Call Me (Cliché)

by SomewheresSword

Summary

When the sheriff’s sister ends up in a wheelchair for the duration of summer, Stiles' dreams of three months full of pack bonding, late-night video games and bro-time with Scott come crashing down. He's temporarily relocated to Redford, a three hour drive away, and he can already tell he won't be getting many visitors.

Sure the pack will forget about him while he's gone, Stiles is determined to make the most of his summer of isolation, training his body and mind - and his magic - so he can come back with a bang, and maybe catch a certain Sourwolf's eye.

Then Derek shows up at his window one night with a flimsy excuse about needing research done. Suddenly, his summer away is looking a whole lot more interesting.

Notes

Let me preface this by saying this is an idea that's been sitting on my harddrive since early 2013, and I haven't written fanfiction in about that long. I also stopped watching Teen Wolf about halfway through S3, so any inaccuracies can probably be chalked up to that.

I needed to get my mojo back after some original fiction struggles, so I dusted off the idea and started writing. Next thing I knew I had 84k in my hands, so I figured I may as well post it.
Also I aged Stiles up a year to make him a little closer to California age of consent, just because I figured much younger and the sheriff would not be as cool with it as I wanted him to be. So everything happened the same as S1&2, just they're all a little older.

So, enjoy my self-indulgent personal therapy! It's a lot cheaper than paying someone to listen to me talk.
Music on loud and brain fully focused on the History essay he was typing up, Stiles hardly noticed when his bedroom door drifted open, his dad leaning in the doorway. “Stiles.”

He jumped, automatically throwing up four tabs of meaningless Wikipedia articles, even though for once he wasn’t working on pack-related research. Spinning around on his chair, he offered the sheriff a grin. “What’s up, Pops?”

The sheriff rolled his eyes, waiting for Stiles to turn his music down. “Do my eyes deceive me? Are you actually studying in the first week of summer? Are you feeling okay?”

Stiles gave his dad a look. “Come on, Dad, I’m not Scott. I can study.” The sheriff raised an eyebrow. “I just wanna get all my summer homework done early so I can have maximum goof-off time. Summer is all about video games, doing nothing with friends, and eating my bodyweight in curly fries on a regular basis — the sooner I get these dumb essays out of the way, the sooner I can get relaxing.” And the sooner he would be secure in the knowledge that, should there be a supernatural disaster that took up his entire summer, he wouldn’t be doing three months worth of work in one adderall-fuelled night.

“Wow, forethought. Maybe you are growing up,” the sheriff joked. His brows furrowed, face growing a little more serious. “Can you take a break? I need to talk to you for a sec.”

Stiles’ stomach tightened anxiously, his mind flicking through the dozens of things his dad might want to talk about; werewolves, Derek Hale, Stiles’ mysterious bruises. The list of things Stiles was hiding from the man was not a small one. “Sure, this can wait,” he said, gesturing to his laptop screen. The sheriff strode fully into the room, sinking down on the edge of Stiles’ bed. His face was unreadable, sending Stiles on high alert, his pulse racing as he outwardly stayed relaxed.

“Don’t admit to anything without solid evidence,” he reminded himself mentally, drumming his thumbs on his knees.

“You know your Aunt Hannah?” That was not what Stiles had expected. He blinked, all the alarm bells in his head starting to go quiet.

“Yeah…” He dragged out the word, wondering why his dad was suddenly up here to talk about his sister.

“She was hit by a car.” The sentence turned Stiles’ blood cold, his heart clenching in a way that was getting horribly familiar. It must have shown on his face, as the sheriff’s eyes widened. “She’s okay. Well, she’s not, but she’s alive,” he assured quickly. “She broke both her legs, she’s in a wheelchair for the next couple months. She needs someone to come help her around the house, so I talked to my deputies and they can work it out so I can do most of my work remotely, and just check in every couple of weeks.”

Stiles didn’t dare believe what he was hearing. Was his dad saying what he thought he was? Would Stiles have the house to himself for the entire summer? Immediately his brain filled with images of absolute freedom — gaming with Scott until 4am, house parties that he might be able to persuade Lydia to get the cool kids to come to, being able to invite pack members over without having to explain the origins of their friendship. Maybe even being able to invite a special someone over without getting the third degree. If he could find a special someone, anyway.

“We’ll be leaving on Saturday, so you may want to reconsider spending your time doing
homework.” All Stiles’ dreams crashed and burned at the ‘we’ at the beginning of that sentence.

“Wait, wait, hold up. You want me to go with you?”

“Well I’m sure as hell not leaving you here alone, kiddo,” the sheriff retorted, raising one eyebrow. Stiles put on his best innocent expression.

“Why not? I can cook, I can drive, I have Melissa on speed-dial. I’m seventeen, Dad!”

“Stiles,” his dad said flatly, and Stiles let out a whine.

“Dad,” he retorted. “Aunt Hannah lives in Redford, that’s like, a three hour drive. Do you really want to make me spend a summer three whole hours away from literally all of my friends?”

“Hannah doesn’t mind you having a friend or two come visit. And you can always come crash at Scott’s for a night or two if Melissa’s fine with it.”

Stiles thought about the pack, about all the trouble they might get into that could have them all dead in the three hours it would take him to show up and help. Not that the skinny human was much help in a fight, but… it was the principal of the thing. He could still do research from Hannah’s house. A thought rose unbidden — if he wasn’t in Beacon Hills, going to pack meetings, would they even bother keeping him informed? He wasn’t a werewolf. He wasn’t pack the same way Scott or Isaac or Erica were. Not even the same way Allison and Lydia were, thanks to their boyfriends. He shoved the thought away. Scott wouldn’t let him get left out of pack stuff.

He wished he could believe that completely.

“Dad, please,” he begged earnestly. “I love Aunt Hannah, you know I do, but the whole summer…”

“You can still eat your bodyweight in curly fries in Redford,” the sheriff consoled wryly. “I know it’s not ideal, kid, but she needs us.”

“She needs you,” Stiles muttered. “You just don’t trust me here by myself.”

“Do you blame me?” the older Stilinski argued. Guilt curled in Stiles’ gut. “I wish I could. I really do. But… Stiles, everything that’s happened in this town in the last year, don’t you think it might be good for you to get away for a little while? Get a little perspective?”

The lines in the sheriff’s face looked deeper in the fading light through Stiles’ window, his eyes weary. The guilt doubled. His dad didn’t know anything about pack stuff; he probably thought he was doing the safest thing for his family, getting his son away from all the weird and deadly shit going on. He wasn’t entirely wrong. But Stiles wasn’t interested in safety, not at the expense of his friends. They might need him.

“Is there anything I can say that might convince you to let me stay? I’ll get a summer job. I’ll call you every hour on the hour. I’ll write daily reports of my activities for Melissa.”

“We both know how easy it would be for you to lie, son. To me, and to Melissa. I’m sorry, Stiles, but I’m not backing down on this. We’re moving in with Hannah on Saturday. Honestly, she could use all the help she can get; I’ll still be working a lot, she’ll need you just as much as she’ll need me.”

That was a low blow, and they both knew it. Stiles huffed, folding his arms over his chest and slumping back in his desk chair. “Fine,” he said reluctantly. This wasn’t an argument he was going to win.
“I am sorry, Stiles. It might not seem it, but I wanted you to enjoy your summer. You deserve it. I just… Christ, kid, you have to understand things from my perspective.”

The hard part was, Stiles did. If he’d been in his dad’s position, he would have done the exact same thing. But Stiles knew the truth, and that changed everything. He needed to be in Beacon Hills.

“I’m gonna be spending so much money on gas,” he muttered to himself. The sheriff chuckled quietly.

“I can probably help out with that. If you behave, and help your Aunt Hannah when she needs it.”

He got to his feet, moving close enough to ruffle Stiles’ growing-out buzzcut. “You’re a good kid, Stiles. I’m sure you’ll still be able to have fun. You never know, you might meet a girl out there that’s prettier than Lydia Martin.”

“Not possible,” Stiles declared immediately, making the man laugh.

“I’ll let you finish your essay, then. Or not. You might wanna leave it until we’re at Hannah’s, maybe call Scott or something.”

