wanted to wipe the supercilious smirk off the blind alpha’s face.

Yet, it wasn’t just his fate to risk. He was the alpha, but if he only put his own needs first, he wouldn’t be a very good one.

The Stilinski house hadn’t changed position in the fifteen minutes he had been standing there. The truth wasn’t going to change either. Derek went up to the door and knocked.

It must have been a minute, maybe two, before Stiles opened the door. “What are you doing here?”

Stiles’ face had been carefully built up before he opened the door, but Derek had learned over the last year how to read it anyway. Stiles was adrift, and when he was adrift he pretended that nothing was wrong -- he ignored the problem until it went away. But this problem wasn’t going to go away. Few of the really difficult problems ever did.

“We have to talk.”

“What could we possibly have to talk about?” Stiles piffled.

Derek didn’t answer but glanced at where they were standing on the porch and then looked pointedly inside.

“Oh, come in already.”

The house was much like it always was, occupied by men who picked up clutter but didn’t see the need to dust every day. Or every week. Stiles had been watching a movie on the television: Star Wars.

“Let me see your eyes.”

Stiles immediately turned away from him. “You just saw them.”

“You know what I mean, Stiles.”

Stiles tried to keep up a brave front but he crumbled. “I didn’t … I didn’t plan for this to happen. I didn’t want this. You have to believe me, I wasn’t trying –”

“Stiles.” Derek tried to make his voice sound comforting and without judgment.

“They killed Isaac, Derek. They killed him and I didn’t realize that was what they were going to do until it was too late. I’m supposed to be the smart one, but I thought … I thought they were just harassing him.”

Derek tried to place a comforting grip on Stiles shoulder, but the other boy ripped away, his eyes flashing their new red.

“I killed Ennis. I stabbed him right in the heart. I was so angry that I didn’t think …”

“We’ll work something out.” Derek had no idea what he thought he could work out. He wanted – he needed – Stiles in his pack, but he’d never heard of two alphas in one pack before. Well, other than the Alpha Pack, but they were violent and unnatural.
Stiles yelled – roared to be honest – at him. “We can’t work it out! A man is dead!”

“He was a brutal killer,” Derek said quietly. “He lured Isaac out into the woods and murdered him, and you avenged your pack mate.”

“I don’t want this,” Stiles whispered. “I thought it would … I thought I could do it and not have any problem, but I can’t. I want it to go away.”

“It won’t.” Derek took another step forward and tried to take him by the arms, but the alpha instinct was too strong and Stiles shook him off. “It can’t.”

Stiles turns away and sits down, grimacing as the sofa shifted. “I came home and the first thing I did was break the couch.”

“Oh.” He remembered when he became alpha. He had been a werewolf for years and it was nearly overwhelming.

“Yeah. Oh.” Stiles laid his head back and closed his eyes. “What am I going to do?”

“The same thing you did when Peter bit you against your will.”

“Mutilate my best friend?”

Derek nearly bit his tongue. “Adapt.”

Stiles looked up at him and dashed the tears away from his eyes. “That may be the single most badass thing you have ever said, and that’s comparing it to ‘I’m the Alpha now.’”

Derek walked over to him but didn’t sit down. “Stiles, remember when I first met you?”

“It was in the woods. Scott had dropped his inhaler running from your crazy uncle and we went back to get it.”

“Yeah.”

“And you yelled at us about it being private property. You couldn’t stop scowling.”

Derek felt the corners of his mouth lift. “No. I thought you were two snot-nosed punks. And then I realized that one of you had gotten bitten.”

Stiles looked down. “And look how that turned out.”

“You made mistakes. I made mistakes. But we learned. We got better.” Derek went down and pulled up Stiles chin. “You’re the cleverest person I know and you’ll make a great alpha.”

“Do I have to be?” Stiles said quietly.

“What do you mean?”

“Do I have to be an alpha? I don’t want to leave your pack.”

Derek remained silent. He stretched for something to say. Stiles, as an alpha, couldn’t be in the pack. It simply didn’t work like that. But he couldn’t say that to Stiles. Stiles loved the pack; Stiles cared for everyone in it fiercely. The boy was probably already crushed today by Isaac’s death.

And Derek? Derek was crushed as well. He was here, standing in this room, talking to this boy,
because it was better than taking care of the corpse of someone whom he had promised to protect and he had failed.

Why did he have to do this? Why couldn’t something he touched remain good?

Stiles was looking up at him. With his eyes, those bright, intelligent, hurt eyes, Stiles was asking Derek for hope. And Derek wanted to give him hope. He wanted to do the right thing, this once.

Derek took a deep breath. “It doesn’t matter.”

Stiles’ face crumpled. He had taken what Derek had said in the worst possible way.

“It doesn’t matter if you’re pack or not.” Derek felt the words force themselves out of his mouth. He had to wipe the disappointment away. “It doesn’t matter if you form your own pack or you don’t. It wouldn’t matter if we were both human and there were no such thing as packs at all.”

“I … I think I lost you there, big guy.”

“I’m saying that even if you aren’t in my pack, I care about you and I want you in my life.” Derek couldn’t believe the words were coming out of his mouth. He shouldn’t say them, but he couldn’t make them stop. “I don’t care if you’re a human or an alpha or a robot. I … like you.”

Stiles reared back in shock. He stared at Derek, and then he sniffled. He tried to cover it up as he usually did. “So, let me get this straight,” he said, trying for his usual façade of ridicule but failing miserably. “You like me. You like like me.”

Derek felt like his heart was going to explode. He felt nervous and clammy. He was an alpha and a Hale, he shouldn’t feel like this. He should downplay it. He should pass it off as a joke. Then he heard Deaton’s voice echoing in his head.

_Fear is your weakness, Derek._

“Yes.”

“In a let’s-hold-hands-let’s-go-stead-will-you-wear-my-pin sort of way?”

“If that’s what it takes, yes.”

Stiles eyes widened and he burst into a slight grin. “You’re not just saying this to make me feel better?”

“No, Stiles.” Now, Derek felt exasperated.

“Well, it did.” Stiles rubbed his hands on his pants legs. “So what now?”

“We survive. And that means we have to deal with the Alpha Pack. Or … actually, not deal with them.” Derek went on to explain Deaton’s suggestion. “I can do it. I have the money. He has the contacts. We can disappear. We need to disappear.”

“I can’t leave my father.”

“Yes, you can. I know you don’t want to.” Derek said heavily. “I know it’s going to be tough, but I can’t leave you behind. Kali will be coming for you, and you aren’t a match for her. _I’m_ not a match for her. And I can’t leave you behind because … I don’t think I can. I think your father will understand.”
Stiles sat quiet on the couch, Derek standing before him. “Who is going to look out after him?”

“I think Melissa will. I think Deaton will. And … I think Scott will.”

Stiles made a noise back in his throat. “Scott set me up.”

Derek sat down on the couch next to him. “Did he?”

“He gave me the means to kill Ennis. He knew that me becoming an alpha would screw this up.”

The Hale alpha looked at his hands. “Would you have gone after Isaac without the knife?”

“Yes.”

“Do you think you could have taken on Ennis?”

Stiles glowered at him. “No.”

“There was no reason if you went at him that Ennis would have killed you as well. I’m grateful to Scott, even if that wasn’t his intention.”

“I don’t know what to do about him. I guess it doesn’t matter if we’re going to leave.”

Stiles’ admission thrilled Derek on multiple levels. Stiles was choosing to go with him. He smiled in spite of himself. “I think we’re going to have to do something about him. Deaton figured out that weird magic he’s using.”

Stiles listened carefully as Derek explained everything that Deaton had discovered about the Rite of the Maimed King.

“So, if Ennis had killed me …”

“Scott would have died, too.”

“What a mindfuck.” Stiles ran a hand through his hair. “All this for power.”

Derek clenched his hands. “No. I think it’s worse than that.”

“How can this be worse?”

“I know a little …” Derek took a moment to steady himself. “After the fire, when I felt it was my fault –“

“It’s not your fault! You’re not to blame for Kate tricking you!”

“But I still felt that it was true. There was a time when I didn’t see any possibility of life for me. I didn’t know why I got up in the morning. I didn’t want to do anything. I didn’t want to be anything, if I couldn’t fix this terrible thing that had happened. I think Scott feels the same way.”

Stiles chewed on his thumb.

“He may tell himself that he’s seeking justice, but I think he doesn’t want to live like this – with the pain of what you did to him.” Derek winced, but it was the truth. “He doesn’t want to live without you as his friend.”

Stiles didn’t say anything immediately. He put his hands into his lap, and then he stands up.
“Where are you going?”

“To get my phone. I know what I have to do.”
Kali

Chapter Summary

Kali is very angry, but not for the reasons other people expect.

“So.” Kali crossed her arms, leaned against the island in the middle of the kitchen, and stared at Deucalion with as much contempt on her face as she could muster. Deucalion couldn’t see it, of course, but Aiden and Ethan could. They left the kitchen for the safety of the penthouse’s living room. The older man’s sharpened senses would eventually pick up on her emotions eventually. She kept tight hold on that scorn in order to make sure he would.

“Yes, Kali?” His tone indicated her recognized her anger. It was what she needed tonight.

“Ennis is dead. Killed by a pup with a poisoned knife and a bad attitude.”

“That seems to be the gist of what happened.”

The Demon Wolf was in charge, and she was content to let him remain in charge, but she would never be afraid of him. She’d never silence her tongue to make sure he didn’t get angry. She respected him, but there had always been a limit to that respect. She hadn’t murdered her own pack just to be enslaved to another alpha. If Deucalion fucked up, she was going to let him know.

Kali pushed herself off the island and called out into the living room where the twins were hiding. “Maybe someone could walk me through how the fuck that was possible?”

“I followed the plan. We provoked Lahey at lunch and I lead him out to the woods where Ennis was waiting.” Aiden spoke from the couch where he was sitting and trying to be out of the line of fire. “He wasn’t a match for Ennis, as expected.”

Kali could have told anyone that. “But you didn’t stick around afterwards.”

“I couldn’t.” Aiden protested.

“He felt my pain,” Ethan suggested. “I was keeping the other beta in the lunch room, also according to plan.”

“So, Ennis is beating this Lahey brat to death with his bare hands, which we all knew would take longer than simply killing him, but it would make the statement you wanted, Duke.”

The Demon Wolf went to the bar and poured himself a drink. “Indeed, it would. Indeed, it did.”

“And you, Ethan.” Kali stalked right over to the other twin. “You were supposed to keep Stiles and the others away from the fight.”

“I tried.”

“You tried?” Kali leveled a glare at him. “Did he overpower you?”

“I already told you what happened.”
“Kali,” Deucalion said pleasantly, “Is there a point to this tantrum?”

She had a clear image in her head of Ennis beating the nearly-defenseless beta until he stopped moving. The idea of not using his claws would have thrilled Ennis – unlike her, he enjoyed demonstrating his absolute superiority against his enemies. For her part, she preferred an even match, and she didn’t appreciate humiliation.

“Yes, and I’m getting to it. You knew what Ennis’s weakness was, Duke. You’ve yelled at him before for losing the plot while enjoying violence. So these identical idiots get outmaneuvered by a former asthmatic, which frees the Stilinski kid to charge in, raging and near out of control. Ennis, as we would expect him to do, stood up to take the first blow. He didn’t have time to see the knife, didn’t have time to smell the wolf’s bane, and we’re down an alpha.”

The Demon Wolf tilted his head to the side. “That’s a valid analysis.”

“How about this for a valid analysis: we’re losing.”

“How about this for a valid analysis: we’re losing.”

“I don’t confuse your personal losses with our overall goals.”

Kali growled at the Alpha of Alphas. He had never quite understood her, had he? Deucalion assumed that he knew her better than she did, and he wasn’t the first man who had made that mistake. He was dismissing her anger as being solely caused by Ennis’ death, as if that were her primary motivation. It was Duke who was smitten with another alpha, with the memory of Talia Hale, and so he assumed that when Kali had wished to join his alpha pack, she had been there for her friend, Ennis.

It was true that she had gotten along well with Ennis. They had fought well together, and after joining they had trained until they were a nearly unstoppable combination. She had fucked Ennis, but it wasn’t anything romantic, and it wasn’t the same time of wide-eyed – see, she could make vision puns as well – worship that Duke had for Talia.

No matter how old and how powerful she grew, the story was still the same. When Kali had been in high school, she had dated because it was what everyone had expected her to do, and she kept at it until the she realized – not only did she not want to date but she really didn’t want to do what everyone expected her to do. She wanted to do what she wanted to do. Expectations had penned her in from all sides.

Receiving the Bite had been a godsend. She became strong enough to do as she liked, and she could become even stronger if she wanted to. She could run under the moon like an animal or sip tea and talk about cinema like a sophisticate; the choice was now hers. It had helped that her alpha had been not only wise but temperate. She had understood that Kali’s desire for the Bite was about freedom, so she always tried persuade Kali to do what she asked; she never demanded obedience. For example, when Kali decided not to wear shoes any longer to prove a point, the alpha had accepted her decision without complaint, even when their stodgy emissary had clucked his tongue. Kali had found a life which suited her.

To her detriment, eventually the alpha died and passed the spark to Kali. More power was initially attractive, but in the end she began to feel penned in once again. Being a wolf no longer meant freedom, it meant responsibility. As alpha, she settled disputes between pack members. As alpha, she negotiated treaties and fended off hunters. She had barely had time for herself when it came to trivial matters; her life was being consumed by the pack.

She might have gone mad after those first years if it hadn’t been for Julia’s arrival. Her new emissary perceived the problem and had tried to lighten Kali’s burden as much as she possibly could. Kali
respected Julia in turn; hell, she came to treat the woman as her closest friend. Sometimes they had fun together, and Kali’s second-greatest regret was that Julia may have actually fallen in love with her. Kali would have never been able to return her feelings.

Her greatest regret had been killing her emissary in the first place, but it was the price of joining the Alpha Pack, which was the price of having freedom once more. In hindsight, she should have tried to trick Deucalion into believe Julia was dead. Experience had taught her that he could be tricked; like all men, he had trouble comprehending that greater power doesn’t insure obedience.

“We’re losing. It’s now three alphas versus two alphas and three betas.”

Aiden stood up and scowled at her. “Four alphas.”

Kali sneered right back. “You two got outwitted by a pair of seventeen-year-olds. When you’re merged together you might make one halfway decent alpha.”

“Tsk.” Deucalion was amused. “Don’t speak that like to the boys.”

“They’re not children. If I wanted to be a mother, I would have had children of my own.”

Ethan got up to stand next to his brother, finally provoked. “We were told,” Ethan stressed, “that McCall wasn’t a threat, so we didn’t treat him like one. But he is a threat. He figured out that we were provoking Lahey, and he supplied Stiles with the knife.”

“Curious.” Deucalion took a sip of his drink and turned away from them. He was thinking.

Kali went towards one of the bedrooms to be alone, but Aiden stopped her. “I’m sorry.”

“Sorry? For what?”

“For Ennis’ death.” Aiden glanced down at the ground. “When the hunter stabbed Ethan, I reacted. If I had stayed with him, maybe he’d still be alive.”

“Yeah, I’m pissed, but you couldn’t have known that he’d use …” Kali trailed off. Now, that was a question.

“You’ve stumbled across it as well, haven’t you?” Deucalion asked from across the room.

“How did McCall know that stabbing Ethan would alert Aiden?”

Ethan looked abashed. “He wouldn’t say.”

“The Argents couldn’t have taught him that. Everyone who knew that you felt each other’s pain is dead. Right?” Kali demanded.

“Yeah,” Aiden confirmed. “We did it when you told us to.”

“And yet, he somehow knew.” Deucalion said with appropriate dramatics. “It wasn’t a guess; he demonstrated enough knowledge of your abilities to manipulate you. I think that you were right, Kali.”

Kali raised both eyebrows. Deucalion seldom admitted when he was wrong.

“I have underestimated the danger posed by the hunter. His moves indicate a deeper game than I, at first, suspected. At the bank, I dismissed him as simply over-enthusiastic and a bad shot.”
“And now?”

“This is strategy.” Deucalion hummed, thinking. “To what end I cannot perceive, and that concerns me. You are also correct in your plea for urgency – as loathe as I am to abandon my original game plan, part of mastering the battlefield is learning when you have to abandon something that isn’t working. I think it’s time to bring this game to the close.”