Stiles reached for his phone, then deflated. “Scott’s with Allison,” he remembered, grimacing. “She’s spending the summer in France with her dad, so they’re cramming as much time together as possible.” Despite everything that happened with Gerard, and the fact that the two of them had technically broken up, they were still completely attached at the hip ‘as friends’ and seemed to plan to be that way until Allison left the country. Stiles hadn’t minded, expecting to have the whole summer after that to monopolise Scott’s time. So much for that plan.

The sheriff winced, clapping Stiles on the shoulder and squeezing gently. “I’m sorry, kid.” With that, he left the room. Stiles stared at the closed door, mentally rewriting all his plans for the summer.

Even if his dad paid for gas, Stiles didn’t really want to spend the next three months driving three hours each way every other day. And it wasn’t like the pack could come up and visit him — his dad didn’t even know he was friends with half of them. Scott, sure, and maybe even Isaac. But Erica and Boyd? Lydia? Derek?

He snorted, imagining Derek Hale coming all the way out to see him. Not likely.

Stiles sighed, grabbing his laptop and moving over to stretch out on his bed, saving and closing the essay he’d been working on. His dad was right; there was no point in working on it now when he was about to have plenty of free time to do homework.

Maybe he could take up a new hobby. Or start on the bestiary he kept telling himself he was going to write, tired of having to deal with the archaic Latin and medieval French in the Argent books.

He groaned, opening Netflix. God, he’d had such high hopes. Derek was starting to be a not-completely-shitty alpha, getting all the betas starting to learn to work together. Everything still mostly ended in arguments, but it was a start, and Stiles had anticipated a whole summer full of pack bonding and cool training montages and everyone actually trying not to hate each other all the time. He was going to miss all of that. They would all be bonding and training and growing without him. He’d be left behind, as per usual.

This summer was going to suck.

Stiles spent most of the next day sulking — not that he’d ever admit to it. He told his dad he was
packing, trying to figure out everything he might need for a whole summer away. The sheriff pointed out that he’d be coming back regularly and could pick up stuff at any time, but Stiles ignored him. It wasn’t like he had anything else to do.

He’d texted Scott that morning, asking if they could hang out, implying he had something to tell him. He wasn’t surprised when Scott informed him he already had plans with Allison — but they could totally talk after the pack meeting that night.

By then it would be a little late, but Stiles didn’t tell him that. He’d wanted to tell Scott first, before he had to tell the rest of the pack, but clearly Scott had other priorities. Stiles wasn’t bitter. Not at all.

Shoving a bundle of t-shirts into a duffle bag, Stiles turned to the stack of video games on his bookshelf. There was no way he was going to survive without those. Especially the single-player games; he was under no illusion that Scott would be willing to game online with him as much as Stiles would want to. He’d be too busy running around with Isaac and his wolfy friends, chasing bunnies and howling at the moon. Stiles snorted to himself at the mental image, shaking off the twisting feeling in his chest. He’d probably have been left out of that stuff anyway, due to lack of supernatural-ness, but… it would’ve been nice to be around, just in case.

That was the thing. It was all well and good his dad telling him he could invite people over to Aunt Hannah’s place, but that would require making plans. Stiles wasn’t the type of guy people made plans with. He just kind of… fell into things, showing up conveniently when things were happening, or tagging along because Scott was invited and he was present when Scott was invited. He was just there.

He was under zero illusions about how the summer would play out. There would be no going to the new Marvel movie with Erica, because she wouldn’t care enough to either come out to see him or wait for him to come back to Beacon Hills. She’d just go with Boyd. There would be no research not-dates over coffee with Lydia, because those things only ever happened accidentally, when the latest big bad showed up and he and Lydia were the best bet at figuring it out. She’d just handle it herself, or call him if she absolutely needed help. They wouldn’t have time for him to drive down to help in person.

Scott was the most likely to come visit, but Stiles wasn’t even sure on that. Not now Isaac was around, living half with Derek and half at the McCall house. Scott wouldn’t need Stiles with Isaac there, and they wouldn’t think to ask Stiles to come hang out with them. They didn’t even do that now, with Stiles living ten minutes away.

He was starting to get angsty again. He scowled to himself, grabbing several video games and stacking them in his bag, glancing over the titles to make sure he hadn’t missed anything. He frowned; Mass Effect 2 was missing. Had he left it downstairs?

He racked his brain, trying to remember the last time he’d played it, when it hit him — he’d lent it to Scott months ago, after copious amounts of begging from the werewolf. Scott had promised to play through it quickly and give it back, but… Gerard had happened. Stiles grit his teeth, refusing to let his brain drift into those memories.

His car keys were sat on the corner of his desk, and Stiles grabbed them impulsively, pocketing his phone and leaving his bedroom. The sheriff was at the office, getting his stuff in order for an extended absence, so there was no one around to question him getting into his car and driving to Scott’s.

Pulling into the driveway beside Melissa’s car, he took a deep breath and shut off the engine, hopping out of the Jeep and jogging up to the door. He had a key in his pocket, but he knocked
anyway, offering Melissa a grin. “Stiles,” she greeted, surprised. Her face fell a little. “Scott’s not home, sweetie, I’m sorry.”

“Oh, I know, he’s with Allison,” he replied, wishing he sounded a little less annoyed about that. “I can’t come by and see my favourite nurse?”

“That depends, are you bleeding from somewhere I can’t see?” she asked, eyeing him over critically. Stiles laughed, shaking his head and following Melissa into the house.

“No blood, I promise. I actually came over to grab a video game I let Scott borrow. I’m, uh, packing up, and I wanted to take it with me.”

Melissa hummed knowingly. Stiles figured his dad would have told her about their change in summer plans possibly before he’d even told Stiles, and he seemed to be right. “You leave tomorrow, right?” she checked, leading the way up to Scott’s room.

“Yup,” Stiles replied, popping the ‘p’. “Good old Redford, James County. Home of… miles and miles of nothingness, in all honesty.” He hadn’t been to Aunt Hannah’s house since just after his mom died, but from what he could remember, it wasn’t a particularly busy town. He was pretty sure there was a decent-sized city an hour or so away, though. That could be fun, maybe.

“I’m sure it’s not that bad.” Melissa lingered in the doorway while Stiles entered Scott’s room, squatting down in front of the TV to rifle through his messy pile of game cases. He found what he was looking for and straightened up.

“Eh. It is what it is,” he said, shrugging. “Aunt Hannah needs the help.”

Melissa reached out to cup his cheek, smiling knowingly. “You’re a good boy, Stiles. I know your dad appreciates you going along with all this. He feels awful about dragging you away from your friends all summer.”

Stiles’ guilt returned, remembering how he’d whined and argued and sulked. His dad wasn’t doing this to spite him. It was just shitty circumstances. Maybe he’d been too hard on the man. “I’ll survive. I always do,” he added with a lopsided grin, that judging by the look on Melissa’s face didn’t quite reach his eyes. “You never know; without me and Allison around to distract him, Scott might finally decide to actually study!”

She snorted, showing exactly what she thought of that. “If only,” she sighed. “He’s got summer school, but with everything else going on…” Melissa shook her head. It had to be hard, knowing your son was involved in something dangerous, knowing there was nothing you could do to stop him.

“What you—“ Stiles faltered, ducking his head, then ploughed on. “Do you ever wish you didn’t know? Y’know, about all the werewolf stuff.”

Melissa’s lips pursed in thought. “Sometimes,” she admitted. “The whole supernatural world… it’s terrifying. But even if I didn’t know, it would still be happening. And I’d rather know about it so I can help Scott with whatever he needs, than be in the dark and watch him struggle without knowing why.”

Her words were like a knife between Stiles’ ribs, and it clearly showed. Melissa grasped his hand, squeezing. “I didn’t mean — honey, your dad, it’s a different situation. Scott… this is him, for life, no matter what. You’re still human. You could walk away, and your dad would never have to know.”
“Could I?” he asked hollowly. “After everything I’ve seen?” Human or not, there was no way he could walk away from the pack, not now he knew.

“All you can decide if it’s time to tell him, Stiles.”

“And Derek,” Stiles added, because the alpha definitely had a lot to say about humans being all up in his business. Telling his dad without Derek’s permission was a one way ticket to getting claws in places he never wanted them.

Melissa smiled wryly, not arguing. “Did you want to stay for lunch? I don’t know when Scott will be home, but there’s plenty in the fridge.”

“Thanks, but I should get going. Lots of packing to do,” he said. Melissa started down the stairs, Stiles following close behind, and when they reached the bottom she drew him into a tight hug.

“Don’t be a stranger, okay? I know my son isn’t the best at communication, but you’re always welcome in this house. Redford isn’t another planet.”

Stiles tucked his face into Melissa’s hair, swallowing against the lump in his throat. Melissa always knew what to say to make him feel better, even when he himself didn’t know what he needed to hear. “I know,” he assured her. “I’ll visit, when I can.” Whether Scott asks me or not went unsaid. Melissa eventually pulled away, leaning up to kiss him on the forehead.

“Good. And tell your dad, if he needs anything to just call. Looking after someone in a wheelchair isn’t easy, even if she does have a pretty good range of movement otherwise.”

“I’ll let him know. Thanks, Melissa.”

“You’re family, honey,” she insisted, reaching past him to open the door. “Be safe. Try and have fun, okay? Getting out of this town could be good for you.”

His reaction was much the same as it had been when his dad said those words, but Melissa didn’t scold him for it, waving him off fondly. “And don’t let my son be an idiot while you’re gone!” Her tone was fond, and Stiles laughed.

“I think it’s a few years too late for that one,” he joked in reply, grinning at her exasperated look.

He was in lighter spirits as he drove back home, Melissa’s words sitting comfortable and warm in his chest. Maybe it wouldn’t be so bad, after all.

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He was the last one to arrive at the pack meeting, parking beside Allison’s car and taking the familiar path into the abandoned train depot Derek was still using as a base. Peter wasn’t there, but that wasn’t a surprise; he only showed up if Derek forced him to, and was usually more trouble than he was worth.

Everyone was talking over each other, barely even noticing him as he took his usual seat between Scott and Erica. Derek glanced over, eyes narrowing as he looked Stiles over, nose twitching in a way Stiles knew meant he was smelling probably more than Stiles ever wanted him to know about his day. As frustrating as it was that the betas hardly knew how to use their werewolf powers, Stiles was pretty glad they didn’t have as much control over that one as Derek. Having one all-knowing super-wolf was bad enough.

“Hey, man,” Scott greeted cheerily, his gaze still half on Allison as she chatted with Lydia nearby.
“Were you at my house earlier? I thought I smelled it but it’s hard to tell, you’re there a lot.”

“Yeah, I had to go grab something.” He wasn’t going to try and talk to Scott about his summer plans now. They wouldn’t have privacy anywhere. Scott would just have to learn with the rest of them.

Derek’s eyes flashed red, and the pack went silent, turning to their alpha with varying degrees of respect. “I haven’t heard anything from the Alpha Pack lately,” he began. Boyd, Erica and Isaac all stiffened.

“That’s good, right?” Erica said hesitantly.

“Not necessarily. They’re good at covering their tracks; I doubt they’d just up and leave after everything they put us through. We keep patrolling, keep training. They’ll be back, and we need to be better. We need to be a real pack.”

“Oh, goody,” Scott muttered under his breath, loud enough for even the non-werewolves to hear. “Can’t you ever just be optimistic for once? We fought them, we got everyone back, they turned tail and ran. They’re probably halfway across Oregon by now. It’s summer, can’t we just chill? We’ve had enough stress lately.” Allison grimaced, but Scott didn’t seem to notice. Stiles glanced at her apologetically.

“Do you really want to take that chance?” Derek retorted. “I know things haven’t been easy, but don’t expect them to get any easier. Just because Gerard is dead doesn’t mean everything is sunshine and roses now. It’s bad enough we’re working with two men down this summer, we have to stay focused.”

Stiles sucked in a breath, opening his mouth before he could chicken out. “Uh, actually, three men down,” he volunteered, refusing to fidget when all eyes landed on him. “My dad told me last night — my Aunt Hannah was hit by a car, she’s in a wheelchair for a couple months. We’re moving in with her for the summer, to help her out until she heals enough for crutches. So, uh, I’ll be in Redford all summer. Yeah.”

“Dude, no way! That sucks!” Scott exclaimed, looking like someone had kicked his puppy.

“I’ll still come back and visit when I can, but that’ll only be every couple weeks or so, depending on how much Hannah needs me. And you can call me for research whenever you need me,” he added, eyes flicking to Derek, wanting the man to know he had no intention of abandoning the pack despite the distance.

He figured it was only by the mercy of Jackson already being in London that there were no jokes made about how much more peaceful it would be without him.

“I mean, it’s not a big deal. It’s not like Stiles could fight the Alpha Pack anyway,” Isaac pointed out. Stiles flinched. “We’re already gonna be missing Allison and Jackson, having one less human won’t make much difference.”

“Really feeling the love there, buddy,” Stiles sniped back. Sure, he hadn’t expected people to start crying over his absence, but… having someone other than Scott care would be nice.

“I didn’t know you had an aunt,” Derek said. Stiles blinked.

“Yeah, my dad’s sister. I haven’t seen her since — it’s been a while,” he deflected, not wanting to bring up those memories. “I tried to convince dad to let me stay here all summer while he goes to Redford, but apparently, I’m not trustworthy,” he said dryly.
There was a weird look on Derek’s face. Stiles figured he was just trying not to look too outwardly happy about being Stiles-free for a whole three months. He refused toanalyse the weird ache in his chest at the thought of not seeing Derek Hale’s dumb scowly face all summer.

“Why didn’t you tell me sooner?” Scott asked quietly, while Erica and Isaac argued with Derek over the patrol schedule he’d arranged. Stiles shot him a look.

“I tried,” he pointed out, a little more sharply than intended. “You were busy.”

The wounded look returned. “Dude, I thought I’d have all summer with you and only a couple days with Allison! If you’d said it was important I would have come.”

“Important these days means bloodthirsty werewolves, or hunters trying to kill me. I didn’t want to worry you.” And he didn’t want yet another occasion of Scott ignoring his ‘important’ calls.

Scott frowned, but the undertone to Stiles’ words went completely over his head. “Well, we’ll make it work. It’s only a few hours drive. Like you said, you can come visit pretty often. It’ll be fine,” he assured, smiling brightly.

Stiles wished he could have that much optimism.

As they often did, the pack meeting devolved into arguments pretty quickly after that. It was the last one before Allison — and now Stiles — would leave, and she and Scott seemed pretty set on ditching as soon as possible to continue hanging out ‘as friends’. Stiles’ brief hope of one last late-night gaming marathon with Scott died a quick death at the look in his best friend’s eyes.

He wasn’t in any rush to pack up his research books when Derek gave up trying to control them all, and Allison gave him a brief hug and a ‘see you, Stiles!’ before following Scott out. Isaac didn’t even bother with that, merely stalking over to the train car that was his bedroom. Erica appeared at his side, punching him gently on the shoulder. “Gonna be quiet without you, Batman,” she said, the words a lot nicer than they would have been from Jackson. Stiles offered her a grin.

“You can always come visit, Catwoman. Hannah won’t mind. You too, Boyd,” he added, knowing better than to expect them to go anywhere apart. Ever since they’d escaped the Alpha Pack, they’d barely left each other alone for more than an hour. Stiles didn’t blame them. If he’d had someone with him when Gerard had him, he wouldn’t want to let them go either. But he’d been alone.

Boyd nodded, and he and Erica left Stiles to shove the last couple of books in his backpack. Lydia beat him to one, holding it to her chest. “If you’re going to be gone, I’m going to keep this. We might need it,” she declared.

“Yeah, sure. I’m taking most of my books with me so I can still research while I’m gone, but if you need anything, I guess call me and I can bring it over? Maybe we can compare notes after a while, see where we’re at? I’ll bring the iced coffees.”