“You have an idea how to do that?” Kali turned on him. “I don’t see how we are going to get Derek to kill his betas, now. It might be wisest to cut our losses, get Cora before she bonds with her brother too much, and kill the rest.”

“None of us are going to kill Erica and Boyd, Kali. Stiles will be the one to do that.”

Kali paused and the twins’ jaws dropped, stunned. Deucalion waited to continue his proclamation like the dramatic fucker he was.

“Stiles is a new alpha, and with that comes a whole collection of new instincts that he has not had any time to process. They will be particularly hard for him to process given his pre-existing emotional instability and the highly dangerous situation in which he finds himself.”

“I don’t think he’ll ever turn on his pack like you want,” objected Ethan.

“I think you misunderstand Stiles’ essential nature and his essential weakness. He’s clever and devoted, but he lacks principle. To protect what is important to him, he’ll do anything. He’ll lie, cheat, abandon life-long friends. The thing that is more important than anything else to him is his father. We’ll use that.”

“Stiles will die by my hand.” Kali stated. “I want you to understand this, Duke.”

“Perhaps.” Deucalion let the bass rumble of authority permeate his statement. “Unless Derek kills him first.”

Aiden nodded. “I see what you’re going for.”

“In addition, it’s important to confirm who is feeding the young McCall boy information. So this is what we’re going to do tonight. Kali, you’ll invite the sheriff to the old distillery on the outskirts of town. Aiden and Ethan, you will do the same with Melissa McCall. Don’t take no for an answer.”

Kali grimaced, but she had demanded action, and as she believed that the Demon Wolf could overthink things, this seemed likely to get them everything they wanted. Snatching a county sheriff would be fraught with danger, but she wasn’t upset by it. It would make things far more likely she would be able to face Stiles directly. “And what are you going to be doing?”

Deucalion reached for his cane where it rested by the door. “I think it’s time that I have a sincere face-to-face with our dear Marin.”

~*~

The first thing that Deucalion ever taught Kali was that reputation could be more powerful than actual ability. If your opponent believed that you were unbeatable, they became more prone to desperate moves. If your opponent believed you were a master tactician, they’d second guess themselves constantly. There were reasons other than ego behind Deucalion making highly dramatic speeches wherein he proclaimed himself the Demon Wolf.

To give the illusion of invulnerability, one of the first things the Alpha Pack did when they came to
this city eight months ago was identify and study locations important to the Hale Pack. They started with the remains of the Hale House, leaving their calling card. Then they studied the abandoned train station to confirm that Derek had truly abandoned it. Other sites soon followed: the converted factory building, The Boyd house, The Reyes apartment, The Stilinski house. The sheriff’s station.

If they ever decided to stop being the Alpha Pack, they would make excellent private investigators. They took pictures of the outside of the buildings and its inhabitants. They created flowcharts tracking the apparent schedules of the people who lived in them. They dug up phone numbers and e-mail addresses. When they were finished, they could find any member of the pack or any member of their extended family within hours if they needed to do it.

Deucalion, for his part, psychologically profiled every member of his targets’ pack, so he was never surprised by their reactions. He created extensive dossiers and expected the other alpha to read them thoroughly. He was a genius at strategy because he worked hard to know his enemy inside and out.

For example, early on they had identified a blind spot in the security system at the sheriff’s station. While there was a camera on each entrance to the building and one on the entrance to the motor pool, there wasn’t any cameras that captured the parking area within the motor pool itself.

Kali leapt over the chain-link fence easily and then found a good place to wait and hide. The sheriff was working second shift, which meant he usually left work around eleven, so she did not have long to wait. It would still be fully dark, as the half-moon had yet to rise.

As expected, the sheriff left the station promptly at eleven, talking animatedly to a woman by his side. Even in the dark, she was easily identified as Deputy Tara Graeme, a former teacher and a six-year veteran of the force who was essentially Noah Stilinski’s right hand. Kali remembered reading in the dossier that she used to help Stiles with his math homework. How Deucalion found that out, she didn’t know.

They were far enough away from the entrance to the station that they couldn’t outrun her but not yet close enough to their vehicles when Kali stepped out of the shadows and walked toward them, her nails clicking on the pavement.

“And then I said to him …” The sheriff stopped his probably entertaining story when he noticed her approach. They had never met, but like his son, he was very good at piecing things together quickly. Most people never looked at her feet … until it was too late. “What do you want?”

“It’s good that you know who I am, so you also know not to go for your guns, or I’ll have to get rough. Don’t put your trust in the special bullets I can smell in your pistol; I’m far too close.”

Deputy Graeme, while she may not understand everything being said was to assess a threat. Her hand had dropped to her gun when the sheriff caught her arm.

“Deputy, stand down.” He was smart, but he wasn’t willing to sacrifice those who followed him. “That still doesn’t tell me what you want.”

Kali could take control of this situation the hard way or the easy way. She chose the easy way. She lunged forward, faster than any human could follow let alone match, grabbed Tara Graeme, and hurled the other woman into the wall of the station behind them. With a sickening crunch, the deputy slumped to the ground.

Stilinski’s first thought was of the woman. “Tara!” He shouted and turned to go to her. Not the smartest move as Kali had him by the throat in a second.
“I can hear her heartbeat. She’s still alive, and if you behave yourself, she’ll stay that way for a while. In fact, do you have your phone?”

“Yes.” He gritted his teeth, but he didn’t attempt to struggle out of your grip.

“You do what I say when I say it, and you can call someone to check on her right before you call your son. Now, walk in front of me.”

Kali released the sheriff with a mild shove in the right direction. She saw him hesitate, weighing his options, but he made the right call. He started walking in the direction she pushed him, and he kept his hand well away from his weapon.

“You still haven’t answered my question.”

“I think it should be clear by now what’s going to happen. I’m abducting you.”

“Why do this now? Why, after all this time? You could have done it months ago.”

Kali listened carefully. He wasn’t lying according to her senses. “Oh. You haven’t seen your son today, have you? Things have changed.”

The sheriff stopped in his tracks. Kali smiled at his predictability; she wasn’t going to take it out on him this time. “Remember, you need to behave. Go that way.” She led him to the fence.

“I can’t climb that,” he remarked dryly.

With a smirk, Kali wrapped one arm around his chest and clambered over the fence. His weight wasn’t anything that would hinder her strength as a werewolf. “Not a problem.”

Stilinski went towards her car. It seemed he had done a little research on his own. “What happened to my son? If he’s hurt …”

“He’s fine, for now. More than fine, in fact.” She dug out her keys. “You’re driving, so get in.”

“No.” It was pathetic really. She could carry him over her head. Kali grunted instead. “Get in the car before I put you in the trunk.”

“Not until you tell me what’s happened to my son. If you wanted to kill me, I’d be dead already, so I have some bargaining strength.”

“You’re right about that. I need you alive, but your condition is … negotiable.”

“Then let’s negotiate this. What happened to my son?”

Kali opened the driver’s side door and gestured. “I didn’t lie to you. He’s fine, but he killed my friend, which makes him an alpha yet makes me very unhappy. So get in the damn car before I break both of your legs.”

The sheriff face’s showed disbelief, but he slowly got into the car. She relieved him of his pistol as he did so, and, making sure the safety was on first, tossed it into a nearby dumpster. As quickly as she could, she got into the passenger’s seat and handed the man the keys.

He put the key into the ignition but didn’t turn it. “You said I could call someone to help Tara.”

“And you will, the quicker we get a good distance away from the station.”
The sheriff pulled them out into traffic. Stilinski was calm, though he had a firm grip on the wheel. He drove according to the speed limit, he stopped at all the intersections, but he didn’t drive too slowly or do something that would draw attention to them.

They reached the outskirts of the city proper when Kali had the sheriff pull over into an abandoned gas station. “Call them. If they haven’t found her already, tell them to check outside for Deputy Graeme. Say only that.”

The sheriff complied. He only wanted Tara to be okay. It didn’t take long.

“Now, your son.”

The phone rang longer this time.

“Dad.” Kali could hear the other side of the conversation over the phone.

“Stiles? Where are you? Are you okay?”

“Yeah. I’m at Scott’s.”

The sheriff’s heartbeat spiked. A bead of sweat formed on his forehead.

“Stiles.”

“Is there something wrong, Dad?” He was deflecting.

“Well, lots of things!”

“I’m fine, Dad. I’m over here talking to Scott. I’m trying to … work things out.”

“Good. That’s good. I hope it’s going well.” The conversation couldn’t be more awkward. “Stiles, I …”

Kali told him. “Your father would like to see you soon, Stiles.”

The intensity of Stiles’ voice over the phone was frightening. “You … you don’t touch him! If you do I’ll tear you apart.”

“In the history of impotent threats, Stiles, that one has to be in the top five.” Kali chuckled and the sheriff shot him an angry glare. “Your father is fine, and he will continue to be fine as long as you do exactly what we say.”

“Don’t do it, Stiles!” The sheriff said aloud. Kali put her finger to her lips, but it didn’t bother. Stiles seldom did what his father wanted.

“What do you want?”

“Oh, that’s not for me to say. We have your father. Deucalion will be contacting you soon enough. Tell your father goodbye.”

“No. No!”

“Stiles – “

“Fine. Have it your way.” Kali snatched the phone from the Sheriff’s hand and tossed it out the window. “Drive. Now.”
“And what if I refuse?”

Kali smiled and stuck one of her claws into his side. “Your son won’t find what’s left of you, but he won’t realize you’re dead until it’s too late for him as well. The only possible chance you have to help him is if you do exactly as you’re told.”

Noah Stilinski gritted his teeth at the pain, but her words must have convinced him.

They drove out to the interstate drove to the next exit north, turned around, and then drove two exits south. The interstate effectively cancelled out the ability of werewolves to track the car, not that there was much chance of it to begin with. Once again though, Deucalion’s thoroughness always paid off. Kali was pretty sure that the Alpha of Alphas planned a final confrontation at the distillery, but it would happen only when they were completely ready.

Noah Stilinski narrowed his eyes. “Why here?”

“History.” Kali smirked and told him to get out of the car. “Attempting to make a break for it would be really stupid.”

She herded him inside. Aiden, Ethan, and Deucalion were waiting for them inside. As was, unsurprisingly, Melissa McCall. She heard the sheriff’s breath intake.

“What is she doing here? She doesn’t have anything to do with this!”

“Oh, but I think she does,” Deucalion answered. “She is the legal guardian of a teenager who fired an assault rifle at me and who supplied his friends with a poisoned blade that killed my colleague.”

“And I said …” Melissa McCall stated with barely restrained fury. “That you have the wrong person. Scott wouldn’t do that.”

Kali took ahold of the man’s shoulders and lead him over to the table. Melissa McCall was sitting on one metal chair, and Stilinski was placed in the other. His arms were handcuffed to the legs. It wasn’t uncomfortable, but unless they were trained escape artists, they wouldn’t be getting out anytime soon.

“Unfortunately, Mrs. McCall you are out of the loop on your son’s activities.” Deucalion clucked his tongue. “For example, you believed that your son’s injuries were the fault of a wild animal.”

“He was.” She swallowed. “I saw them myself.”

Kali narrowed her eyes. What was Deucalion’s ploy in this? She was confused – why were hostages worthy of his games?

Deucalion snapped his claws out so she could see them clearly. “Perhaps. Or perhaps they were made by something like these.”

“W … what are you?”

“A werewolf. Much like the werewolf that nearly killed your son.”

Kali watches the woman put the missing parts of her life together like a jigsaw puzzle where someone has finally handed her all the pieces. She sees the horror, then the surprise, then the awakening and the slowly blossoming anger.

Oh. That was Deucalion’s goal.
Melissa whirls her head to the sheriff. “You don’t look surprised. Why aren’t you surprised?” It’s an accusation.

There would be no cooperation between the hostages.

“Melissa …” Noah opened his mouth to explain, but he couldn’t.

“It’s easy,” Kali sneered. “Sheriff, all you have to say is the truth.”

The restrained law man glared at her.

“All you have to do is say … my son is a werewolf.”

Melissa’s eyes narrowed as the last piece fitted into place. “How … dare … you.”

Deucalion chuckled. “As entertaining as this conversation would no doubt be, I have an endgame to plan. So, remain quiet, or I’ll have your mouths sealed.”

Kali went over to where Deucalion was standing. “And now?”

“Now, Kali, we let the dust settle. Just for a little bit.”
Stiles Stilinski

Chapter Summary

Stiles goes to see Scott, because eventually it had to come to this.

“Time is the fire in which we burn,” Stiles told the stars twinkling in the night sky. He closed his eyes so he could try to recall what it felt like before he had learned the supernatural existed. For years, there would have been someone who got what he meant immediately, for they had watched *Star Trek: Generations* together while rain pounded on the windows of his bedroom. Stiles would have to explain what the quote meant to him to the people in his life now.

Of course, that was the reason he had come here. It was long past time for him to put things right between him and Scott. When he left his own home, he had had a few ideas on how to do that, but his surety had fled with each step. He chewed on his thumbnail as he stood shrouded in the darkness at the edge of the street.

The McCall house stood before him, and for some reason beyond his comprehension it seemed vaguely threatening. He remembered when he had been in this house almost every day. He’d walk in the front door without knocking, with his own key, like it was a second home. Before everything had been destroyed, he had spent so many nights here that they eventually gave him his own shelf in the medicine cabinet in Scott’s bathroom and his own place in the hall closet.

Now, the hair on the back of his neck stood up as if he were entering a lion’s cage. Now, his stomach churned with regret.

The old lamp in Scott’s room was burning, the only light in the house that he could see from the street. Stiles’ senses had always been better than Derek’s other betas, so he was confident when focused his hearing. Stiles could hear only Scott’s heart beating on the second floor; there was no else in the house.

Stiles sniffled. “You can do this.”

He had given a lot of thought on the way over on how to approach this situation. Should he call first? That’s what a normal person would do. He may not have Scott’s cell phone number anymore, but Melissa had a land line. He could ring him up and ask to come over.

But what if Scott said no? Stiles, alpha or not, was not infinitely brave. If he couldn’t bring himself to do this tonight, he might not ever be able to try again.

He could knock on the front door, taking Scott by surprise. He could try to talk his way in. Less chance of Scott saying no, but there was still a chance. He couldn’t risk it.

“The window it is then.”

Bad memories emerged from around the corner of the porch. The next-to-last time Stiles had climbed up the side of the McCall’s house had been the night he had been so eager to go out into the Preserve and look for a dead body. The last time he had gone through Scott’s window was when he had fled the scene, covered in his best friend’s blood.
But those were only the two most recent times. There had been other times. Happier times. It was those times he was trying to retrieve, so he pushed the other thoughts completely out of his head.

Now that he was an alpha, Stiles had little trouble climbing the porch and shimmying along the roof. In fact, he could do it with so easily that he was quiet in a way he had never been before. Scott hadn’t displayed any heightened senses, so maybe he could get inside without him noticing.

At the window, he peeked through the flimsy curtains. So much closer now, he could hear the scrape of a razor across skin through the bathroom door. Stiles searched for a line of mountain ash, his eyes glowing in the darkness. Scott had neglected to close the line at his bedroom door. It was Stiles’ lucky night. He opened the window as quietly as he could and slid inside, a shadow in the night. Or so he hoped.

He paused, stuck to the spot by the violent resurgence of guilt. As he had landed near the bed, he detected the smell of blood. It could only be because his senses had been amped up by his alpha status, as the blood was old, very old. Maybe a year old. The bedclothes and the mattress had been removed, but maybe the Argents hadn’t taken the box springs. Melissa had absolutely kept the bed frame itself. The McCall’s had never been made of money.

It was Scott’s blood, and Stiles had put it there.

He had never talked to anyone about that night, his second full moon. He hadn’t even told Derek the details, and the fact that he had kept it secret from his pack mates and his father had blown up in his face. He had liked to pretend it was water under the bridge – that remembering what had happened was just wasteful and stupid. But he remembered everything. He always had.

He used to dream about it every night, but now, a year later, it had become more like once a week. It was still too often.

The first week after he had been bitten had been filled with excitement and horror in equal measure. He had quickly figured out what had happened to him, delving into research as if possessed. The clues had added up quickly: the healing wound, the folklore, waking up in the woods, and seeing Peter in his monstrous alpha form.