Lydia smiled at him, the same way you might smile at a puppy that just peed on the carpet. “If I need you, I’ll be in touch. But I can handle it.” And she turned on her heel and left. Stiles sighed; he’d thought after everything, they might be on better terms, but he still barely existed to the goddess that was Lydia Martin.

Shouldering his backpack, Stiles turned to leave, and his heart almost jumped out of his chest at the voice that called his name.

“Stiles.”
He turned, meeting Derek’s gaze. He hadn’t realised the alpha was still there. He had that weird look again, opening his mouth to speak but closing it abruptly. He scowled. “Be careful,” he said eventually. “The Alpha Pack are still out there, and they’ll smell you. Call me if anything weird happens.”

“I will,” Stiles promised seriously. The Alpha Pack was nothing to joke about. “And, uh, you too. Call me if you need me for… stuff,” he finished lamely, unsure exactly what he could have to offer to the pack that someone else couldn’t do just fine in his place.

Derek nodded jerkily, and there was a long moment of silence and awkward staring, Stiles wishing he could think of something intelligent to say and not willing to leave until he was sure Derek was done talking. “I’ll, uh, see you around, Sourwolf.” Derek nodded again, turning to head to his own train car, and Stiles finally left the depot. His pulse thudded faster than he’d like it to, especially when he knew Derek — and probably Isaac, too — could hear it. He got in his car, turning on the engine and resting his head briefly on the steering wheel.

“Please let them be safe,” he muttered under his breath. “God, just… don’t let something happen while I’m gone.” If the Alpha Pack attacked again, if anyone got hurt or worse… he’d never forgive himself for being three hours away and useless. He wasn’t a fighter, or supernaturally strong — he was the puny human. But he’d do his best to help his pack, and he couldn’t do that if shit went down while he wasn’t there.

Eyes darting to the clock on the dash, he fastened his seatbelt and pulled out of the drive, his heart heavy. He wanted to be as optimistic as the betas, believing the Alpha Pack had left them alone. Just one summer; one carefree, easy summer without any death or destruction or supernatural disaster. Was that too much to ask?

He ignored the traitorous voice in his mind that hoped for something bad to happen — at least then, one of them might actually call him while he was gone.
They weren’t leaving until the afternoon — the sheriff had to sort out some stuff at the office first — so Stiles actually managed to spend a little time with Scott. When he arrived at his best friend’s house for a morning of bro-time and video games, he wondered how much of that invitation was Melissa’s doing. Then he scowled at himself; was this really what he’d come to? Doubting even Scott’s willingness to hang out with him? They’d been best friends for years!

He forced his brain away from memories of pain and fear and Gerard’s face, his phone ringing through to Scott’s voicemail, death staring him in the eye while he prayed for his friend to arrive and save the day.

They were best friends. Scott could be a little dumb about it, but he was still practically Stiles’ brother.

It was fun, playing video games just the two of them, no mention of the pack or Allison or anything outside of yelling obscenities at each other and the aliens on-screen. As if all the weird shit of the past year hadn’t even happened. “I can’t believe you’re gonna be gone all summer,” Scott said eventually, when they were full of chips and soda and starting to think about the fact that Scott had work in half an hour. “We’ve never spent a whole summer apart.”

“It’s not like I’m leaving the country,” Stiles said reflexively, then winced as he practically saw Scott’s thoughts move to Allison, his sad-puppy expression getting worse. “It’s three hours drive, but hell, I bet you could run it in the same if you cut through the woods and tried really hard.” Scott still didn’t have a car, and Melissa would need hers for work.

“Yeah. Could be fun to try and time it,” Scott agreed, perking up a little. “And you said your dad will let you come home and crash here for a couple days, right?”

“Totally. I don’t know why he won’t let me be in the house by myself at night,” that was a lie, Stiles was fully aware his dad had reason not to trust him, “but he’ll let me stay at yours as long as your mom is cool with it.”

“I already told you, you’re welcome here whenever,” Melissa cut in, leaning in the doorway. “Scott, honey, you’d better get going, you don’t want to be late for work.”

“I’ll give you a ride,” Stiles volunteered. He had at least an hour before his dad would be done, and he wanted to make the most of having company before his three-hour road trip. Scott brightened, and after hugging Melissa goodbye, the two boys piled into Stiles’ Jeep, heading for the vet’s.

“Hey, be thankful you won’t have to spend all summer doing Derek’s freaking training bullshit,” Scott pointed out suddenly. Stiles frowned.

“Dude, he’s trying to help you suck less at being werewolves. That’s a good thing.”

“I don’t need him for that. Me and you figured it out just fine.”

Stiles raised an eyebrow; his definition of ‘just fine’ was clearly very different to Scott’s. “He’s been a wolf his whole life. He grew up in a family of wolves. I think he knows more than I do on this particular subject, Scotty. The pack will be stronger if you can all learn to work together.”

Scott huffed. “That’s supposed to make me care? It’s not like the pack has done anything good for me. My life has been way worse since they got involved.”
That wasn’t what he said when he was using his werewolf skills to get on the lacrosse team and become more popular, but Stiles wisely kept his mouth shut. “Yeah, well, we’re kinda stuck with them. Might as well make the most of it. Play nice with Derek while I’m gone, yeah? Don’t antagonise him. He’s in the same mess we are.”

Scott still looked grumpy about it, but he stayed quiet. Stiles wished he’d get over his hatred of all things Hale and start trying to make things work with the pack. Maybe him leaving was a good thing; with both him and Allison gone, Scott would have to hang out with the pack. He didn’t have anyone else, except maybe Danny, and they weren’t the ‘hanging out’ kind of friends. If he could get through the whole summer without getting in a fight with Derek, it would be a miracle.

Stiles followed Scott into Deaton’s office with the promise of puppies, offering a smile to the vet as he entered. “I hear there’s adorable fuzzballs in need of some lovin’,” he greeted, making Deaton chuckle.

“A litter of four, only a few weeks old. They’re in the back.”

The two boys made a beeline for the cage, Stiles losing a blissful fifteen minutes in tiny wet noses and itty bitty paws. “Man, I wish Dad would let me get a dog,” he groaned enviously. “Remember when I almost convinced him to take in that police dog that got shot?”

Scott grinned. “Dude, you were so close. She was such a good dog.” Sadly, the complications from the shooting meant her vet bills and care would be way more than the Stilinski family could cope with, still paying off Claudia’s hospital bills.

“I should get going,” Stiles said eventually, once the four puppies were back in their cage and snoozing in a pile on some blankets. “Let you get to work.”

“Yeah, man.” There was a beat of silence, then Scott wrapped his arms around Stiles in a rib-crushing hug. “Have fun in Redford, I guess. Hopefully you can come back and visit soon.”

“Fingers crossed.” Stiles patted him on the back, then pulled away, ruffling Scott’s hair. “Be safe, okay? And listen to Derek. I know he’s all murder-brows and secrets but he’s a good guy.” Scott didn’t look convinced. “I’ll see you soon, buddy. Love you.”

“Love you, too,” Scott replied, offering a fist bump. Stiles reluctantly headed back into the waiting room, where Deaton was filling out some paperwork.

“I’ve heard you’ll be leaving for a while,” Deaton said, startling Stiles. He didn’t bother asking how the vet knew about it. Deaton was too mysterious and creepy to question.

“Yeah, most of the summer. My aunt needs some help, she’s in a wheelchair.”

Deaton reached under the desk, pulling out a heavy-looking leather-bound book. “A little recreational reading, for while you’re away. It may come in handy further down the line.”

Stiles took the book, looking down at the cover. It was old enough not to have a title, and when Stiles flicked through it he was glad to see it was in English — it seemed to be all about magic and folklore. “What do you mean, it’ll come in handy?”

Deaton merely smiles mysteriously, shaking his head. “Have a good summer, Stiles.”