He had only told Scott, and Scott hadn’t believed him at first. But it didn’t matter whether Scott had believed him, because when Stiles had begged him to help, Scott had done it regardless. The first full moon, planning to avoid both the alpha who they thought was the creepy Derek, they had gone to an abandoned building with chains and a padlock. At first, Stiles thought he would claw out of his skin, but Scott had sat on the other side of the door and talked to him all night. He had talked about video games and lacrosse and high school and their plans for when they finally graduated from it.

Stiles had never heard Scott speak so much at one time. Stiles had always been the one who dominated the conversations, usually with Scott nodding along in the background. But that night, that terrifying and wonderful night, Scott had held Stiles together with the power of his voice alone.

So, on the next full moon, ignoring what Derek had warned him about, they had decided to wait it out in Scott’s bedroom, with chains attached to the radiator if they needed to use it. It had began as well as the first full moon, but then Scott had mentioned Allison and a flash of jealousy had sent Stiles spiraling out of control.

Stiles closed his eyes. He’d spent so long trying to erase the feeling of Scott’s blood on his hands. Derek had told him, had pleaded with him really, that it was only a mistake and that he shouldn’t let it define his life, but Stiles could only think that his mother had been right all along.
Standing at the scene of the crime, he was hit from the side before he could go follow those dark thoughts farther. Honestly, he shouldn’t have closed his eyes in a possibly dangerous situation.

Scott slammed him into him, and Stiles felt some sort of knife slicing through his upper arm. He lurched sideways from the impact, smashing into the desk and scattering school supplies, framed pictures, and the contents of a glass of soda around the room.

Stiles tried to throw Scott off, but surprisingly, the human managed to pin him to the ground. As Deaton had explained, Scott was, and would be for as long as the Dolorous Stroke endured, his physical match.

“What are you doing in my room?” Scott hissed, switching position so the knife rested against Stiles’ throat.

Stiles didn’t move as the wound closed up on his arm. “I’m not here to fight.”

“So what are you here to do?”

“Talk.”

Scott stared him in the eyes until he finally pulled away the knife. He stood up, slowly and backed away until he was up against the door to his room. “You want to talk? Usually when your side wants to talk, it really means that you’re here to tell me what to do.”

Stiles waited took a few steps back to put enough room between them. His wound was already completely healed; luckily, Scott hadn’t used a poison knife. “I’m here to end this.”

Scott didn’t say anything in response.

“You have to stop.” Stiles squared up. “I can’t … we can’t do this. We can’t face the Alpha Pack and deal with you and whomever is backing you.”

Scott’s jaw set; anger seeped into the corner of his eyes. “That’s sort of the idea, Stiles.”

Stiles took a deep breath, staring at Scott in exasperation. “I still don’t understand what you’re trying to prove?”

“Werewolves are killers.”

“That’s a generalization.”

“It’s really not. It’s a pathology. How many werewolves have you met in your life, Stiles?”

“We don’t have time for this.”

“No. You don’t have time for this. I have plenty of time, and unless your idea of ending this is trying to rip out my throat, then you’re going to listen to me for once in your fucking life.” Scott’s anger was palpable. “If spending time listening to me bothers you, just think of it as revenge for all those months you attended Junior Monster Camp while I rotted in a hospital!”

Stiles eyes glowed red, but he had to remind himself it wouldn’t do any good to try to force Scott to stop. He wanted the past back, so he had to undo the months that had turned them into the people they were now, and it was obviously going to be the hardest thing he’d ever done. He nodded in acquiescence.

“How many werewolves have you met in your life, Stiles?”
Stiles gritted his teeth; he recognized a monologue when it was imminent. He’d play along with Scott’s moralizing, if this was the price he had to pay for the peace he needed. “Twelve.”

“Of those twelve, nine are killers. Most of them have killed multiple people. Erica would have killed someone, but Isaac beat her to it. As far as I know, Boyd hasn’t killed anyone, but he helped cover it up. No one knows what Cora has been up to for six years, but let’s assume she’s the exception to the rule and has never murdered or conspired to murder anyone.”

“So generous of you.” Stiles made it sound as sarcastic as he possibly could.

“During my stay in the hospital, the Argents brought me their histories. Story after story of werewolves killing people over centuries. Do you know, the Argent family was founded by a hunter who stopped a werewolf called the Beast of Gévaudan? He was a werewolf in eighteenth century France who killed nearly five hundred people.”

“I’ve got some stories, too. Kate Argent? Gerard Argent? They ring a bell?”

“For every Kate and Gerard and Coach Lahey, I can point at a thousand human beings in this city alone who have never drawn blood in violence, let alone killed anyone. The percentages are not in your favor.”

“Those deaths didn’t happen without context!”

“Of course they didn’t, which is the entire problem.” Scott took step forward, his eyes glittering. “Their context is that those acts of killing are just a side effect of how your species thinks. It’s how your species sees other people that leads to all this death. If it was just a series of unfortunate events, I’d have no chance to get what I want.”

“And what do you want?”

“For all of you to kill each other.” Scott’s voice was cold and mean. “Or for all of you to stop killing. That’s it. Either way, my story ends with no more bodies. No more worrying if my mother or someone else I love will be the next person to get in the way of your context.”

“You’re talking about us as if we’re not human anymore.”

Scott started to laugh, and it wasn’t a happy laugh. “But you’re not, are you? You remember Jackson from before all this? He was an asshole. He was a bully. He was just terrible. Stiles – the human Stiles – would have talked about killing him, but he didn’t mean it. The worse he would have actually done was playing a practical joke. If it had got really bad, he would have tattled to Jackson’s parents or the principal.”

“I am that Stiles.” Stiles opened his mouth to explain that Jackson was killing people so he had to die, but since he only became that monster after a werewolf bite gone wrong, he didn’t want to add to Scott’s argument.

“That Stiles worshipped Lydia Martin. He studied her. He knew everything about her. He pierced her disguise of vapid head bitch in charge and saw the brilliant force of nature beneath. He would never even dream of hurting her. The idea that he would pal around with the man who killed or follow the man who ordered her death would have made him sick to his stomach. But here we are.”

“Lydia was a mistake.”

“No.” Scott hissed. “It was standard procedure. That’s how it is with werewolves. To a werewolf everyone is pack or not pack. Everyone is a threat or not threat. How you treat people – how you
see them – depends on where they fall in those decisions.”

“That’s not true. My dad …”

“Pack is family, Stiles. How many times has Derek told you that you’re brothers now?”

Stiles stared at Scott in irritated bewilderment. “You really think we sit around and talk about our next victims? We gather over Derek’s kitchen table and go over list of targets?”

“No. I don’t think you think about it at all. I think you go on instinct. You see a threat, and you go for the throat.”

Stiles snorted. “We’re not animals.”

“So what were you thinking when you stabbed Ennis in the heart with my blade, Stiles? What was your goal there?”

“I was thinking he had fucking beat Isaac to death with his bare hands!” Stiles screamed out. “God, what the fuck is wrong with you? It’s not wrong to want revenge.”

“Actually, in California it is. In the United States it is. In every human civilization since the invention of the printing press, it has been.”

“We’re not …” Stiles trailed off. In his anger, he had almost declared that he wasn’t human. He bit his tongue hard, glad his fangs weren’t out.

Scott didn’t bother to gloat. “You might be thinking that what I want is revenge. I don’t. If the Hale Pack and the Alpha Pack decided right this instant that they were done with their homicidal killing sprees, I’d walk away. I’m not a Hunter. I never will be.”

“Because once you get what you want, you’ll lose your power.”

“Yeah. Then I’ll be a cripple again.” Scott shrugged.

“Don’t say that.”

“Don’t say what? The truth?”

Stiles took a step forward. “No matter what the Argents and the druids have tried to turn you into, I know you better than they do. I’m your friend.” Stiles took another step forward, imploring. “I know that I said it before, but I’ll say it again: I’m sorry for what I did to you.”

“You’re … sorry.” Scott threw the knife in Stiles’ general direction. It wasn’t anywhere close to Stiles’ body, but it sank into the wood of the window frame.

“Hey!”

“I don’t want your fucking apologies!” Scott shouted. “You don’t even know what you’re apologizing for!”

“I … don’t?” Stiles turned to look at the bed. “What are you talking about?”

“You and Derek and your father – you all think I don’t get it was a fucking mistake? That I don’t understand that you were out of control? That I didn’t know what I was doing when I volunteered to be there that night?” Scott sneered.
Stiles blinked. “You’ve never said –“

“I never said I didn’t blame you because you weren’t there for me to say it to! You didn’t give me a chance! You abandoned me. We were friends for ten years, and then I was nothing to you.”

“I couldn’t go see you. It wasn’t Derek, it was the guilt. I couldn’t imagine a way to talk to you, to even try to explain.”

“Of course, it’s you. It’s all you, Stiles.”

Stiles swallowed. “What do you mean?”

“What you’re feeling at any given time is more important than anything else – more important than the law, more important than the truth, more important than our friendship. The moment you felt that guilt was the moment I stopped being your friend.”

Scott went over to the desk, opening the top drawer. He took out a crumpled Pokémon card.

“You kept that?” Stiles asked. It was the first thing he had ever given Scott.

“You were important to me, and I thought I was important to you. But I shouldn’t have said that I was nothing to you. I don’t think that could ever be true. I became a problem, and like all your problems, you ignored it until it went away.”

“That has nothing to do with me being a werewolf.”

“It has everything to do with you being a werewolf! Because suddenly I was not-pack and not-threat, so you could ignore me. When I came back to school, before I stabbed Isaac, you had no intention of talking to me, did you?”

Stiles raised both hands. “You’re not being fair.”

Scott shouted once again. “DID YOU?”

“NO!” Stiles roared right back. It was his first roar as an alpha and it shook the house. Out in the hallway, pictures fell off the walls.

“What do you really want, Scott? It can’t be just to demonstrate how much of a terrible person I am.”

“Isn’t it obvious? I thought I was the dumb one and you were the clever one!”

Stiles turned his head on the side in confusion.

“I want you to be my friend again.”

“What?”

“I want you to be the friend I knew, who joked about killing people but never really meant it. Who would fight bullies twice his size to protect people weaker than himself. Who would never sit idly by and let someone kill the girl he claimed to have loved since the third grade.”

“And if not, you’re going to kill me?”

Scott shook his head. “And if not, you’re going to kill you. You may not know the details of my plan, but you know the gist of it, so stopping me will be the easiest thing you’ve ever done. Find another way to stop the alpha pack other than killing.”
“How do you expect me to make peace with the people who killed Isaac in the worst way imaginable?” Stiles demanded.

“The same way you worked with the person who killed Lydia in the worst way imaginable.”

Stiles lifted his eyes to the ceiling. “We don’t have time for this black-and-white nonsense.” His phone rang. “People’s lives are at stake.”

“Exactly,” Scott said darkly.

The conversation ended there because the person on the other end was his father. “Dad.” He hoped there was good news, because this discussion was going nowhere.

His father’s voice was the false calm of someone trying to be calm when they were anything but. Stiles could hear the tension. “Stiles? Where are you? Are you okay?”

“Yeah. I’m at Scott’s.” He wasn’t going to lie tonight.

“Stiles.” His father’s voice faltered.

“Is there something wrong, Dad?” Stiles kept his voice steady to reassure his father. Scott’s belligerent attitude dropped and his face folded in concern. Stiles noticed and he appreciated it.

“Well, lots of things!” There was an edge of panic to the sheriff’s voice.

Stiles swallowed and looked Scott in the eye. “I’m fine, Dad. I’m over here talking to Scott. I’m trying to … work things out.”

“Good. That’s good. I hope it’s going well. Stiles, I …”

Kali’s voice shoved a poison dagger of its own into Stiles’ heart. “Your father would like to see you soon, Stiles.”

Stiles’ eyes glowed like bonfires, his claws lengthened, the case of his phone creaked. He shouted into the phone. “You … you don’t touch him! If you do, I’ll tear you apart.”

“In the history of impotent threats, Stiles, that one has to be in the top five.” Kali chuckled. “Your father is fine, and he will continue to be fine as long as you do exactly what we say.”

“Don’t do it, Stiles!” His father shouted.

Stiles' tongue felt too big for his mouth, pushing against his fangs. “What do you want?”

“Oh, that’s not for me to say. We have your father. Deucalion will be contacting you soon enough. Tell your father goodbye.”

“No.” This couldn’t be happening. “No!”

Kali cut the conversation short. The room spun on its access. He couldn’t focus. His body shifted randomly without control. He never realized when he sat down on his bed.

Someone was in front of him, pulling the phone from his hand. “Stiles. Let go.” The voice soothed him. “You’re going to need this.”

Stiles looked up at the figure trying to help him, face fully transformed, but it was like a different person in front of him. Gone was the antagonist, determined to punish him for his crimes. It was just
Scott.

“They have my dad.”

Scott frowned. “I heard. What are you going to do?”

The question shocked him into breathing. “I’m going to go get him back.” He stood up. Scott reached out a restraining hand. Stiles batted it off.

“You don’t even know where to look.”

Stiles turned to snarl in Scott’s face, but all he saw there was everything he had missed for so long. “I have to do something.”

“Stop.” Scott said gently. “You’re acting on instinct. You need to think.”

If Stiles wasn’t torn up by his father being in the hands of the Alpha Pack, he would have been savaged by the memories that assaulted him. This is what Scott had always done; slowed him down when he was rushing into one of his half-baked plans. Stiles couldn’t do anything but nod.

“You okay with Derek?”

“What?” Stiles squinted.

“Your alpha status hasn’t made things weird with Derek, has it?”

“No.”

Scott held up Stiles’ phone. “Call him. If you can use the phone without breaking it.”

Stiles didn’t take the phone until he was able to take his claws in. Scott stood in front of him, waiting patiently, for that to happen. In time, he took the phone and dialed Derek. He got only the voice mail, which was strange, as Derek didn’t use his phone that much. He left a simple, terse message.

Stiles looked at the phone scornfully. He had to fight every urge to throw it into the wall. “Why am I sitting here? I could follow him by scent, find out where they’re keeping him.” He stood up.

“You’re going to sit here and wait because this is a trap. You killed Ennis, now they want to kill you, and if you run to them now, you’re giving them what they want. You need – as much as I hate to say it – your pack.” Scott gently put his hands on his shoulders. “You’re going to sit here because Beacon County has a little over 1600 square miles, and it could take you a week to track your father down by scent.”

Stiles sat down. “You seem to care now.”

“I don’t want to see anyone die by running into a trap. I don’t want to see your father die.”

“Then help me find him!”

“I already know where he is,” Scott answered. “But I’m not telling you until you get Derek and the others to back you up.”

Stiles opened his mouth to protect but Scott looked directly at the phone. Gritting his teeth in exasperation, Stiles dialed again, only for it to go to voice mail.

“How do you know?”
“I may have … put a tracker on your father.”

“What?”

“An assault rifle wasn’t the only thing I took from Argent’s cache.” Scott looked a little sheepish.

“Why … did you … bug my father?”

“He’s the sheriff? Knowing where he is might come in useful.”

Stiles sighed. “When did you get so fucking devious?”

Scott shrugged in return. “I guess I never had a reason to be this way before.”

The phone rang and Stiles snatched it up and answered it without even looking to see who was calling. “Where the hell are you?”

“Is that anyway to answer the phone?” Deucalion’s voice was snottily amused.

“You sonofabitch, you better let my father go right now!”

“Come, Stiles. You know I wouldn’t take him without desiring something in return. You’re supposed to be the most intelligent of Derek’s betas.”

Stiles felt the rage flooding back. “What do you want?”

“See? I knew you could be reasonable. I have only one small task for you, and your father will be free and safe. Kill Vernon Boyd and Erica Reyes.”

Stiles’ eyes widened. “What?”

“I think I was very clear. I want a Hale alpha, and I want him or her to join us without the baggage of betas. Your killing of Ennis has removed you from that equation, but I’m no longer willing to wait until Derek sees the wisdom of my methods. If you get rid of his baggage for him, everyone can be happy.”

Stiles looked up at Scott. He’d been defending werewolves from the charge that they were killers minutes before. “Even if I would do it, I couldn’t. I’ve been an alpha for perhaps twelve hours. Do you really think that Derek’s going to leave me alone with them? Especially if he’s figured out that you have my dad?”

Scott’s face screwed up. He pointed at his ear. Stiles turned the phone on speaker.

“Your reputation is for your quick wit. I’m sure you’ll be able to manage something in the short time I’ve allotted you. Perhaps you could ask your former best friend for help? I assume that it is he in the room with you.”

Stiles looked up at Scott and shrugged. Deucalion probably had better hearing that most alphas.

“I’m not going to help Stiles or anyone else kill innocent people.” Scott answered, sternly.

“It should be easy for you. Since you’ve tied yourself to Stiles with the Rite of the Maimed King, you two make a dangerous team.”

A look of alarm shot across Scott’s face. Obviously, he hadn’t wanted the Alpha Pack to know this. But he recovered quickly. “It’s not that I can’t, it’s that I won’t.”
“But I think you will – you and Stiles both, because you love both of your parents very much. Because I have your mother as well, and because if Vernon Boyd and Erica Reyes aren’t dead by moonset tomorrow night, I’ll kill both your parents and send you their corpses.”

Deucalion hung up. As Stiles looked at Scott, he could feel the horror deforming on his face and then saw its mirror staring back at him.
Cora Hale

Chapter Summary

Cora goes looking for trouble and finds it.

Cora struggled to keep her rage locked in the back of her throat. It took all her concentration to walk down the halls of Beacon Hills High School as if she belonged there. She should belong there. She should be attending school as a junior and be running late for physics or English or civics or math. But she didn’t fit in; the Argents had taken the chance of a normal life from her six years ago.

The irony of the situation fed her anger, and in some sort of strange feedback loop, her anger fed her frustration. She had returned home only to find that it was no longer home. She had come back for her brother, only to find that he wasn’t really her brother anymore. To her, he seemed some weird ghostly echo of the boy she had once known. In the end, she had been captured by the Alpha Pack for nothing but bad memories.

Yet, failing to exert control over her fury was simply not an option. Growling out loud wouldn’t help Erica, who walked next to her pretending to be a normal high school student. Her brother’s beta wore, underneath a leather jacket, a magenta stretch mini dress which matched her eyeshadow but clashed with her ruby lipstick. It looked tacky, but only the dullest of clods could fail to notice that the tight clothing was holding Erica together and the makeup worked as a mask to hide her misery. One member of her pack had died and another was missing, and she wasn’t handling it.

“Are you going to be okay?” Cora demanded and immediately regretted the hostile tone she used. She should have tried reaching out even if she didn’t feel like it.

“I’m fine.” Erica repeated, just as her boyfriend and her alpha had repeated for the last twelve hours, and no sane person could have believed it.

Cora shouldn’t have been saddled with this blond basket case, but her brother had insisted that after what happened to the Lahey kid, no one was to be alone ever. So she was stuck with a person she didn’t know, she didn’t have the temperament to be kind, and she certainly didn’t know how to fake it. In the end, the alpha’s safety precaution was a meaningless gesture, meant to reassure everyone that they were safe. They weren’t safe.

Ennis had been an angry, vicious man. While she had been the Alpha Pack’s prisoner, he had always skipped straight to brute strength to get her to do what he wanted. While she didn’t doubt that Stiles had killed him, she knew it couldn’t possibly have been a fair fight. Ennis could have taken both her and Erica without breaking a sweat, if he were still alive.

And Ennis wasn’t as strong as the twins were in their combined form. He wasn’t nowhere near as good in a fight as Kali. And, finally and inescapably, the Demon Wolf’s power dwarfed all of them put together.

They weren’t safe at all.

“Where are we going?” Cora asked less to know and more to master the sudden fear that had overtaken her anger.
“They have the same class during first period.” Erica said, keeping her voice as level as she could manage.

“Do you have it with them?”

“No.”

Of course not, Cora swore silently to herself, *that would have been convenient.*

When they reached the door, it looked like Erica was going to walk straight into the room. Cora grabbed her hand. “What do you think you’re doing?”

“Checking to see if they’re in there.”

“We don’t need to go inside to do that. We absolutely do not need to be stalled by any student or teacher. Listen from out here.”

“Okay,” Erica said shortly. “I’m not stupid.”

“I know you’re not, but I can’t stress enough how much I don’t want to run into one of them. We find out what we need and then we get the fuck out of here.”

Erica bother to respond to that; instead, the blond werewolf tilted her head to the side so she could focus her hearing on the gaggle of students inside the classroom. Cora, meanwhile, took in a deep breath through her nose, sorting through the myriad different odors in the school, searching for Stiles’ scent. She’d only known him for little more than a week, but he was part of her brother’s pack, and his scent had been all over her brother’s loft. She could find it.

“I don’t hear them.” Erica said, her voice small and quiet. Despair tinged her scent.

“I can smell Stiles, but it’s an older scent. Probably from yesterday.” Cora clenched her hands. From the day he had become an alpha and thus a threat. “You need to double check me. With so many people around, I could have missed something.”

Erica complied. “I can smell them, but I can’t tell how old the scents are.” She looked down the halls. “We could ask in the administration office?”

“Do you think they’d really tell us?”

“I don’t know.”

Before they could make a decision, the door to the classroom opened up and the teacher poked her head out. “Can I help you?”

Cora shook her head. “No, thank you.” She would hope that the teacher would simply go away, but unfortunately, she was the one who had rescued her and Derek from the Alpha Pack in her car. That was quite a coincidence.

“Yeah, you can.” Sometimes Erica forgot that her man-eater persona was a front, and when she spoke, she sounded like the teenage girl she actually was. “Have you seen Stiles or Scott this morning, Ms. Blake?”

The teacher stepped out in the hallway and closed the door behind her. “I’m afraid not. Neither of them showed up to class. Neither did Vernon Boyd nor Isaac Lahey for that matter, and I know they’re all friends with each other. Did something happen?”
“No!” Erica answered, too brightly and too fast, but Cora could see her eyes filling with tears.

“No. We needed to talk to them. We’ll look elsewhere. Goodbye!” Cora pulled Erica away from the teacher and down the hallway. She only glanced behind her once, to see Ms. Blake watching them as they turned the corner.

“That didn’t make us look suspicious at all,” Cora complained, sarcastically.

“Well, excuse me!” Something snapped within the blond werewolf. “One of my closest friends was murdered in a totally horrible way and another one is missing, so maybe I don’t fucking care if I look suspicious. And I would totally appreciate you getting off my back.”

Erica turned and stomped away. She didn’t look back. Cora could smell the tears and the anger and the despair that the other werewolf had been frantically trying and failing to hide.

“Erica!”

Erica walked faster. Cora had to hurry to catch up with her.

“Stop. Erica, stop.”

The other werewolf turned around, dashing away tears and smearing her makeup.

“How the fuck do you move so fast in those heels?”

“I don’t care if you’re Derek’s sister. Derek risked everything to save you and all you’ve done is complain about him and complain about us.” Erica grabbed Cora by her jacket’s lapel. “If you don’t care, the least you could do is go away.”

Cora pulled Erica’s hand off her jacket. “I care.”

Erica sneered. “Sure.”

“I do.” Cora almost walked away, but she could feel how much Erica needed something to cling to. “I didn’t know Isaac. I don’t know Stiles. But I know pack. I know what it feels like to have one, and I know what it feels like to lose them.”

The other werewolf couldn’t meet her eyes. She drew in a shuddering breath, trying to master herself.

“It’s not that I don’t know you, it’s not that I don’t want to care, it’s that … I lost my whole family. Why do you think it took me six years to even start looking for Derek? I didn’t want to feel that again.”

“So leave.”

“I can’t.” Cora took hold of Erica’s hand. “As much as I hurt, as much as you’re hurting right now, we’re nothing without our pack. We’re nothing without our family. So I care. I just don’t like it that I care.”

Erica looked up and sniffled. “So what are you doing to do now?”

“We’re going to go find your pack mate. Or we’re going to go find that hunter and make him tell us where Stiles is. Come with me.”

Hand-in-hand, they walked down the corridor, but suddenly Erica stopped. “Do you smell that?”
Cora cocked her head to the side. “Blood. Where’s it coming from?”

They followed the scent to the Guidance Counselor’s office. Cora shot a look at Erica, communicating silently, and then she threw open the door.

The place was a mess. The desk was askew, everything that once sat on it tossed on the floor. A poster on the wall had been torn. On the ground, a black powder was scattered every, amidst drops of blood. All of the signs pointed to someone trying to fight off an attacker and losing.

Erica knelt down to handle the black powder. “Mountain ash?”

“I can smell an alpha as well.” Cora frowned. “Deucalion. Why would he attack your guidance counselor? Who is this woman?”

“Everyone likes Ms. Morrell,” Erica commented. “I talked to her before; she’s really good.”

Cora couldn’t figure it out. Was there something this woman knew that Deucalion needed?

“So,” said Ms. Blake from the door. “He figured it out.”

Erica jumped up a few feet in the air from where she was investigating. Cora, thankfully, simply whirled about, caught by surprise but trying to hide it. The fact was that they shouldn’t have been caught unawares, given their heightened senses, and especially given the ridiculous shoes the teacher was wearing.

“Ms. Blake, we were …” Erica began.

The woman raised her hand to interrupt. “We don’t have much time. You need to take me to Derek. Do you know where he is?”

Cora raised both eyebrows. “I’m not telling you anything until you tell me why you aren’t freaked out by finding us here!”

Jennifer locked eyes with Cora. “Marin is Emissary to the Alpha Pack and Alan Deaton’s younger sister. Deucalion’s taken her.”

“How do you know this?” Before the teacher could respond, Cora figured it out on her own. “You finding Derek and me that night wasn’t a coincidence.”

“No, it wasn’t.” The teacher looked nettled that her ruse had been discovered. “I need to speak to Derek right now.”

“We’re not taking you anywhere near him.” Erica stood up. “Does that mean you knew what was going on and didn’t’ do anything? You knew who the twins were and you let them do this?”

“That’s an oversimplification.” Jennifer rolled her eyes.

Erica walked over and grabbed the teacher by the arm. Ms. Blake pushed her off hard enough that she careened across the room and into the Just Hang in There! poster.

“What are you?” Cora demanded again. “No lies, or this conversation is finished.”

“I used to be an emissary.”

“Bullshit,” Cora snapped. “No emissary is that strong.”
Erica had straightened herself up as something dawned on her. “She’s the one that did McCall’s shitty tattoo.”

“You’re smarter than you look,” Jennifer snapped back, the helpful teacher mask dropping for a moment. Erica growled right back at her. “But none of that matters now. What matters is that Deucalion taking Morrell means that your pack is even more in danger than it was. So what you should do is, as I’ve been asking, take me to your alpha right now.”

Erica glanced at Cora, deferring to her.

Cora studied the woman. The identity of the druid who had conducted the Rite of the Maimed King on Scott McCall was something Derek had admitted he really needed to know.

“I can help you find Stiles,” Jennifer offered.

Cora cursed. This women knew how to manipulate people. “Fine. But you step one foot out of line, and all the power in the world won’t save you.”

~*~

Cora stood in front of the loft’s window. It gave her a commanding view of the room and the people arrayed around it.

Erica and Boyd sat on the couch, holding hands to reassure each other. Boyd had been stoic and silent once they had returned, dealing with his own grief by focusing on others’ needs. Yet he wasn’t able to cover his own scent. The pair of them were watching Derek closely.

Derek stood in the middle of the room, wearing a sharp edge of wounded pride over the weary misery he was very nearly drowning in. Cora imagined the pain he must feel, that torn and missing limb where Isaac Lahey had been. But it was more than that – the fact that Stiles, even though he was an alpha – had not contacted them for over twelve hours had set her brother more on edge than she would have expected.

Jennifer stood facing him, defiant and demanding. Cora had to admire her. She had been involved in a conspiracy that sought to use Derek’s pack against the alphas and yet here she was, acting like she was doing them a favor.

“You’re going to need my help against Deucalion and the other alphas,” the teacher insisted.

“Why would I need your help?” Derek suggested. “You were working to destroy my pack. You might still be doing that.”

“I wasn’t.” Jennifer shook her head. “I was using your pack to stop them.”

“That’s not what Scott McCall said,” Derek shot back.

“Scott’s a child …” She turned and looked at the three people in the room who were Scott’s age and who were now glaring even more fiercely at her. “He wants to stop violence by demonstrating its futility. He always prattled on about how what we were doing had to mean more than personal revenge. He wants to make the world a better place.”

“And you don’t,” Boyd accused from the couch.

“I don’t. I don’t need to set a precedent, I need to stop the Alpha Pack. I want to stop the Alpha Pack, and so should you.” Jennifer pointed at Derek. “Deucalion doesn’t just want a pack, he wants
perfection. He will kill to get it, and he will keep killing until he does, including every person in this room if he hast to. But even if he does, he’ll never stop, because there’s no such thing as a perfect pack. I’ve seen his madness close up.”

Even if Cora couldn’t scent the rage, she could see it on the woman’s face. “What did he do to you?”

“I was Kali’s Emissary, and I was the one she couldn’t kill,” Jennifer said bitterly, “but that doesn’t mean she didn’t leave me with scars. I had to watch as she murdered her pack, her friends, my friends.”

“You don’t look scarred,” Erica pointed out, still angry that Ms. Blake had done nothing at the school.

Jennifer hesitated. Her eyes slid to Derek, shyly, fearfully. It was then that it occurred to Cora – Jennifer liked her brother. Cora snorted then, out loud. Ms. Blake obviously didn’t know how stupidly self-destructive that could be.

“I am scarred.” Jennifer hesitated once more, lowered her head, but when she looked up, her face was a ghoulish horror of puckered red flesh, warped and twisted as if someone had taken hold of the skin of her face and tried to yank it over the head.

There was an intake of breath from everyone, and a stunned “whoa” escaped from Boyd. Jennifer’s face returned to its beautiful shape and her eyes sought out Derek’s reaction. After the initial surprise, he had returned to his alpha-in-judgment face, but even Cora could see the softening around the eyes.

“It might be vain, but I use my skills to keep myself looking like this, because I couldn’t bear the thought of waking up and seeing that in the mirror every morning,” Jennifer admitted. “Self-loathing is a pretty powerful motivator; you don’t even want to know what my original plan was going to be. If I had stuck with it, things would have been a lot bloodier then they are now. It didn’t matter, because that is what has been happening ever since the Alpha Pack formed. This is what Deucalion does, so there will be more victims like me and more victims like Isaac Lahey until they are stopped.”

“So what changed?” Derek asked. “Why reveal yourself to us now?”

“Because Deucalion must have discovered that Marin was helping us. She was the third member of our conspiracy. She was the one who told me about the incident between Scott and Stiles. She was the one who shared with me what Alan thought about Scott’s potential, because she knew that I had been studying ancient rituals seeking a way to thwart the Alpha of Alphas. She knew I could use the Dolorous Stroke. She was also the one who told me that Cora had been taken by the pack. Deucalion has her now, and we are all in much greater danger.”

“You’re in great danger,” Cora sneered.

Jennifer returned the sneer with equal vigor. “Cora, you’ve witnessed Deucalion’s power, but his true threat is in his grasp of tactics. Secrecy was our only hope; we had to catch him unawares to be sure we could stop him.”

“I can’t believe that Ms. Morrell was the Alpha Pack’s emissary,” Boyd wondered. “If she was working against them …”

“It was the only way to get close,” Derek nodded.

“Marin believes in the Balance, and there’s nothing more unbalanced than that pack. Once he gets everything she knows, Deucalion will be able to turn what we’ve done against Scott and me and against all of you.”
Cora had had enough. “Why do you think we would even believe what you have to say?”

Jennifer jutted her chin out. “None of you heard what happened at the police station last night, have you?”

“What. Happened.” Derek was immediately on alert.

“The sheriff and a deputy were attacked. The deputy was badly hurt and the sheriff was kidnapped. Who do you think that was for?”

Cora watched her brother’s fist clench and his back tighten with rage.

Jennifer took a step toward Derek, almost gentle. “When was the last time you heard from Stiles?”

Derek’s eyes blazed red. He didn’t like what she was implying, and neither did anyone else.

“Stiles would never turn against us.” Erica stood up, dropping her grip on Boyd’s hand.

Jennifer tsked. “Stiles is a brand new alpha, full of power and instincts he’s not had a moment to process, locked in a struggle with the best friend he savaged and left for dead, trying to patch up his relationship with his only surviving family, and now that person, his father, is in the Alpha Pack’s possession. Stiles is the definition of emotionally compromised. You know it’s true, Derek.”

Derek’s jaw ground in silent affirmation.