Stiles rolled his eyes, muttering about vague and ominous veterinarians on his way out, tossing the book onto his passenger seat and driving home. He’d read through it later — he’d have plenty of time to do so soon.
At last, the two Stilinski men were packed and ready to go, the house locked up and double-checked, both their cars waiting in the driveway. They’d be driving separately so they’d both have cars when they were in Redford, as the sheriff would be constantly going back and forth between there and Beacon Hills for work. Part of Stiles was sad about losing out on three hours of quality road-trip time with his dad, but the bigger part of him — the part that was keeping a million secrets — was incredibly grateful he wouldn’t be stuck for three hours of potential interrogation time. Just him and the open road, and whatever not-crappy radio stations he could find on the way.

“You fully gassed up?” The sheriff checked, and Stiles nodded.

“Filled up on the way back from Scott’s,” he confirmed. “I also have water, granola bars, cash, and a red bull, and the emergency kit is in the trunk as always. Even though it’s only three hours and you’ll be tailing me the entire time,” he added with a smirk, ignoring his dad’s scolding look.

“Always helps to be prepared. Got the GPS set?” Stiles nodded again. “Perfect. Let’s move out.”

Before they left, Stiles glanced back at the house, hoping it would only be a couple weeks before he came back.

It was weird, driving out past the ‘You are now leaving Beacon Hills’ sign. It shouldn’t be a big deal, but it still felt like there was something tugging in his chest. He hummed along with the song on the radio as he kept driving, eyes catching on a flash of red out of the corner of his eyes. In the woods by the side of the road; the briefest glimpse of two glowing red eyes. He smirked to himself, weirdly tempted to blow a kiss at the window. “See you later, Sourwolf,” he muttered quietly, shaking his head.

During the school year, he would have given anything to be able to escape the madness of running with a wolf pack. Now, he couldn’t bear to be away from them.

He pulled onto the highway, keeping one eye on his dad’s car in his rearview mirror, and turned his music up louder, rolling his shoulders and preparing for three hours alone with his own thoughts.

They stopped a couple times on the way, both for gas and for food, but the drive to Redford wasn’t nearly as bad as Stiles expected it to be. He wasn’t used to driving by himself for that long; it was kinda nice, not having to worry about whether he was singing too loud or talking to himself or annoying anyone with his fidgeting. Maybe driving back and forth from Beacon Hills wouldn’t be too bad.

Finally, they pulled in to the driveway of his aunt’s house. The sheriff had taken the lead for the last leg, as Stiles couldn’t remember the way and the GPS sometimes got confused on the backroads. Stiles parked his Jeep behind Hannah’s Chrysler, figuring she wouldn’t be using it for a while. His knees cracked when he stepped out onto the driveway, the sound so loud that even the sheriff winced. “You shouldn’t sound like that at your age, son,” he remarked. “I don’t even sound like that at my age.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Stiles deadpanned. “I am a prime example of teenage fitness and vitality.” His dad snorted, cuffing him around the head and turning the movement into an arm slung over his shoulders.

“Come on, we’ll say hi to Hannah before we start unpacking.”
They rang the doorbell, and a minute or so later the door swung open, revealing Hannah’s smiling face. She looked uncomfortable in the chair, like she wasn’t quite used to it yet, but she managed to get the door okay. “Noah! Stiles! God, it’s good to see you both.”

“Hey, kiddo,” the sheriff greeted, leaning down to kiss her forehead. “You doing okay?”

“Just fine, quit worrying,” Hannah assured. “Now let me see my nephew. Good lord, did you really get that tall or do you just feel taller because I’m in this damn chair?”

Stiles laughed, squeezing past his dad to hug the woman he hadn’t seen for eight years. “Almost taller than Dad,” he confirmed. “Whereas you haven’t changed a bit since I last saw you.”

“That’s definitely a lie, but the flattery is appreciated,” Hannah said, grinning. “Come on, in, take a load off. Unless you want to get your bags right away?”

“Not if those are Mom’s chocolate peanut butter cookies I can smell,” the sheriff declared, making Stiles raise his head in anticipation. Hannah’s grin widened.

“Turns out all the good baking stuff is in the bottom shelf,” she remarked. “I figured it’s the least I can do for you boys coming out all this way to help me.”

Stiles had only had Grandma Stilinski’s chocolate peanut butter cookies a couple of times since she’d passed away a few years before his mom, and his mouth watered at the memory of them. “Feel free to make me cookies any time you like, Aunt Hannah,” he declared.

“Don’t; he’ll be going back to school twenty pounds heavier and I’ll never hear the end of it,” the sheriff cut in dryly. Hannah laughed, heading into the kitchen, where sure enough the tray of cookies were sat on the table.

“Milk is in the fridge if you want it.” Stiles busied himself pouring three glasses of milk, bringing them over to the kitchen table where the two adults had already made themselves comfortable. He sat down, reaching for a cookie and cramming it into his mouth unashamedly, ignoring his dad’s exasperated look. Those cookies were heaven.

“If I’m here all summer, you’re gonna have to teach me the recipe for those,” he pleaded.

“I guess you’re old enough to learn by now. Your dad was never that great with baking, I’m not surprised he doesn’t remember it,” Hannah said, glancing at her older brother.

“Yeah, that hasn’t changed,” Stiles confirmed.

“Why would I bake when there’s a great bakery in town?” the sheriff retorted, grabbing his own stack of cookies. “Anyway, Hannah, how are you really doing? They only let you out of hospital this morning, right?”

“Yeah, a little before lunch. I’m okay, really; still sore, but they’ve given me the good drugs. I’m just glad I have the suite down here still set up with all the bars from when Dad lived here. I’d hate to have to figure out how to get upstairs every time I wanted a bath.”

“That does make things a lot easier. Well, we’re here to help however you need. I’ll be out for work a lot, but Stiles will be around, so you can put him to work as much as you want,” the sheriff said. Hannah sipped at her milk, gratitude in her eyes.

“I really appreciate this, both of you. Stiles, I know you probably had better plans for your summer than hanging out with your wheelchair-bound aunt, and I’m sorry I had to ask this of you, but I hope
we can have some fun too.”

Stiles suddenly felt bad about all the complaining he’d done. “It’s okay, Aunt Hannah. It’s not exactly your fault.” From what his dad had told him of the accident, she’d been hit by some joy-riding kids in a sports car while crossing the street. She was lucky to be alive. “I think we’re long overdue some family hangout time.” She smiled, reaching across the table to squeeze his hand.

Stiles was mostly silent as the two siblings caught up on their lives, steadily making his way through the pile of cookies, until his dad tossed his car keys at him. “Go unload the bags, before you eat any more of those things. You’ve had enough sugar to keep you awake for a week,” he joked.

“You just don’t want me to eat them all so you can have them,” Stiles retorted knowingly, but obediently left to start bringing bags in. His dad had packed lighter than he had, as he’d for sure be going back to Beacon Hills at least once a week.

“You’re the first door on the left, your dad is down the hall on the right,” Hannah called from the kitchen, and Stiles called back a vague confirmation, jogging up the stairs to deposit the bags. It took two trips, but soon he was in what would be his room for the duration of the summer, his things piled on the floor in front of him. It wasn’t too bad, though it was clearly a guest room; a little smaller than his room back home, there was a queen size bed with a desk opposite, and a wardrobe next to the window.

Deciding to let his dad have a little more time to talk to his sister, Stiles unzipped his first suitcase, turning some music on his phone while he started unpacking. There weren’t any messages, not that he really expected to have any. But it would have been nice.

He’d brought a sizeable stack of supernatural-related books with him, and he kept those in a duffle bag under the bed, trusting his dad not to go snooping. Deaton’s book was in there too, and Stiles’ curiosity was burning.

There was a knock on the door, and he turned to look at his dad. “Settling in okay?”

“Yeah, all cool here. Pretty sweet view from the window.” He jerked a thumb at the glass, through which he could see mountains and forests, a vague hint of a city creeping in on the horizon.

“Yeah, Hannah picked a good town to settle down in.” The sheriff paused, looking uneasy. “You gonna be okay here all summer, kid?”