“I don’t know how Deucalion will use Stiles against us, but he will. He’ll turn Stiles into a killer. That’s what he does.”

Cora could see Derek’s resolve weakening. “There is no us.”

“Fine,” Jennifer replied. “If you don’t want my help, you can handle it on your own, and we’ll all die. But I know how to find Stiles, and you don’t.”

Jennifer turned on her heel and head toward the door, but Derek surged forward and caught her by the elbow. “You know how to find Stiles?”

“No directly, but these two,” Jennifer gestured to Erica and Cora were head, “were looking for Scott and Stiles at the school. They were expecting them to be together, or at least for Scott to know where Stiles is. And I can find Scott – we’re connected by the Rite of the Maimed King.”

Derek’s eyes flashed once more. “Sit.” He pointed to a chair. “We may need you, but you need us, so you’ll do what I tell you when I tell you. Deucalion isn’t going to leave you alone, either.”

Jennifer narrowed her eyes but walked over to the chair on her ridiculous shoes and sat down. Cora throttled the urge to cheer.

“What do we do now?” asked Erica.

Derek drew himself up to his full height. Cora saw the echoes of her mother for the first time. “First, we find Stiles. We remind him he’s pack, no matter what the color of his eyes are.”

Boyd nodded in agreement.

“Then, we rescue his father from the alphas or whoever has him.” Derek continued. “We do it together. All of us. Because in the end, we’re a real pack. We’re stronger than they are.”
Derek turned to Jennifer. “Tell me how you can find Scott.”

“The Dolorous Stroke gives Scott power to match Stiles, but Scott wasn’t able to invoke that power by himself. I had to invoke it for him, which means I can draw upon it as well. All I have to do is tug on it, and he’ll tug back.”

Cora frowned. “Like pulling on a rope. That’s better than nothing, but we’ll be going in blind.”

“Scott isn’t going to hurt any of you. His goal was to do this without killing any of you himself.”

Derek shook his head. “And if we should be worried that Deucalion is going to turn Stiles against us, then we have to do the same for Scott, because he’s not exactly emotionally stable either.”

Jennifer didn’t say anything to refute it.

Derek pulled out his phone. “Let’s do this the smart way.”

“Who are you calling?” Cora asked.

“Scott, of course. I don’t know his actually phone number, but I’ll call his house.”

Cora wandered over to Boyd and Erica. “Are you two all right?”

Boyd had placed a supporting arm around Erica. “Yeah. You don’t know your brother anymore, but we trust him. He’s made mistakes; he’s made big mistakes, but he grew out of them.”

“And he’ll do anything to save Stiles.” Erica added.

Cora shrugged off the implication. “I don’t really care that much about Stiles right now. He’s an alpha.”

“You should,” Erica replied, seriously. “Unless you’ve missed what’s right in front of your face.”

Cora looked between the two of them. “What the hell are you talking about?”

Erica looked over at Derek, who was talking to someone on the phone, and was polite enough not to eavesdrop. She still lowered her voice. “When you dig your head out of your own ass and actually pay attention to the relationship between Stiles and Derek, you might be in for a surprise.”

Cora felt her brows come together. She turned to watch Derek on the phone. Erica’s words had stung her, but the truth was she had been looking for the old Derek, looking for an alpha like Talia. She hadn’t really been paying attention to Derek at all. Did he really feel something beyond the pack bond for Stiles?

She would look closer.

Derek hung up the phone. “We have a new problem.”

Boyd sighed. Cora walked over to where Derek was standing. “What is it?”

“Melissa McCall didn’t make it to her shift today. She no-called, no-showed.”

Jennifer cursed.

Cora looked back at Boyd and Erica. They shrugged.
Jennifer finally spoke up. “What he means is that Melissa McCall has never missed a shift at work without calling in, even on the day that she found her son half-murdered. The alphas have her, as well.”

“This isn’t going to be good is it, Derek?” Cora asked.

“No,” Derek turned to Jennifer. “Do what you have to do.”

Jennifer nodded and stood, closing her eyes. “I have a lock on him.”

“Should we get help?” Erica asked. “What about Dr. Deaton?”

Derek took out his phone once again. “I’ll call him but I want him at the clinic. We’re going to stay together, but if any of us get separated, I don’t want heroics. Go to him, and he’ll protect you.”

Cora was the last to leave the loft. She couldn’t shake the feeling that it was the last time she may ever see it.
Scott McCall

Chapter Summary

Stiles and Scott launch a desperate plan to save their parents.

Chapter Notes

Chronologically, this takes place before Chapter 17.

The Jeep idled in front of the stoplight. Scott sighed and put his phone away.

Stiles fidgeted in the driver’s seat, barely paying attention to the light, as he had barely paid attention to the road or the other drivers since they had left Scott’s house. His eyes were focused on something no one else could see while he muttered silent arguments no one was supposed to hear. It was a face Stiles had seen so many times before that he didn’t need to be told what it meant. Stiles was going over plans in his head. There would be a lot of them, good plans and bad plans, and he’d think about them all until he finally settled on one he liked enough to put into action.

There had been a time in Scott’s life when he looked forward to the moment his best friend made those decisions. After his father had left for the final time when he was seven, after it became clear that for some reason Rafael wasn’t interested in being a big part of his life, Scott had felt lost. Even though his mother had assured him again and again that it wasn’t his fault that they had divorced, a voice always whispered to him in the middle of the night that it had been caused by something he did. He was sure even though he couldn’t remember what had happened, he didn’t need to; he had proof.

Sometimes, when his mom and dad would be arguing, he’d walk into the room, and they’d immediately stop talking. There had been times when he had gotten physically close to his dad, and his mom would get all upset. There had been times when his dad went out of his way to avoid touching him. To a second grader, this was more than enough proof that he had done something to make this happen, and while years had passed and he had learned that sometimes people did things that weren’t about him, that feeling had never truly went away.

But Mieczyslaw “Stiles” Stilinski hadn’t cared about any of that. He hadn’t cared that Scott had made his dad leave. He hadn’t cared that Scott couldn’t run as fast or as long as the other kids. He hadn’t cared that it took Scott a little longer to pick up on things. Stiles would appear almost every day, like a thunderstorm, like an earthquake, like a cavalry charge, and he would always have a plan. Maybe the plan would be to play cowboys and Indians, or to go climb trees, or to watch cartoons, but it would always be something, and he always wanted Scott to come along with him. Scott really hadn’t cared that much what the plan was. He’d follow it, because, unlike his Dad, Stiles wanted to be with him.

Until he didn’t.

It hadn’t been a lie when he told Stiles it wasn’t the mauling that made him angry. Scott understood,
more so after the Argents had trained him, exactly what had happened that night in his bedroom. A failed anchor had caused more than one experienced werewolf to lose control, let alone a newly-bitten teenager experiencing his second full moon. Scott could have tried to forgive him, he could have tried to deal with the agonizing pain, and he could have made a new life for himself with his friend even with the restrictions of his body, if Stiles had been there to help it happen.

But Stiles wasn’t there.

Scott may have always been a little oblivious, but he understood how people worked. Stiles would have been torn up with guilt; after all, Scott had been friends with Stiles at the end of his mother’s illness. Scott had watched when Stiles tried to be extra good so as to not burden his father, even if he more often than not failed miserably. There was little guesswork involved for him in imagining what the days after that second full moon had been like for his best friend.

But still, Stiles didn’t seem to care what it had been like for Scott.

The first few days in the hospital had passed in a blur of drugs and surgeries, but even when Scott finally became lucid, Stiles’ absence hadn’t immediately bothered him. Since an alpha was trying to force his friend into a pack, Stiles had had enough to worry about. So Scott waited. Then he had heard that Allison had died in the final confrontation with Peter. Lying in bed, Scott couldn’t even lift a glass to his lips, yet he had still wished he could have been out there with both of them.

Days turned into weeks. He had assumed that Stiles would visit whenever the Argents weren’t around. He had even dropped hints to his mother about when specifically she could bring Stiles with here, so Stiles could feel comfortable. But he never came, and his mother had made excuses.

She did, however, bring him his cell phone, but Stiles didn’t call. When Scott finally recovered enough motion in his fingers to text, he discovered that Stiles had changed his own number.

Scott couldn’t lie to himself anymore – Stiles wasn’t coming. The Argents came though, both Mr. Argent and Mrs. Argent, and they explained everything. They told him about Allison. They told him about Gerard and the kanima. They told him about Lydia and Jackson. They kept coming for months and months.

It had never made up for Stiles not coming.

Yet, here he was, sitting in the passenger seat of Stiles’ Jeep in the middle of the night in Beacon Hills. It was almost like it had been before. Almost. The differences were a huge chasm between them. He wished Stiles wasn’t an alpha werewolf with blood on his hands, and they could be friends once again.

The light changed to green. Stiles took a second and then realized it, pulling it away.

Scott looked around. It hadn’t been that long since he had been in Beacon Hills. “This isn’t the way to Derek’s Loft.”

“Nope.” Stiles popped the ‘p.’

“Then where are we going?”

“You’re going to use that device in the backseat to find my father.”

Scott sighed. Stiles’ voice had been angry and insistent. “That wasn’t the deal.”

Stiles took in a deep breath and his eyes flashed their baleful red. When he spoke again, his voice
was light-hearted. “I am altering the deal. Pray I do not alter it further.”

Scott felt his face wrinkle in confusion. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Seriously?” Stiles asked the Heavens with a long-suffering moan, eyes looking through the roof for support. “You spent months immobile in a hospital and didn’t watch it? What did you do?”

“Read, mostly. But I mean it, why are you altering the deal? I’m not going to help you go charging in at the alphas and get yourself killed.”

“Not even to save your mom?” Stiles asked pointedly.

“Not even to save my mom,” Scott felt the words catch in his throat, but he forced them out. “Because we have time. We can find another way to save both of them.”

Stiles gripped the wheel so tight the metal creaked. “Does it make you feel superior?”

“What?”

“This crazed obsession with saving lives.”

Scott turned his head to face Stiles and let his mouth drop open. “Superior? You think trying to find an alternative to killing people is … acting superior?”

“Isn’t it?”

“Stiles, before this nightmare began, how many people our age did you know that had killed someone? How many people did you know who killed someone, period?”

Stiles didn’t answer.

“Your father has been a sheriff for eight years. He was in the army before that. How many people has he killed?”

Stiles annoyed shrug was so familiar, when Scott had made a point and Stiles didn’t have an answer for it.

“Do you think that your father approves of you killing to avenge Isaac?”

“Shut up about my dad.”

“Then stop trying to make it sound like I’m being unreasonable because I don’t want people to die.”

“Scott?” Stiles’ voice took on a timbre of disbelief. “Dude? You underwent an ancient druidic ritual that gave you super powers and turned me into your arch-nemesis but it might end up killing you if you’re not careful, so in my opinion, you left reasonable behind months back.”

“What was I supposed to do? How else was I supposed to get your attention?” Scott demanded, but the truth in Stiles’ words stung. It had been so easy when he had been in such terrible pain to contemplate the Dolorous Stroke. The doctors had been talking about pain management and quality of life. Allison’s temporary gravestone had finally been replaced with a permanent one, with beautiful marble flown all the way from France. Chris had come out and said that most he could ever expect of Scott would be to watch.

“Did you try smoke signals? Carrier pigeons?” Stiles rambled on, sarcastically.
Watching. Back then, that’s all that Scott imagined for the rest of his life. Watch the boundaries of his life shrink to almost nothing. He had lost his health, his friends, the girl he could have loved. In the end, the choice was clear. He could watch, or he could do something, and the only thing he had found that would allow him to do something was becoming the Maimed King.

It had to mean something. It would mean something, even if it only meant that Stiles was talking to him again.

Forgetting what Stiles was now, Scott whispered. “You were worth it.”

Stiles looked over at him sharply. Scott felt himself flushing in embarrassment. The jeep continued to ramble down the road.

“No, I’m not.” Stiles said bitterly.

Scott cleared his throat. This was simply too awkward. “So, why aren’t we going to your pack?”

“Because I can’t reach them on the phone. I’ve tried six times, so I think they must be using a cell-phone jammer or something like that. That means Deucalion wants me to go there.” Stiles said confidently. “I think his plan is supposed to work one of two ways. Option one: you and I track down my pack and attempt to kill Erica and Boyd. If we win, Derek no longer has any betas and thus no reason not to join the Alpha Pack.”

“He has Cora.”

“Cora is his sister, but I’m not sure if she’s pack yet. She hasn’t had time.” Stiles shrugged.

“And what if we didn’t win?” Scott thought that was more likely.

“We’d be dead, but … they wouldn’t get out unscathed. They’d be wounded and demoralized and they’d still have to be deal with a physically stronger Alpha Pack. Deucalion would have the upper hand again. Neither of which is going to happen.”

Scott smiled, not at the thought of dying, but of the conviction in Stiles’ voice that Option One was unacceptable. That was the Stiles he knew.

“Option Two is that we go to Derek and get his help after we explain what’s happened. He mounts an attack to rescue our parents—“

“Would Derek do that?” Scott only knew Derek from his creepy behavior when Stiles was first bit and from the Argent’s reports of his body count during the time of the kanima.

Stiles’ eyes flashed red. “Scott, Derek isn’t who you think he is. I know … I know you think he’s just as big a killer as his uncle but … but it was nothing like that.”

“Don’t defend him.”

“I’m not. I’m not defending us.” Stiles stated. “Because I know you won’t listen now. Maybe someday you’ll believe differently. But trust me – I know that’s hard for you now, but you used to – Derek won’t let your mom die.”

“Okay.” Scott didn’t trust Derek at all. It was hard to do so when he couldn’t count the bodies that Derek was responsible for on both hands.

“As I was saying, Option Two is that we go to Derek and explain what’s happening. He mounts an
attack to rescue our parents, but it’s a disaster. All Deucalion has to do to win is focus on killing Erica and Boyd – which is not happening – and he gets his way. Deucalion can do it himself when the attack comes, or he can try to force us to do it with his claws on our parents’ throats.”

“So, instead …” Scott prompted.

“You and I are going to take advantage of the fact that he has to have people watching the loft and, I’m betting, he has people watching the police station, to sneak into wherever they have our parents and free them without the Alpha of Alphas being the wiser. So get out your doohickey and tell me where to go.”

“Okay.” Scott got the tracker out and turned it on.

“Okay? No questioning?”

“Nope. You had me at ‘sneak in.’”

The distillery was on the very edge of the county, on the other side of the preserve. It had been the site of an illegal bootlegging operation during Prohibition, but when the amendment had been repealed, the owners had turned it into a legal business.

They were still in the preserve when Stiles pulled the jeep off the road and into a thicket.

“We still have a few miles to go,” Scott pointed out.

“Driving up to it in my jeep is going to blow any chance of stealth.” Stiles rolled his eyes.

“True.”

“So, you’re going to teach me how you concealed your scent and how we can hide our heartbeats.”

Scott hummed. “All right. Come on.” He had snatched a bag before they had left. He produced two sets of coveralls and ponchos.

“What is this?”

“Scent blocking clothing.” Scott began repeating what he had been trained. “Scent is nothing but molecules. This clothing captures yours so animals and people with enhanced noses have less of a chance of picking you up.”

Stiles grimaced. “It looks bulky.”

“Our natural grace will help compensate for the weight.” Scott started putting the outfit on. “And I’ve had practice using it. We’ll also have this.” With his head he gestured toward a white noise generator.

“For our heartbeats?”

“Yep. It’s tuned to obscure that sound as much as possible.” Scott explained. “It’s not perfect. None of this is perfect.”

“I don’t need it to be perfect. I need it to work once.” Stiles said shortly.

Scott paused at Stiles’ tone. He looked at him and had to remind himself that he wasn’t just a werewolf. It was Stiles, and someone Stiles loved was in danger. That meant no holding back.
“We’re gonna save them.”

“I know. It’s my plan!” Stiles turned to look at him. “Let’s get moving.”

Stiles was an alpha; Scott mimicked his power, so the three-mile hike through the Preserve was nothing to either of them. Scott chuckled; they must have looked like a pair of game hunters, but neither of them had rifles. Scott didn’t have the assault rifle anymore; Chris had taken it back. But he have knives – one poisoned, one not – and he had a stun baton. If everything went well, he wouldn’t even have to draw them.

Stiles took the lead. Scott followed behind. His friend’s – yes, he could say that now – his friend’s eyes were fixed forward. Both of them watched looming outline of the distillery appear in the darkness, framed by stars.