“Little late now, isn’t it?” Stiles said wryly. “I’ll be fine, Dad. Maybe you were right; maybe it’ll be good for me. Get a little me-time. Quit being so codependent with Scott.” He’d thought it over on the drive, and the thought of spending a whole summer without any distractions or drama actually sounded pretty good. Sure, he wouldn’t have the fun adventures with friends he’d dreamed of, but he could get work done and do research without having to deal with Scott’s latest crisis or the betas doing something dumb, or Derek threatening to rip his throat out with his teeth. And, he hoped privately, maybe without him around the pack would realise that he was actually a vital part of the team, and they missed him.

A guy could dream.

“That’s the spirit, kiddo,” the sheriff encouraged. “You’re seventeen, it’s a good age to take a little time and figure out where you’re at in life, who you wanna be. You’ve been… distant, lately. I’ll be honest, son, you’ve worried me this year. So forgive me if I don’t feel terrible about taking you out of that environment,” he confessed. “Let’s hope this is good for both of us, huh?”
Stiles was used to the ever-present guilt by now, but every now and then it reared up higher, choking him. Now was one of those times. “I’m sorry, Dad,” he started, but the sheriff shook his head.

“I know, kid. And whenever you’re ready to talk about what’s been going on with you, I’ll be here. But until then, let’s go sit with Hannah for a little while. I can’t believe it took her getting hit by a car for us to come visit. I’m a terrible brother,” he mused, sighing.

“It’s been a rough few years, Dad. I’m sure Aunt Hannah gets it.” It had taken a long time for Noah Stilinski to be even remotely okay after losing his wife. Even longer for Stiles to come to terms with losing his mother.

Hannah had relocated to the living room when they went back downstairs, a cup of tea in her hands. “So, Stiles,” she said once he was settled on the couch, his feet tucked up underneath him. “What’s been going on in your life? A ten minute phone call every couple months just isn’t cutting it,” she said with a grin. “You’re in high school, that’s gotta be interesting. Spill.”

Stiles laughed, trying in his head to figure out exactly what he could tell her without having to outright lie about it. There wasn’t much, honestly. No wonder his dad was worried about him.

“Well, Lydia Martin is still the most incredible goddess of a human being, and my number one rival for valedictorian,” he started with a grin.

When in doubt, wax poetical about Lydia. It was a strategy that hadn’t failed him yet.
Stiles had been in Redford for two full days, and he was already bored. His summer homework was all finished, most of the pack had stopped texting him back after a few rambling essay-length texts on his end, and Scott was MIA as it was Allison’s last day in the country before she and her dad went to France.

He was considering getting a summer job, just for something to do, but he wasn’t sure if there was anything nearby that would be worth it. It would have to be part time — with the amount of time his dad spent working, or back at Beacon Hills, Stiles had to be around to help Hannah at least two days out of the week. Still, it could be fun finding something to do, and extra money certainly couldn’t hurt.

Anything to keep him busy. He’d spent so long on edge lately, so many months and weeks waiting for disaster at any moment, that this amount of down-time was excruciating.

Jogging downstairs, he found his aunt in the kitchen, rearranging her baking supplies in the lower cabinets. Earlier that afternoon, Stiles had helped get everything she might need out of the higher cabinets, but she’d shooed him out while she arranged things to her liking, insisting he had better things to do than watch her stack crockery for an hour. Turned out, that wasn’t entirely true.

“Hey, Hannah. You still going?”

“Starting to think I’ll never finish,” she replied, turning her chair around and sighing. “Why the hell do I own so many baking tins?”

“I am the wrong person to be asking,” Stiles replied, perching on the edge of the counter. “Hey, I was wondering; do you know anywhere around here that might be hiring part-time summer staff? I’m sure if you ask my dad he’ll agree that having me bored and restless is not a fate you want inflicted upon you, and, well, money is always helpful. Is there like, a bookstore, or an office, or something?” He usually spent his summers working in the sheriff’s department filing paperwork for extra cash — at least, he had until his dad had caught him snooping through classified files one too many times and forbid him from being in the station unsupervised.

“Hmm. I don’t know about offices — we’re not exactly a bustling metropolis out here. But there’s a little bookstore slash café thing in town, or the library, or the county clerk’s office. Probably a couple other places. Not sure if any of them are hiring, though. Why don’t you drive into town tomorrow and ask?”

“Will you be okay if I do?”

Hannah shot him a pointed look. “Stiles, I might be stuck in this chair, but I’m still a grown ass woman. I can handle a few hours by myself, especially once I’ve got my kitchen sorted out. I don’t want you to feel like you’re stuck on house arrest, sweetheart. Go take a day for yourself, explore the
town, get a milkshake — the ice cream place is incredible. Actually, I demand you go, because I’m gonna need you to bring me back a strawberry malt. That’s an order from your poor, injured aunt.”

Stiles laughed, giving a playful salute. “Yes, ma’am. I’ll head in tomorrow morning, see what I can find.” He hopped off the counter, standing behind his aunt and resting his hands on her shoulders. “Until then, how about we work together to clear all this away so I can make dinner before dad starts threatening to get take-out?”

The pair of them surveyed the mess of kitchenware, and Hannah sighed. “Yeah, okay. I need help,” she admitted. Stiles snorted; that was an understatement.

He set to work helping stack plates and trays and bowls, chattering away about his biology homework and taking comfort in not being told to shut up or slow down. It almost helped chase away the weird, hollow feeling in his chest that he’d had ever since leaving Beacon Hills, like something had been scooped out of him. It wasn’t homesickness. It was something bigger. He knew, deep down, that it was the pack. Or rather, the absence of them.

Could humans feel pack bonds that strongly? Was that a thing? He’d have to do some research.

That evening found Stiles shut in his room long past the time everyone else had gone to bed, his nose buried in the book Deaton had given him, his laptop open beside him despite the fact that no one was online for him to talk to. He lived in hope.

The book was interesting, though he wasn’t sure what Deaton had meant by it ‘coming in handy’. It was about the different kinds of magic, specifically detailing the history of druids and their practice. He hadn’t read it the whole way through yet, but unless they were planning on fighting some druids, Stiles wasn’t sure what he was supposed to be gaining from it. Still, it was a fun read.

He set it aside for a moment, reaching for his laptop and scrolling absently through Facebook. Erica had posted a cute selfie with Boyd at the ice rink, and Stiles liked it, glad they were starting to get back to their normal lives. From the sounds of things, what they’d gone through in their brief time with the Alpha Pack made what Gerard did to him look like child’s play.

Just as he was starting to think about possibly calling it a night, his window rattled. Stiles froze, his heartbeat picking up. There was a quiet thump outside. He reached down slowly, fingers curling around the handle of the baseball bat he had stashed under his bed. Just as he got to his feet, his window slid open and a dark shape appeared, only the alarmed flash of red eyes and familiar leather jacket stopping Stiles from swinging his bat.

“Derek, what the fuck.”

“Why do you have a baseball bat? You don’t even play baseball,” Derek Hale asked as he squeezed through the now-open window, long denim-clad legs unfolding until he was stood in Stiles’ room. In Redford. Three hours from Beacon Hills.

“What the hell are you doing here?” Stiles hissed, setting the bat down on the bed. He eyed the werewolf over, catching the faint dampness to his hair, the mud flecked on the hem of his jeans. “Did you run here?”

Derek glanced away and didn’t answer, which was as good as a yes. A sudden thought struck Stiles cold. “Is everyone okay? Did something happen?”

“The pack is fine. I need you to research something for me,” Derek said, shoulders hunched as he
glanced around Stiles’ new room, nose twitching, a vague look of distaste on his face.

“Damn, missed me already?” Stiles teased, all thought of sleep gone as he grabbed his laptop and set it on the desk, sinking into the chair. “What do you need?”

“There’s been some stabbings. Non-fatal so far, all victims have said they were attacked by a little kid with a knife.”

“What?” Stiles asked incredulously. Derek just nodded, aware of how bizarre that sounded.

“I know. But every time the kid just disappears — as in, turns invisible, not runs away. There’s also been small fires in the areas around the time of the stabbing.”

Stiles grimaced; no wonder Derek was taking an interest.

“Little kid looking creature, uses a knife, likes fire and can turn invisible,” Stiles rattled off, mentally running through his options. “Anything else?”