“Wait.” Stiles hissed.

Scott slowed to a stop.

“There.” Stiles whispered, pointing with a hand to a rickety lean-to behind the distillery proper. “I don’t recognize it.” Stiles looked at him with questioning eyes.

Scott nodded. Stiles would have recognized the scent of a werewolf. He would have recognized his own father’s scent and his mom’s scent. Scott moved off in that direction.

Stiles caught him by the sleeve.

“We have to check.” Scott whispered back. He shook off the hand and headed in that direction. The door to the shed was shut but not locked. With one last glance back at Stiles, he opened the door, making as little noise as possible.

A figure lay on the floor. Scott couldn’t make it out in the darkness. A waxing gibbous moon had allowed him to navigate through the woods, but the moonlight wasn’t bright enough inside. The figure wasn’t moving. Scott went to check the body. Stiles closed the door behind them.

It was a woman. She had a pulse, but she wasn’t response to his touch. Taking a risk, Scott remove a tactical flashlight from his pocket and snapped it on. The figure was Marin Morrell. She was alive; she was breathing, but her eyes stared vacantly into his. Scott was filled with revulsion. What had happened to her?

Intimately, Stiles put his lips on Scott’s ear. “Our guidance counselor?” Scott closed his eyes at the touch. He hadn’t been touched by Stiles without anger for over a year.

“Emissary. Alpha Pack.” Scott answered, speaking the words so quietly no one but a werewolf right next to him could hear it. “She worked with me and Jennifer. I don’t know why she’s like this.”

Scott bent down and whispered in the woman’s ear. “Marin? Marin?” No response.

Stiles reached out and turned her head gently and then brought the Scott’s faint light to show the back of her neck. Claw wounds had bled freely there. It wasn’t enough damage to cause this. Stiles shook his head and brought his lips back to Scott’s ear. “Deucalion can take memories.”

Scott checked her over, but that was terrible news. Deucalion must have figured it out, which mean he knew about the Rite of the Maimed King, so he understood how big a threat Scott might be. No wonder the Demon Wolf had taken his mother.
Stiles pulled at his sleeve. Scott looked at him and then gestured at Mrs. Morrell. She was Deaton’s sister. Stiles shook his head.

This wasn’t the place for arguing. One angry word spoken too loudly and their chance to steal their parents away from the alpha pack is gone, but the warm feeling which had blossomed earlier in his chest wilted. He could read the truth in Stiles’ face; he didn’t care about her.

Scott would come back for her. He had to.

Scott tried not to let his disappointment and his judgment get in the way. The tattoo on his chest burned with his frustration.

The distillery might not have been easy to navigate, filled with stored tires and old equipment, but it make it easy for Scott and Stiles to sneak in through the back. Once inside, Stiles held up a hand, cocking his head. One finger. Two fingers. Three fingers. There were three people here.

Scott pulled the mouth flap of his scent coveralls down so Stiles could see his lips. Mom and Dad? He mouthed.

Stiles smiled a brittle smile in answer. Their parents were there, which meant there was only one alpha. Tense with anxiety, they crept forward. Snatch and grab, Scott told himself. We’re going to snatch, grab, and run.

They crawled around an old vat, and then they see the three of them. At a rickety table, the sheriff was handcuffed to a chair; at the other end, his mother was the same. She was asleep, her head falling forward slightly. He could barely hear her soft, measured breaths. It took everything he had not to run to her.

But he didn’t, because standing near the front doors, in front of a huge spiral drawn by werewolf claws, was Deucalion. His white cane was in hand. He seemed to be alone.

Of course, it had to be the Demon Wolf.

The alpha grabbed his hand. Why did Stiles do that? Could the white-noise generator not be doing enough to cover the jack-hammering of his heart? Scott took a breath and forced himself to calm. He nodded his thanks to Stiles, but Stiles blinked.

Maybe Stiles had just wanted reassurance.

Whatever it had been, Stiles didn’t hesitate for long. He pointed at Scott and then at his mom, and then pointed at himself and then at his dad. Snatch and grab. The alpha hadn’t let go of Scott’s hand, and then he squeezed it once.

Twice.

Three times.

They moved fast, as fast as only alphas could, and Scott was now at his mother’s side. He felt forced to put a hand over her mouth – her eyes shot open and Scott put the index finger over his mouth. Then he went to where the cuffs were hooked to the chair. He tested them, about ready to snap them off, when he heard the cultured tone of Deucalion’s voice.

“It’s quite too bad for you.” Deucalion moved fast across the room, gracefully, as if he wasn’t even blind. His eyes glowed a baleful red. Stiles, roaring and without hesitation, met him halfway.
It was a hopeless, futile gesture. Stiles wasn’t a great fighter. Scott yanked his mother free, smashing the chair over her startled protest, and dragged her with him to the sheriff. He didn’t have time to explain. He smashed that chair as well.

Stiles was thrown back to where they were, slamming into the table. He had done little with his attack on Deucalion but get the side of his face bashed in and a line of bloody claw-marks down his chest.

“Oh! Here!” Scott commanded. There was a moment, a terrifying, horrific moment, when Scott was afraid that Stiles would launch himself into futile combat once again. Yet, with one last glare at the Alpha of Alphas, Stiles stuck to the plan and scrambled back over the table.

As fast as Deucalion was moving, he couldn’t move faster than mountain ash. Scott threw a perfect circle around exactly the way Jennifer had taught him.

“Clever, but only a short term solution.” Deucalion wasn’t even breathing heavily. “I must say, this whole exercise shows remarkable skill. You’ve dampened your scents. You’ve hidden your heartbeats. But you couldn’t hide your parents’ hearts. Tsk.”

“We’re just full of tricks,” Stiles snarled back. He was still transformed. In Scott’s arms, his mother trembled and then looked at him, questioningly. Scott shook his head; he wasn’t a werewolf.

“So I learned, when I plundered poor Marin’s mind for the details of her conspiracy. Say what you will about her, she was willing to put her life on the line for what she believed.” The corner of Deucalion’s mouth twisted up. “It’s a pity that she failed.”

Scott didn’t say anything. He wasn’t interested in provoking the evil alpha or defending his own actions. Stiles, on the other hand, was.

“She hasn’t failed yet. We’re still going to destroy you.” Stiles snapped the cuffs off of his father’s wrist.

Scott handed his mother to him so he could do the same. “I’ll explain everything later, Mom, I promise.”

“No, do you even know what all this means?” Deucalion’s cultured accent lilted across the room. “I chose this place not only for its remoteness, but for its history.”


Scott thought about it for a moment. “This is where you lost your eyes.”

“Where they were taken from me. I see, Scott, that Marin was correct when she thought you were perceptive, even if you are woefully naive.” Deucalion clapped slightly as if they were at a garden party. “Here is where I learned that power is the only thing that makes a difference. All the diplomacy, all the optimism, all the hope – it’s meaningless without the power to back it up.”

“I’m sure you learned wonderful lesson, but if you’re trying to intimidate us, you’re wasting our time,” Stiles smirked. “You and your cronies can’t get past this mountain ash.”

“And you can’t leave it.”

“I don’t need to,” Stiles triumphed and slide to the side. “I’ve already alerted the police. I can wait all night behind this circle for them to get here.”
The Alpha of Alpha’s eyebrows raised in surprise. “Tactically advantageous … if I believed you would be willing to risk both your father’s deputies and the revelation of the supernatural. Even so, there is a slight flaw in your plan.”

Scott frowned. He glanced back at Noah and Melissa. They seemed to be holding up okay.

“What would that be?”

“I’ve never been too fond of Emissaries, as useful as they could be,” Deucalion began. “I kept Marin around because she other pacts expected me to have one. I was suspicious – and obviously my suspicions were confirmed – about her motives, and I was worried that I didn’t have a counter for her abilities with mountain ash.”

Stiles crossed his arms.

“Eventually, I discovered the limitation on the use of the ash – it relies on the spark of will provided by its wielder. You don’t need to break the line; all you have to do is rob it of that spark.”

Scott glanced at Stiles and Stiles winked back at him. “My friend Scott here has a strong enough will to keep you at bay for weeks.”

“I know. Marin and her brother were in agreement that Scott had potential, being gifted with a forceful will and exceptional strength of character. They were quite upset when you went and spoiled it, Stiles.”

Stiles’ face fell before he could stop it. Scott took a step and put a hand on his friend’s shoulder.

“Stiles spoiled nothing.”

The Demon Wolf chuckled. “Didn’t he? So tortured, so desperate to reclaim what he had taken from you, you endured the Rite of the Maimed King. I wonder, after everything you’ve suffered Scott, how much will you actually have?”

“Enough to keep us safe until the police get here.” Scott stated. He didn’t know if the police were coming.

“Possibly, you’ve become quite adept with the mountain ash, I agree. Druids and their herbs.” Deucalion took something out of his pocket. “I learned a bit about them from Marin. Take this herb for example.” He held up a vial. “Mistletoe. It’s both a poison and a cure.”

“I know,” Scott said, narrowing his eyes.

“Which means …” Deucalion’s voice grew cold. “You can use it, and it can be used against you.”

With a flick of his wrist, the enemy alpha tossed the contents of the vial at Scott. His first reaction was to brush at his face as the powder got everywhere, but in the next moment, his breath caught in his lungs. His back, his arms, felt like they had burst into flame. It was like when he first woke up in the hospital, only magnified.

He tried to say something, tried to warn Stiles, but he couldn’t. Because he couldn’t breathe. His lungs had closed up and he couldn’t relax, he couldn’t get them to open. He couldn’t talk. He fell to his knees.

“Scott!” Stiles cried. “Scott! What’s wrong?”

“He’s having an asthma attack,” Deucalion observed, matter-of-factly, “and I doubt he brought his
inhaler. Eventually, he’ll die, but first, he’ll lose consciousness, and when that happens …”

Scott’s fell over even as he felt his mother rush to his side. He could see the mountain ash line in his vision even as his sight blurred.

Deucalion had assumed full alpha shift, all trace of humanity vanishing below fur and fangs. “Then I’m going to kill all of you.”
Chapter Summary

Melissa McCall only learns of the beginning at the end.

The world had gone mad.

Six hours ago, while the world had been both stressful and disappointing for Melissa McCall, it had still made sense. She had just finished a shift which had seen a seven-year-old accidentally shot by her brother, a sixteen-year-old overdosing on Robitussin, the victims of three separate car wrecks, and a priest who had a heart attack during Mass in the Emergency Room. As a consequence, her scheduled eight-hour shift had clocked in at a little shorter than sixteen hours. She had been looking forward to going home and then taking a long shower, eating the leftovers in the fridge with her son, sleeping forever, or any combination of those three.

The parking lot hadn't looked any different than any other night, and she had only been twenty feet from her car when she was picked up, bodily, by two nearly identical young men whom she had never seen before. They had moved so fast that she hadn't had time to get to the pepper spray out of her purse or even scream for help.

As they dragged her into a car, her mind kept flashing back to all the victims of assault she had treated. She determined she would survive, no matter what. She had far too much in her life to give up.

Then things had gotten stranger.

She had never been anywhere near the abandoned factory on the outskirts of the county where they had taken her, but she was sure that no one would hear her screams if she began, and she didn’t want to provoke her abductors. She noted with irony that she had completed supported Rafael’s idea to move here and away from the dangers of the big city. Given what happened to Scott and now this, she started to believe it might be good for her to rethink her decision.

She bit down on the inside of her mouth to keep herself from laughing hysterically. The taste of blood calmed her.

With surprising gentleness, the twins had carefully handcuffed her to a metal table before leaving her with some man who had a generic British accent and a frequent smirk. Other than that courtesy, they refused to answer her questions, which was to be expected, but they also hadn’t seemed worried that she had seen their faces, which was disquieting. When she had tried to suggest that they release her for the fifth time, the older man, who had introduced himself as Deucalion, told her that she needed to be patient.

“You’ll receive all the answers you need when the time is right.”

The first answer that she received had been werewolves. Her fear at being kidnapped, slowly having been numbed by exposure had suddenly been replaced by new terror. Once her mind had started working again, it had taken a few minutes to force herself to accept that this was real. It was only after she had been sitting for a few hours that her terror had been replaced with cold anger.
The second answer she received had been lies. She had been lied to by Scott, by Stiles, and most infuriatingly, by Noah. She had also been lied to by that kind family who had helped her cope with Scott’s hospital bills, even as they insisted that they would pay for what her insurance couldn’t and they would provide Scott with a home in San Francisco as he underwent painful rehabilitation.

The third answer she received had been it wasn’t an animal attack. She had been allowed to believe that story, and there was a part of her – a small part – that was still grateful. It had enabled her in those first few months to move forward. She had been able to be supportive, to go to work, to tell everyone that needed to be told the gruesome details, to pick her and her son’s life back up as much as she could.

Yet, moving forward had simply been an illusion; she hadn’t had any control in her life and she could never have really been there for her son. How many times had she encouraged him to get back up on his feet without understanding what he had been going through? How many times had she told him that this was not a judgment upon him but an accident? She had said that word – accident – so many times during the long months in the hospital, for she had seen how other patients had let their new disabilities become who they were, and she was determined not to let that happen. She thought she had succeeded.

Her son had lied to her face, and she wondered if he had lied to her because he was ashamed or if he had lied to her out of some misbegotten need to protect her. When their lives weren’t in incredible danger, Scott had better believe that they were going to talk about it.

They were also going to be talking about the Argents, because when her son had burst into the room clad in hunting gear and carrying knives, the final piece had clicked into place for her. Chris Argent had lost his sister and his father to animal attacks, and their daughter had been murdered as well. They were involved in all this violence, and they were most like one side of a war in which her son was now participating. They had recruited him.

She would not stand for it. Her son was supposed to recover from his injuries, go back to school, get his grades up, go to college and became anything he wanted in his life. He was not meant to be a soldier in someone else’s war, a war that had already cost him so much.

As for Stiles, she didn’t know what to think. She had always been there, watching over him, since his mother had passed. She saw what it had done to him; she had known what to look for when dealing with children whose parents and suffered a slow and agonizing death. She had tolerated him when he had acted out. She had comforted him when he had needed comforting. She had confronted Noah when things at their house had appeared to be spiraling out of control.

And what had she received in return? Stiles had dragged her son into the world of the supernatural, he had nearly killed him, and then he had deceived her. It felt as if he had stood up and physically attacked her son right in front of her. What would anyone think of a mother who just stood there and let some asshole – no matter how young he was – endanger her only child?

Stiles had avoided her for the last year, keeping any interactions with her short and to the point. She had been blind not to see that it was more than just empathy for the situation. It had been guilt.

She would have to work out her messy feelings about Stiles in due time, as well as trying to repair her shattered friendship with Noah Stilinski. The sheriff was an adult. He had been her friend, and yet he had stood in her living room and pretended he didn’t know what had really happened. She could understand why he would do that to protect Stiles, yet that’s what made her angrier, because, in doing so, he had denied her the ability to really help her own son. She felt she would never want to speak to him again if she could manage it.
But she had bigger problems right now.

“What did you do to him?” She demanded of Deucalion, though she couldn’t bring herself to look him in the eye. He had transformed into a nightmarish mix of man and beast, and it made her heart feel like it was trying to tear its way out of her chest. She focused instead on Scott. His head lay in her lap as he struggled to breathe.

The monster moved away without answering. He folded up his white cane and placed it on a table.

“What did he do to him?” Melissa demanded of Stiles, while Scott tried to interrupt her from where he wheezed. “Don’t talk, honey. Try to keep breathing.”

Stiles glared at Deucalion, his face fully transformed. His red eyes glowed beneath a jutting brow and his fangs were long and sharp. He didn’t answer her either; she wasn’t even sure if he had heard her.

“Stiles!” Melissa raised her voice even louder. The sheriff put a hand on her shoulder and she shrugged it off.

When Stiles finally turned back to face her, it was as if a spell had been broken. He looked at her and at her son, and he was once again the kid she had scolded for making an extra key to her house. “Uhm.” It was incongruous the way the word sounded around his fangs.

“Don’t _uhm_ me. Answer my question.”

More and more of Stiles appeared as his monstrous features shrank away. “Long story short – Scott used magic to suppress his asthma and his nerve damage and to make himself super strong.”

“Magic!” Melissa sounded a little hysterical even to her own ears. “He said it was an experimental new medicine!”