“It smells weird,” Derek told him. “Like… earthy. Or wet stone?” He leaned in to look over Stiles’ shoulder as he started his search. Stiles hated the way his heartbeat ticked up at the close proximity, the heat of the werewolf radiating against his back.

“So, trouble already? It’s only Monday, dude,” he glanced at the clock in the corner of his screen. “Well, Tuesday, now. But how are you guys already in trouble?”

“I don’t know if it’s trouble, yet,” Derek retorted. “That’s why I’m here.”

“Yeah, I’m still confused by that. You do know phones are a thing, right? You have one, I have one, you can use yours to contact mine…” Derek growled, and Stiles’ mouth snapped audibly shut. He turned back to his screen, scrolling through some of his usual reliable websites for anything matching Derek’s description. “I mean, I don’t know why I’m complaining,” Stiles muttered as he read, more to himself than anything else. “It’s nice to know I’m still needed. Not like anyone else has bothered to try. Aha!” He exclaimed, startling Derek into taking a half-step back. “Here you go. Kobolds — they’re a type of goblin, usually found in mines. Sound familiar?”

Derek leaned closer, reading the paragraph Stiles had found. His breath was hot on Stiles’ neck, and Stiles tried not to focus on that too much. He hoped Derek thought his racing pulse was just from being startled and excited to research, rather than the other kind of excited. Did he realise how much he was invading Stiles’ personal space?

“Yeah. Does it say how to get rid of it?”

Stiles kept looking, much easier now he had a name to go off. “So other than the… this, how’s stuff back home?”

“Same old,” Derek replied noncommittally. “Scott was moping for a while, after Allison left. Isaac made him help move the train car, that kept him busy.”

An odd feeling went through Stiles, almost like jealousy but not quite. He felt bad that his buddy was sad, but the thought of Isaac being the one to cheer him up made the vice in his chest twist harder. No wonder Stiles hadn’t been bombarded with texts about missing Allison and requests to play Call of Duty online.

“Erica and Boyd doing okay?” He asked tentatively, unsure if he had any right to the question. They were pack, but they weren’t really friends. Not yet. He’d been hoping to work on that this summer,
but clearly the universe had different ideas.

“They’re healing,” Derek said. “It’ll take a while, but… they’re getting there. I just need to know what the Alpha Pack are up to. Every minute they’re out there is a minute my betas are worried about being taken again.”

Stiles bit his lip, glancing back up at Derek. The alpha’s brows were furrowed, his jaw tight. Stiles wondered how much time he spent worrying about that, how much he thought about what Erica and Boyd and Isaac had to be feeling. He didn’t understand how Scott could call Derek an asshole all the time when it was clear that he was trying so hard. He cared, he was just… emotionally constipated.

“We’ll find them, and we’ll make sure our pack is safe,” he promised, meeting Derek’s hazel eyes. Derek’s lips curled in something that was almost a smile. “Speaking of safe, here’s your answer. Seems like the usual brute force and iron weapon will do the trick. It’s weird, though; they’re not usually violent creatures. Tricksy, sure, but not malevolent. There might be something weirder at hand.”

Derek hummed quietly, nodding, eyes scanning the text carefully. “Thanks, Stiles.” He stepped back, hands awkwardly in the pockets of his jacket. Stiles glanced at the clock; half an hour. Derek had run all this way for just half an hour of Stiles’ Google prowess. Why the hell hadn’t he just called? “Are you okay?”

That was not a question Stiles had ever expected to hear from Derek Hale’s lips. He blinked. “Me? Yeah, I’m doing just fine, no need to worry about me. Little bored, little lonely, nothing I’m not used to — and you can just go right on ahead and forget I ever said that,” he added quickly, blood rushing to his cheeks. Derek ducked his head, looking a little flushed himself.

“Adjusting to new places is hard,” he said eventually. Stiles held his breath, waiting for more, but that seemed to be the extent of Derek’s wisdom for the evening.

“I might get a summer job. Maybe start running,” Stiles declared. Derek nodded.

“That’d be good. Keep your skills sharp. Be ready in case… in case.”

The two of them looked at each other in awkward silence — or rather, Derek looked at Stiles, and Stiles looked at a spot a few inches to the left of Derek’s head. Eventually, Derek shifted. “I should go. Let you sleep.”

“Forget about me, when the hell are you gonna sleep? How long did it take you to get here, anyway?” He’d joked to Scott about making the run, but he hadn’t expected it to actually be doable. Derek shrugged.

“Three, maybe three and a half hours,” he replied, as if that was a totally reasonable time to run that kind of distance. Stiles let out a low whistle.

“Damn.” He bit his lip before he blurted out his thanks; he hadn’t realised how much he’d missed the pack until Derek showed up. That reminded him. “Hey, Derek. Can humans feel pack bonds?”

One of his thick eyebrows rose. Stiles immediately felt stupid for asking the question, but he held his ground. “They can,” Derek said eventually. “Pack humans feel it… differently. But it’s there. Sometimes.” He looked like he was going to ask something, but instead he turned away, reaching for the window. “Thanks again, Stiles.” With that, he disappeared, barely stopping to shut the window behind him before he was nothing more than a dark blur heading for the woods. Stiles stared at the window for several long minutes after he was gone.
“Did that just happen?” he asked himself, running a hand over his hair. “Did I hallucinate Derek Hale?”

Snorting, he shut his laptop down and stripped off his jeans, deciding to deal with that particular problem in the morning.

As he relaxed into his mattress, his mind stayed stuck on the one simple fact.

Derek Hale had come all the way to Redford, for him.
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

My wifi is gonna be super sketchy for the next couple weeks, so apologies if updates aren't as regular as they have been. Just know that I already have this whole thing written, so it won't be abandoned!

After the late-night visit from everyone’s favourite alpha wolf — which, according to Stiles’ browser history and the marks around his window, he had not hallucinated — Stiles couldn’t stop thinking about Derek’s words. *Keep your skills sharp, in case*...

Anything could happen in Beacon Hills. Even if the Alpha Pack never returned, it was only a matter of time before the next supernatural showdown. He was an idiot if he believed everything would be fine and dandy now that Gerard was dead; only Scott believed that. Their pack was a disaster, and his life was a disaster, and maybe if he could get his shit together just a little bit, there might be less death and destruction in his future. Being away from the pack was probably the only chance he was going to get to *actually* get his shit together, as bad as it sounded, and he’d be damned if he didn’t make the most of it.

So, Stiles planned. He followed his aunt’s order to head into town and explore, turning job applications in at both the bookstore and the library. It wasn’t as big as Beacon Hills, but it was a nice little town, and Stiles spent far more time than he’d anticipated just browsing the random stores full of all kinds of cool junk, eventually ending up in the ice cream shop she’d told him about. As he sat in front of a banana split the size of his head, notes app open on his phone, Stiles descended into the research zone. So far, his list looked a little like this.

**Knowledge = Power**

- Online bestiary?

- Notes on previous monsters

- Crowdsourcing - supernatural community? *Gotta be online somewhere.*

- Figure out what’s fact/fiction - ask Peter? (Ew)

**Defence**

- Stop sucking at fitness. Running. Self-defence lessons?

- Get dad to take me to the gun range

- Research - weapons good against supernaturals

- Stop being a useless human
He was stuck on that last point. So many things in the last year would have been different if his dad had known what was up. But… if he knew, Stiles had nothing else to hide behind. His dad would want to be involved in everything, he’d probably stop Stiles from doing any kind of pack stuff without his permission. Melissa was different; as long as her son was alive and happy, she didn’t want to know specifics. She was always there to help patch them up or bail them out if needed, but otherwise she didn’t want to be involved. The sheriff wouldn’t be like that. Could Stiles take that risk?

Maybe he’d talk to Derek about it sometime. If the man ever came back to visit him. He’d probably realised Stiles wasn’t worth the journey, and would just call next time. If that.

Shaking his head and shoving another spoonful of delicious ice cream into his mouth, Stiles turned back to his list. Other things, he could definitely do something about. Running was now going to become part of his daily routine — if the exercise helped him sleep without Gerard-related nightmares, all the better. He wasn’t sure about the self-defence, but he could start working on his muscles and stamina at the very least. He was never going to be Allison with her archery skills and mysteriously infinite collection of knives, but he could learn to hold his own in a fight. He could swing a mean baseball bat, to start.