“Well, it’s not new. He was taking mistletoe pills.”

Melissa worked her jaw. “So what did that lunatic douse him with?”

“Mistletoe.”

Melissa tried to stop the tears but she couldn’t; frustration broke the dams. “That doesn’t make any sense!” Before she could go on, Scott coughed, spasming on the ground. For all that it sounded terrible, it was a good sign because it meant he was still getting at least some air into his lungs, but she didn’t know for how long. He didn’t have his inhaler, she didn’t have anything with her, and given Deucalion’s dire pronouncement, she wouldn’t be getting either anytime soon. “I don’t know what to do.”

Stiles’ now completely human face crumpled in on itself. He knelt down beside her and took Scott’s hand in his own.

“What are you doing?”

“I’m taking his pain.”

Melissa watched as the thin black lines run up Stiles’ arms. She’d just accept it along with everything else for now. “Asthma is an inflammation of the lungs. Pain can come after the attack through either pneumomediastinum or in worse cases a pneumothorax.” She had no idea why she lectured him. It wouldn’t change the situation, but it made her feel better.
“It’s helping,” Stiles said through gritted teeth.

“But he needs to be careful he doesn’t draw too much,” Deucalion suddenly taunted.

“Why?” Noah burst out, breaking his silence. “What happens if he draws too much?”

“I know my limits, Dad.”

Melissa finally glanced up at Noah. His face implied that he had come to same conclusion about the price of drawing too much. On the ground, Scott tried to push Stiles’ arms away from him. Melissa caught at them.

“Shut up,” Stiles ordered nonsensically since Scott wasn’t able to speak. “You lie there.”

“Stiles,” Noah began.

“Dad, I’m doing this.” The lines on his arms wrapped around each other, spreading up to his neck. “I can’t fight off Deucalion long enough to keep you safe until the police arrive. Scott’s mountain ash circle is the only thing protecting you two. Let me do this.”

Minutes passed. Stiles would take breaks from drawing away Scott’s pain, and in those moments it was clear that he was getting worse. Melissa stroked her son’s head.

Deucalion had been watching all of them. “You have impressed me, Stiles. You have shown loyalty and determination. I’ll tell you what. If you demonstrate wisdom to me as well, I’ll let you go.”

Stiles let go of Scott for a moment. “You’ll let all of us go?”

Noah hissed at him. “Don’t trust him!”

“I don’t trust him, but he’s got no other reason to make that offer, so I have to think he might be sincere.” Stiles narrowed his eyes and shook his head. “I won’t kill Erica and Boyd for you.”

“There are other ways to get what I want. All you need to do is promise not to help your former pack.” Deucalion said amicably. “You and your parents can walk out of here, safe and free.”

“And Scott?” Stiles demanded.

“I would say that as either a hunter or a darach, he’s a threat to me, but he won’t for long. The mistletoe will take care of that for me, and nothing can stop that now.”

Melissa’s heart caught in her throat. The way that monster said it left no room for doubt.

“On the other hand, my patience is not inexhaustible. The offer extends until he dies which renders the ash circle impotent or until these deputies you promise are coming finally arrive. The choice is yours.”

Stiles swallowed. “He’s not lying.”

Scott reached out, gasping, and plucked at Stiles’ arm. He looked into Stiles’ eyes and then at his mother. He croaked out something that could have been “Go.”

“No!” Melissa shouted.

“No,” Stiles said firmly and picked Scott’s hand up to take pain once more. “We’ll get through this. I abandoned you once, but I’ll never do it again. You’re my best friend.” He squeezed Scott’s hand
hard. Scott blinked, still fighting to breath, sweat plastering his hair to his forehead. He returned the gesture, though not nearly with as much strength.

“So be it. Admirable devotion, but at the cost of your parents? Admit it, Stiles, no police are coming or they would have been here by now. Who’s going to save you then?”

Stiles looked up, eyes flashing red even as the lines appeared on his throat. “My pack.”

Both alphas’ eyes drifted to the large front doors. Stiles knelt next to Scott, and Deucalion stood in the almost exact center of the distillery. Their senses must be telling them what was going on beyond what Melissa’s could. They were waiting, with anxiety but without fear.

Melissa found herself hunching over Scott’s form as a sort of protective instinct. The air nearly shimmered with some sort of charge. Even the most human of them could feel it. Scott tried to rise once again only for his mother to push him down wordlessly.

“Stiles,” Noah leant over and breathed into his son’s ear. “What’s going on?”

Stiles snorted and then winced with pain. “What’s going on is that my plans suck. What’s going on is everything I didn’t want to happen.”

The front door to the distillery was burst open as a werewolf was thrown into it. Her clothes were torn and bloody, but she had no visible wounds. The claws on her hands and feet were long and sharp, and her eyes were intense beacons of red light. But she was smiling. She was having fun.

“Duke, it turns out that for all your chessboard maneuvering …” She regained her feet, her eyes never leaving the door. “It’s going to come down to a brawl.”

“My dear Kali, did I ever give the impression that it wouldn’t? The order of battle may be different then I envisioned, but the details,” He glanced back at his four captives, “are still in our favor. Do you happen to know where the twins are?”

Before Kali could answer, Stiles’ pack stalked into sight. Melissa recognized many of Stiles friends from the few times she had saw him in the last year. Derek Hale stood in the lead, flanked by Erica Reyes and a girl Melissa didn’t know but believed had to be a relative of Derek’s because of the uncanny resemblance. Vernon Boyd was backing them up from behind. To their left, obviously separate, was Ms. Blake, Scott’s English teacher, carrying what looked like an ancient broad sword.

Stiles gasped and staggered on his knees as he let go of Scott. The alpha werewolf looked a little pale, but, despite all his exertions, Scott’s attack wasn’t fading in intensity. In fact, it seemed that Stiles’ actions were simply prolonging it. Eventually, if it got too much for Stiles, Melissa suspected that Stiles would eventually have to completely stop, and the attack would take its unnatural course.

Derek raised his hand when his side reached the doorway. “You’re not going to get what you want. You’re not going to add a Hale Alpha to your deranged murder squad.” Derek’s voice sounded strong, like a commander. “You’re sick, but I give you one chance. Run, now, or we’ll take you down.”

“Really?” Deucalion smirked. “I’d like to see that.”

“Kali.” Jennifer pointed her sword at her. “Look at my face. Do you know who I am?”

Kali narrowed her eyes at the woman. She turned her head slowly to the side, perhaps taking in her scent. Finally, she nodded. “Yes, I do.”
“Then you know how this ends.” Jennifer stated, menacingly.

Kali sneered in reply. “The same way it was always going to end.”

Jennifer screamed and charged Kali. While Melissa didn’t think the English teacher seemed to be a werewolf, she exhibited the same strength and speed as the bare-footed alpha. The reach of her weapon gave Ms. Blake an advantage, but not much of one – Kali was clearly a better fighter.

Derek led the charge of the rest straight at Deucalion. Melissa was surprised; she thought her captor was supposed to be blind. He tossed Derek fifteen feet in the air on his first strike. Moving as if he could see just fine, he easily dodged Boyd’s and Erica’s claws.

The other girl ran up to the four of them but was stopped short by the ring of ash that Scott had thrown around them. Weird light flashed from the point where she ran into it. “Stiles!”

“I’m a little busy, Cora.” Stiles bent down and took Scott’s hand again.

“Have them break the seal! We need your help!”

“I can’t,” Stiles said. “I don’t think Scott will make it if I don’t keep doing this.”

Melissa’s heart clenched. She had been trying to distract herself from what her medical skills were telling her – Stiles was absolutely right. Stiles’ pain drain was keeping Scott alive, so moving him to where he could safely get medical attention was going to be dangerous, and Melissa wasn’t even sure how to tell a doctor that the attack had been caused by ground-up fucking mistletoe.

Cora snarled around fangs. It was very intimidating. “We don’t know if we can take them!”

In the background, carnage flew about the room. In the corner of Melissa’s eye, she saw Erica dragging herself on a broken leg away from the combat.

“Take my dad and Melissa. Go get an ambulance! Go get Deaton!” Stiles shouted.

“Oh, I’m not leaving him,” Melissa replied. “Or you.”

Stiles and Melissa locked eyes over Scott’s body, for the first time since she had known to truth. Both of them ignored Scott’s strangled attempt to communicate something to them. They both could predict what he was trying to say.

“I’m not leaving either,” Stiles father promised. “Though I wish I had a gun.”

“You heard them, Cora,” Stiles answered, squeezing Scott’s hand. “Go help. I’ll get all of them out of here. Trust me.”

Cora took one last look and then sprinted back to the fight.

“I like her,” Noah decided.

“Dad. Melissa. This is what we’re going to do. The jeep’s about a mile through the woods. Dad, when you break the line, I’ll pick Scott up and we’ll make a run for it out the back.”

Across the room, Cora jumped on Kali’s back as Jennifer, bleeding from a scratch on her forehead, scrambled for the sword that had been wrenched from grasp.

They shuffled into a positions. Stiles lifted Scott up, but Melissa couldn’t let go. “No.”
“We can do this.” Stiles was so human now. His eyes shone with unshed tears. “You don’t have any reason to, but trust me. We can do this.”

Melissa bit at her lip. She didn’t know what to do. All the standards by which she made decisions, all the things that made her think she was a good mother, a good person, were gone, swept away by the madness of this night.

Then she saw it. In his eyes, he saw the same little boy standing in the hospital corridor after his mother had died. The one that would have done anything, would do anything, to keep the people who mattered to him safe, even if it destroyed him. Especially if it destroyed him.

She could trust that. “Okay.”

Outside the ring, the fight continued, filling the distillery with noise and violence. Ms. Blake and Cora pressed the advantage against Kali; Derek, Boyd, and Erica were slowly losing against Deucalion. The final outcome could go either way.

Stiles saw that too. He could shift the tide of the battle, but that would mean leaving them. His jaw set with determination. “Dad, do it now.”

The sheriff stepped up and with his foot broke the line in the back. The moment he did however, Scott’s whole body spasmed and Melissa could swear she saw his throat close in on itself.

“What’s happening?” Melissa watched the edges of her son’s lip turn blue. “He’s not breathing. Stiles! He’s not breathing.”

Stiles panicked, the surge of his heart shifting him once more. “I don’t know. Maybe that backlash of the … I don’t know!” He latched once again on Scott’s hand, pulling the pain from him.

“We can’t stay here.” Noah whispered urgently.

Melissa didn’t let the words go past the surface of her brain. All her training told her that there was nothing she could do in the middle of a dirty old distillery. Her son was going to die. Even Stiles’ werewolf magic wasn’t getting Scott to breathe again.

Stiles stared at Scott’s face, turning blue. “Come on. Come on!” He shouted at him. He roared at him. “This is what I didn’t want to see. This is why I ran. Come on! Don’t do this to me.” Stiles clawed hands squeezed Scott’s arms so hard that thin rivulets of blood ran down to the ground. His eyes started glowing.

“Stiles.” Noah went to him. “Don’t go too far.”

Melissa felt the tears run down her face, but she didn’t say anything. She didn’t do anything. There was nothing for her to do. What was going to happen was going to happen.

Stiles snapped at his father, more like a wolf than anything else she had seen, and he never gave up. “Please,” he whispered around fangs. “For me.”

The roar brought a temporary lull to the fight. The combatants turned to the scene, as if they could feel it. They possibly could; Melissa didn’t know what to believe anymore.

Moments slowed to hours, but they still moved. Eventually, there’d be no more pain for Stiles to draw from Scott. Stiles roared once again, tears falling from his eyes, and then something changed. His glowing eyes sparked and faded from a searing red to a warm golden yellow.
And Scott drew a ragged gasp.

Melissa let out a cry of relief, laying her head down onto Scott’s chest to check to see if this was a one-time thing. She strained to listen and imagined she could hear his returned breaths becoming easier as they each followed after another.

Stiles collapsed but he didn’t reach the floor. His father caught him. “What did you do, Stiles?”

“I don’t know.” Weakly, he chuckled, but then grew grim. “What’s going on now?”

Melissa lifted her head when she sensed it too. White light was pouring from under Scott’s clothes. She tore at them, lifting up the hunting garb and the shirt underneath. His tattoo – the one she hated so much but didn’t say anything – was glowing.

Scott, throat raw, whispered so only the four of them heard it. “Balance.”

It was doing more than glowing. Each line, each drop of ink, was turning into light and dissipating. Soon it would be completely gone.

“Ah!” exclaimed Deucalion. He stepped forward suddenly and slammed Erica to the floor. “Touching, but that sacrifice means the Dolorous Stroke has been undone, and the pendulum swings in our favor. You’re down an alpha and two druids. You’ll find your opponent much less of a threat, Kali.”

Kali straightened herself up. “I’ll make sure this time, Julia.”

Ms. Blake sneered at her with bloodstained teeth and brought her sword up. “Go to hell.”

Derek helped Erica up and had her move behind him. As he was doing so, he stiffened and his hand went to his rear pocket. It seemed sloppy to get a phone call in the middle of a fight. “You’re not going to hurt anyone else. You’re not going to get me to kill my betas. Your time is at an end.”

“You can hardly stand, Derek,” the British werewolf chuckled. “You’re not in a position to make pronouncements like that.”

“Let’s see about that.”

Throwing himself forward, Derek tackled Deucalion picking him up and carrying him bodily. Almost lazily, the Demon Wolf put both hands together and pounded Derek into the ground, violently to the fact that Melissa swore she could hear bones breaking.

“Do you like pain, Derek?” The man asked, not unkindly. “You can’t win now.”

“I can’t win, no,” Derek answered defiantly, even as blood poured from his mouth. “But I got you to stand in front of the doorway.”

As quick as an alpha could be, he wasn’t quicker than a bullet that he didn’t know was coming. In quick succession, three large caliber slugs slammed into Deucalion, twisting him around and knocking him to the ground.

Kali immediately took in the situation. She saw her leader down, and even she could do math. She feinted toward Jennifer and ran out the back without a word, exercising the better part of valor.

“No!” Ms. Blake meant to run after her, but Cora caught her arm.

“You can’t beat her by yourself!”
“Then come with me!” Her rage was clear to everyone in the room.

Derek shook his head. “We’ve got Deucalion. Kali can wait.”

Painfully, he brought himself to a full height. He turned to the knot of people on the ground. Scott was still lying flat, while Melissa cradled him in happiness and the sheriff supported his weakened son. Derek let his gaze linger on the young men, especially Stiles. “Now we finish this.”

Deucalion was healing, still alive, but he was suddenly weak. “Argents,” he growled.

Chris Argent arrived out of the woods, shouldering a high-powered sniper rifle. He gestured for the two hunters with him to hang back as he entered the distillery.

“A wise man told me that I had to move past my fear,” Derek commented. “So I did.”

Deucalion coughed up blood. “Then you kill me. I won’t die at the hands of an Argent.”

“You’re not dying. Someone else, younger and not so wise, told me that all he ever saw was werewolves killing each other.” Derek glanced over to where Scott was watching what had happened. “He is wrong. My mother always said that we’re predators, but that doesn’t mean we have to killers.” He turned to Chris. “It’s ready?”

“They’ve got a cell at Eichen House for him,” Chris Argent answered. “I’ll keep my promise.”

Derek lifted both eyebrows.

“I know what my father did. It’s time my family stopped trying to cover up our mistakes and started trying to fix them.” Argent replied. “What about Kali? And the twins?”

“If they’re smart,” Noah called out. “They’ll leave.”

Blake threw her sword down in fury. Cora went over. She wasn’t exactly comforting the other woman, but they seemed to share the emotions about their enemies.

“So what do I do now?” Melissa asked. She wasn’t the only one thinking that even if she was the only one saying that. Boyd and Erica held onto each other as more of Argent’s hunters entered the distillery. Chris Argent kept an eye on the incapacitated Deucalion.

Stiles tried to stand, only to almost tumble over. Derek was by his side in a flash and steadied him. Stiles almost blushed. “Scott, are you okay? Can you stand?”

His voice was still ragged from the attack and he was still in pain, but his breathing was almost back to normal. “I’m better, but … I can’t push myself up.” The weakness in his arms and back had returned full force.

“Here.” Stiles stretched out his hand.

Melissa held her breath. She wanted to interfere, but, as her son had demonstrated, he was growing up. It had to be his decision.

Scott hesitated but stretched out a shaking hand. Stiles pulled him up to his feet.

Derek nodded, satisfied. “Now, we move on.”
They move on.

They went back to school a week later.

Boyd led his pack through the halls of Beacon Hills High School, as he had done a hundred times before. The crowds parted for the pack, as they had done a hundred times before, though there were a few more whispers and a few more stares today. There had been another death, and even, in a city the size of Beacon Hills, whispers traveled like crows.

Pausing in the middle of the hallway, Boyd closed his eyes, looking within for the thrill he had experienced in the past. In time, he found it, only now it was colored with pain. He would have given anything for their number to be five, but they remained only four. Cora Hale didn’t fit in yet, but she was trying. Boyd was trying. They were all trying.

They split apart as the bell rang for first period, Erica taking Boyd’s hand and squeezing it before heading off to her own class. Cora looked as if she were about to say something, but Erica pulled her by her sleeve. Cora didn’t have first period with any of the rest of the pack, so Erica had to show her where to go.

So it was just Stiles that followed him into the classroom. The very temporary former alpha had retreated inside a shell after the confrontation at the distillery and was only now beginning to peak back out. Pack had helped, and they still sat together, instinctively, in the back row.

Scott McCall sat in the same seat he had a few weeks ago when the birds had attacked the classroom. Boyd watched his back. His attitude and his movements were so different now. You could tell how it was sometimes difficult to move his arms, and the smell of his asthma medicine could easily be detected. Yet, he didn’t seem as threatening, and it wasn’t only because he was weaker.

Boyd looked at Stiles, catching his eye, and then motioned with his head toward Scott. Stiles followed his eyes and then shook his head.

“These things take time,” he whispered.

Miss Blake started her class on time, but she seemed far less interested than she had before. Gone was the enthusiasm she had brought to her teaching a few weeks ago, and as a result, her lectures were drab. She didn’t call on any of the three people who knew who she really was, and none of them raised their hands. Boyd imagined it was going to be a long first period, this semester.

Eventually the bell rung, bringing the class to an end. Boyd sighed; he had been looking forward to enjoying their study of *Heart of Darkness*. As the class rushed out, he caught sight of Scott trying to stuff his books into his backpack. His arms hadn’t worked the way he had wanted them to, so he
accidentally dumped the contents onto the floor.

Stiles wordlessly went up and helped him pick them up. They didn’t speak; they didn’t have to. Boyd watched them working together, seamlessly. This gave him an idea.

~*~

Erica put her bag into her locker -- she didn’t like the temptation to study at lunch -- when she heard the footsteps of someone approaching her. She was by herself in the mostly empty hallway, late to meet the rest of the pack in the cafeteria. She slammed the locker door and whirled to meet them.

It was Danny Mahealani. She hadn’t seen him for weeks. “Uhm. Hello, Erica.”

“Hello.” Erica raised one eyebrow in surprise. They had never talked before, so this was a new development. Danny was gay, so he probably wasn’t going to try to hit on her. On the other hand, he could possibly be still dating Ethan, so that was a reason to be worried.

Danny rubbed the back of his neck, awkwardly. “I have a really weird request.”

“Is this something to do with your boyfriend? I haven’t seen him around.”

“He’s not. He had to move out of the county.” Danny seemed sad about it, but he would be, wouldn’t he?

Erica thought for a second about being mean. She’d tell him that he’d been dating a monster and a coward and they had left the county because they had been run out of the county. Then she remembered that Danny had lost his several friends in the last year, including his best friend. Erica had been there; Jackson blood had been on her hands.

“I’m sorry to hear that,” she finally said.

Danny’s once bright smile was smaller and not so bright, but he gave it to her anyway. “Well, we’re still dating. It’s kind of long distance.”

“I see. Did you want something?”

“Well, Ethan asked me to give you this?” He handed her an envelope. “He said that you would be able to give it to Derek Hale.”

She took it. It was sealed and smelled of nothing but ink, paper, and Ethan. “Okay. Thanks.”

“What went on?” Danny said suddenly. “I don’t know what’s going on, but I have an idea it was bad. Can you tell me?”

“Danny …” Erica hesitated. “You don’t want to know.”

~*~

Scott stared at Derek, his mouth hanging open in shock. “What?”

“Do you want the Bite?” The alpha repeated, seriously.

With a sigh, Scott sat down on the bed, letting his arms fall to his sides. Derek had visited him on a weekend, while the rest of the pack was at a movie. He had knocked on the front door, and Scott had insisted that he come up to his bedroom for a private discussion where his mother couldn’t hear. Derek was never one for mincing words, so he had led with his offer.
Scott stared at him, emotions boiling under the surface of his eyes.

Derek nodded. “Have you talked to your mother about this?”

“Mom is angry with me. We haven’t really talked about it. I’ve mostly just listened as she yelled at me.” Scott replied. “Do you want to sit down?”

The alpha pulled out the desk chair and sat down, confidently.

“I’m a hunter. How exactly would that work?” Scott asked lamely, trying to mask his instability with hostility.

“You’re not a hunter. Chris and I talked for a long time. He taught you basic hunting skills during your rehabilitation, but you can’t even pass the basic physical tests.” Derek did not feel the need to pull any punches. “He was giving you something to focus on, but you’ll never be a real hunter. He’d never actually use you in the field.”

Scott winced with the pain of that truth. He must have already known, but it would always be hard to hear it out loud. “Well, okay.”

“You don’t really want to be a hunter, anyway. You lack the …” Derek almost said that Scott lacked the killer instinct, but he thought that would be crude. “You lack the drive.”

“So, you want me to be part of your pack. How do the rest of them feel about it?”

“It’s not up to them.” Derek spoke sternly. “I’m not a tyrant, but I am the alpha. The Bite … the Bite is a gift, and I can give it to who I want to give it to. It’ll cure your asthma. It will help with the nerve and muscle damage. I can’t say I know how either of those things feel, but Stiles told me what about all the things you can’t do. You could have back what was taken from you.”

“It’d be nice to ride my bike again,” Scott said wistfully. “But … I can’t accept your offer.”

Derek figured it out immediately. He knew this music. “Guilt is supposed to help stop you from doing the wrong thing. It’s not supposed to stop you from moving forward.”

“Then why are you offering me the Bite if not out of guilt?”

“I just said why. It’s about moving forward. A member of my pack hurt you by accident. My pack killed an innocent person. I can’t undo either of those things. No one can. But this isn’t about what I can’t do, it’s about what I can do.”

Scott tensed up as he sat on the bed. Even if he couldn’t smell the emotional upheaval, Derek could read it on his face.

“You don’t have to answer me now. Think about it.” He got up to leave. “If it helps, I think Stiles might like having his brother with him.”

“Why would you want me?”

“If you had wanted revenge, you could have killed my pack with the power of the Dolorous Stroke. But, instead, you wanted to do the right thing, and you were willing to risk your life to do it.” Derek paused at the doorway. “Any alpha would want that in his pack.”

~*~

The funeral of Isaac Lahey was a small affair in a wooded corner of Beacon Hills’ largest cemetery.
Derek had paid for everything. The only strange thing that the alpha had insisted on was that it be as far away from the grave of Isaac’s father as possible.

Derek stood before the grave, leading the mourners. The whole pack stood around him, lost and mourning. They could still feel where Isaac had once been and they looked around as if trying to find a limb that had been torn off. Derek was either stronger than they or he was used to the feeling.

The sheriff and Dr. Deaton had joined the pack as well. “Let this be the last one,” Noah whispered, putting his arm around Stiles.

“It will be.” Derek turned to look at the Argents and Scott, standing a respectful distance away. “I give my word.”

“You can’t promise that,” Stiles burst out. “You can’t. It shouldn’t be like this.”

Derek went over and took Stiles’ hand. “Then I promise that I will try my very best for it to be the last time.”

The sky was overcast, but it didn’t rain. One by one, they said their goodbyes and then left.

~*~

The wake was held at the Stilinski house. It also wasn’t very big: the pack, their parents/ some members of the lacrosse team, and various acquaintances.

“Why did you do this?” Stiles had finally asked his father a few minutes before it was supposed to begin. “We could have had it at the loft.”

“Stiles.” Noah said in a gentle voice. “I’ve been around death more than you have. I think that the last thing Derek to do right now is host a bunch of strangers in his home. It’s a lot of work, and he might be an alpha werewolf, but he deserves to be able to think about himself today, too.”

“But why here?”

Noah stood up and looked out the front window. He thought he had heard a car door shut, but it was not a mourner, but a neighbor across the street. “For us.”

Stiles didn’t understand. His face did that strange mixture of puzzlement and hurt when he couldn’t comprehend his father’s actions.

“I said some things when I found out what had happened. I was angry, and I was right to be angry, but I shouldn’t have said those things.”

Stiles blanched once more. Noah came over and stood close, looking him straight in the eyes.

“The hardest thing for kids to learn when growing up is the proper way to take responsibility. You still need to learn that, and I need to show you. For me, that night, getting mad was easy. Teaching you is going to be hard. I also owe Derek for the care he takes with you. Helping him in this is my way of showing that I appreciate what he does.”

“Okay.” Stiles nodded. “Do you think Scott and Melissa will come?”

“I don’t know, but that’s the right question to ask.”

~*~
“I know you’re upset with me,” Derek began. He stood in the classroom twenty minutes before the start of first period.

“Why would I be upset with you?” Jennifer Blake said in cool tones that did nothing to conceal how upset she was. “You let the woman who killed my friends, nearly murdered me, and left my face scarred for the rest of my life go free, and you made sure the man who urged her to do it gets … therapy.”

Derek crossed his arms.

“I thought you would understand, Derek. I really thought you would. You know what the wounds I have feel like. You know what they took from me, because the Argents took it from you. It’s not just the pain. It’s not just the death. It’s the feeling of never being safe again.”

Derek sighed. “Killing Kali or Deucalion isn’t going to make you feel safe.”

“Are you sure about that?” Jennifer asked seriously. “I think it just might, so you’ll forgive me if I try.”

“You’re going after Kali?”

“I will, after the semester ends. I may not have the Rite of the Maimed King, but I spent ten years getting ready for this first confrontation. I’ll do what I have to in order to find her and bring her justice.” The teacher shook her head. “I thought we could have been something Derek.”

“No,” Derek shook his head. “Even if I believe that you’re going to find what you need, we aren’t going to be together. We were never going to be together. There is someone else I’m waiting for.”

Jennifer looked sad. “Then I guess it’s best we don’t see each other after this. Good bye, Derek.”

“Good bye, Jennifer.”

~*~

Scott McCall was sitting at the table when Vernon Boyd sat down next to him. It was lunch time, and Boyd couldn’t take it anymore. He remembered all the times he had sat down alone, and he couldn’t bear to see it happen to Stiles’ friend.

Scott looked up. “Hey.”

“Hey.” They kept eating. When Boyd had finished all of his lunch except for the Jello cup, he turned to the other person. “You should say yes.”

With a half a ding dong in his mouth, Scott looked at Boyd, eyes scrunching in confusion.

“Derek’s offer.”

Scott swallowed the rest of the treat. “Oh. Why would you want me to?”

“Because we watch you. You want to live like this? We can smell the pain on you all the time.”

Scott worked his jaw. “You don’t offer it to every disabled person.”

“No.” Boyd shook his head. “But you’re already in our world. You weren’t born that way. You didn’t get in a car wreck. One of us did that to you.”
“That’s … mighty altruistic of you.”

“Nah. I just want things to get better. I want Stiles to smile more.” Boyd shrugged. “This will help everyone.”

“I’ll think about it.”

~*~

“Scott. Good afternoon.” Dr. Deaton smiled pleasantly as his most recent patients and their schnauzer left the clinic. “Would you like to come back?”

“Uh.” Scott fidgeted. “If you don’t mind.”

Alan led him back to the room. Neither of them were uncomfortable there, though it did bring back old memories for Scott.

“What can I do for you today?”

Scott went over to the sink. He had done a lot of work there. “I was hoping you could help me.”

“I’d love to do that,” Alan answered, brightly. “Would you like to work for me again?”

Scott took in a deep breath. “I can’t … I mean, I don’t think I could do the job. I wouldn’t be able to handle the bigger dogs. I’m clumsier than I used to be.”

“I know about that, but you were the best assistant I ever had. I’m sure that we could adjust workflow around here to utilize your talents to their fullest.”

Scott looked at the veterinarian for a long time and then blinked rapidly, lowering his head so he could lift a sleeve high enough. “I’d like that. I missed working for you.”

“And I missed you.”

“But that’s not the help I wanted. I need your advice.”

Deaton folded his arms behind him. “I’ll try to help if I can.”

“Derek offered me the Bite.”

The veterinarian knowledge. “I know. He talked to me before I did it. I thought it might be a good idea, but I also told him I thought you might not accept.”

“It’s just that …” Scot began and then stopped. “I remember that night. I’ll never forget it. Stiles and I are trying to fix things, but I don’t think … I don’t think that I would be okay with being one of them. What happened to Isaac, what Derek and Stiles did, it doesn’t erase what happened.”

“I know.”

“They still killed Lydia. They still killed Jackson. Derek’s uncle killed so many people. Allison died because of them.”

Deaton watched sympathetically.

“But I remember what it felt like to move freely. I remember what it felt like not to wake up in pain. To not have to worry about breathing.” Scott looked down at the floor. “Is it hypocritical to want
that?”

“No. It’s human.”

“And Boyd had a point. I’m part of that world. If I was willing to cut Stiles out of my life, I would have done it by now, so I’m going to be a part of it. Maybe I should say yes.”

Deaton took in a deep breath. “You’ll find that there are very few things that are black and white, though you’ve never thought that way. Some are simply more complex than each other. You’ve told me what you want, and you’ve told me what you believe. I might be able to offer more than advice.”

Scott looked up.

“You want to remain a part of Stiles’ life, yet you’re concerned about the behavior of werewolves enough not to want to become one of them. You can become my apprentice in more ways than one. You tried to force this pack to confront their natures by becoming their enemy. Help them connect to their humanity by becoming their ally.”

“You’d do that for me? You think I’d make a good Emissary?”

Deaton smiled. “Of course I do. I believed in you ever since the first day I met you. I think you can do anything you put your mind to. It would be my pleasure to help you do that, if you still want to.”

He put his hand on Scott’s shoulder.

~*~

“Dude.” Stiles said it easily as Scott stood in front of his doorway. “Why’d you knock?”

“Because it’s your house?”

Stiles nearly pulled off his feet while pulling him into the house. “Well, you never used to do that. And you don’t have to worry about startling me because now I can hear you from a long way away. I asked you over, didn’t I? So just come on in.”

“Okay, I thought …” Scott seemed hesitant.

“Well, stop thinking.” Stiles moved away. “I got us set up in my room. You remember where that is, right?”

“Yeah. Looks like your sarcasm is where I left it, too.”

Stiles flashed a smile at him. “Damn right.”

They went up the staircase, and suddenly it was freshman year.

“Uhm, Stiles. Why am I here?”

Stiles turned and looked at him. “Because I asked you to come. You need to help me with a brainstorming session.”

“I need to help you brainstorm for what … why would you ask me?”

Stiles rolled his eyes and shut the door behind him. “Derek told me that Deaton told him that you’re going to be an Emissary. That means you’re going to advise werewolves on how to do things right, and I need advice on how to do things right. So that’s why you’re here.”
Scott shifted nervously. “Okay.”

They stared at each other for several minutes. There had been a time when they could communicate without speaking, though that time had long past. But the ragged remnants of what had been there lingered behind their eyes. Unsaid words gathered behind their tongues, but neither could start.

Finally, Scott nodded. “Okay. What do you need help with?”

“I’m going to ask someone out on a date, and you’re going to help me practice how.”

“Who?”

“He’s …”

“He’s?” Scott blinked. “Oh, okay. Fine.”

“Yes, don’t interrupt. He’s older than me, bossier than me, less communicative than me, and he has an abnormally large guilt complex.” Stiles made Scott sit on the bed and then stood in front of him. “You’re going to talk me though how to get him to say yes.”

Scott took a deep breath and then relaxed. “Right. So, Derek. Here’s what we have to do first …”

The session lasted long into the night.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading this. I enjoyed it. I hoped you enjoy it to. Please don’t move this to a different site.

End Notes

I welcome all criticism about this story, including grammar, characterization, and other concerns, even if that criticism is negative. I only ask that the criticism be about the story and not about what I’ve written elsewhere or about me personally.

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