He hadn’t been to the gun range with his dad since he was fourteen, but Sheriff Stilinski was adamant that his son learn how to properly use and care for firearms, since there was one in the house at all times. It was kept in a safe, of course, but it was there if Stiles had need of it. His dad would probably like taking him shooting again; something the two of them could do together. Maybe it would go a little ways to fixing the relationship Stiles had hugely screwed up with all his lies and avoidance.

As for the online bestiary… that was going to be one hell of an undertaking.

When he got home, strawberry malt in hand for Hannah (and a mint chocolate chip milkshake for his dad, just this once) Stiles spent the evening in his room, scouring the internet for any sign of an already existing online resource for legit supernaturals. All he could find were forums that looked a little more knowledgable than others, the wording of the posts definitely speaking from personal experience. Honestly, he was surprised; with all the random crap on the internet these days, it would be easy to have some kind of community resource without revealing the supernatural world to the general public. People would just assume it was some sort of role-playing thing, or a bunch of online crazies.

That was how Stiles spent the next couple of days. Between helping Hannah with things whenever his dad was busy working, and running at least once a day, Stiles was in his room on his laptop, books open at his side as he transcribed anything that might be useful. His head was swimming with ideas for a site — like some sort of supernatural Wikipedia, with a forum attached for discussion and advice — and not for the first time he wished Danny was part of the pack. The computer genius would be the perfect person for such an undertaking; he could build a site like that in his sleep, and all Stiles would have to do was fill it with information. For now, building a personal resource would have to do, with knowledge from the books as well as the websites he’d already found to be legitimate.

It was one of those evenings, Stiles’s eyes going blurry from squinting at handwritten text and copying it up on his computer, that his window rattled. He tensed, but didn’t go for the baseball bat this time, smirking as Derek slid the window open and ducked into the room. “Evening,” Stiles
greeted. "What can I do for you this time, oh mighty Alpha Hale?"

Derek’s face did something weird at those last two words, his eyes glowing red for the barest of moments. He shook it off, gaze trailing over Stiles and the books that surrounded him. “What are you doing?”

“Copying up anything that might be useful out of these books. Next time we have to face some kind of Big Bad, I’d love to not have to spend fifteen hours reading archaic Latin to find the solution. A simple search function would be so much easier.” Stiles shifted a couple of the books, and was surprised when Derek moved to perch on the edge of the bed behind him, peering at his laptop screen. There were dozens of browser tabs open, so many the page titles weren’t even visible, and in a second window Stiles had a project file open to compile as much data as possible. When he had everything down, he’d work through the process of sorting it into something useable.

“Have you even slept since I was last here?” Derek asked, looking incredulously at the amount of writing Stiles had done so far. Stiles snorted.

“Sleep is for the weak,” he retorted, not wanting to admit how often he woke up with his breath stuck in his throat, Gerard’s face burned into his eyelids. “Anyway, you never answered. What can I do for you?”

As soon as the words left his mouth, he was extremely aware of the position they were in; Stiles sat cross-legged on the bed, Derek a scant few inches behind him, leaned in close to look at his screen. His cheeks burned, and he abruptly shuffled away, leaning against the headboard and propping his laptop on his thighs. He tried to make the movement look natural, but he probably failed.

“This symbol,” Derek said, pulling a scrap of paper from his pocket. On it was a neat drawing of a swirling, circular symbol, like three overlapping waves. Stiles hummed. He hadn’t seen it in any of the books he’d read so far, and he hadn’t seen it in any of the books he’d read so far, and he’d read a lot. He told Derek as much, watching the werewolf frown.

“You may as well get comfy, this could take a little while. Just don’t get your muddy boots on my sheets,” he added, bringing up a brand new browser window to start his research. To his surprise, Derek actually did as asked, unzipping his boots and carefully moving the books aside so he could sit beside Stiles, his back against the headboard. The sight of Derek’s feet clad in blue and purple striped socks did something to Stiles’ heart.

“I have some books,” the alpha said suddenly. “From… from the house. Some of them were salvageable after the fire. I could bring them to you, if you like. But you can’t put what’s in them into whatever it is you’re working on there. It’s family knowledge. Pack only.”

Stiles imagined what kind of knowledge would be passed down through a pack over the years; so many of his questions about werewolves and their culture could be answered by such books. There might be stuff in there that even Derek didn’t know. “I would love that, actually. If you don’t mind me having them.” Most of the stuff he was working from was either out of the Argent collection, or from a few books that he and Lydia had found on Ebay and had Peter confirm the legitimacy of. Having something from a werewolf’s perspective could be invaluable — hunters, he was learning, were biased as heck.

“I wouldn’t offer if I minded,” Derek pointed out, his voice a low rumble. “I’ll bring them next time.”

Something fluttered happily in Stiles’ belly at the easy admission that there would be a next time. “Awesome.” He turned back to his screen, wishing there was an easy way to search for images like
there was words. Trying to describe the symbol in a search engine was not going well.

“Have you heard from Scott recently?” Derek asked quietly. Stiles blinked.

“Not really. A few texts here and there, nothing major. Why? What’s he done now?” Stiles had assumed Scott’s radio silence was down to summer school starting; between that and working with Deaton, he had to be pretty busy. At least, that’s what he was telling himself.

“He’s stopped showing up to pack meetings. Won’t take my calls.” Derek sounded frustrated, and Stiles didn’t blame him.

“Ugh, that idiot. I’ll try and talk to him.” He wasn’t sure exactly what he’d say — only that he knew he could never tell Scott about Derek coming to visit him, or his best friend would explode — but he had to do something. Scott isolating himself couldn’t be a good thing. “What’d you do to piss him off this time?”

Derek glared briefly at the insinuation that it was his fault, and Stiles raised an eyebrow. The werewolf huffed. “I need my pack to work together better,” he said. “Learning to fight together isn’t enough. Pack is… it’s supposed to be a family. It doesn’t work if we only see each other when there’s a problem.”

“And Scott took offence to being told to play nice with the other kids?” Stiles presumed, watching Derek’s scowl deepen.

“He thinks he has control, but he doesn’t. He thinks he knows everything…” Derek reached up to rub the bridge of his nose. It was probably the only time Stiles had seen him do anything to admit that he was stressed out. “The Alpha Pack is watching.”

“You’ve seen them?” Stiles asked, alarmed. Derek shook his head.

“No, but I know they are. That’s what they do. When I was a kid, there were rumours — Alpha Packs like to think of themselves as the law enforcement of the werewolf world. They watch packs that are new or struggling, watch the alphas. They want to see if I’m worthy of having a pack, of holding the Hale land.”

“And… if they decide you’re not?” Stiles was pretty sure he could guess the answer.

“They kill me, and force my pack to either follow them or die,” Derek said grimly. “They say it’s about keeping us safe, making sure a poorly-run pack won’t expose us to the world, but really it’s about power. The more alphas they kill, the more power they gain.”

Stiles’ hands clenched, his research forgotten. How could he sit in Redford and think about himself when Derek was getting judged by power-hungry, deranged alphas? The pack was a shambles! Surely if they knew Derek’s life depended on them, they’d pull it together? “Have you told the rest of the pack this?” he tried not to panic, his pulse skyrocketing. How long would the Alpha Pack give them? What if they made the decision before Stiles got back, and there was nothing he could do about it? Would they come after him, since he was part of the pack?

“They don’t need to know.”

“I’m pretty sure they do, Derek! Their behaviour is being judged just as much as yours!”

“I’m the alpha, I shouldn’t need to tell them to make them shape up. Besides,” he added bitterly, “do you really see Scott giving a damn about whether I die or not?”
Stiles hated that he couldn’t argue that. Derek dying would probably just be a problem solved in Scott’s eyes. His dumb best friend didn’t realise how often Derek had saved his ass. “Well there’s also that little bit about making the pack submit or die! I think they’d care about that part,” he bit out, his voice tinged with hysteria.

“I won’t let that happen,” Derek insisted. “Whatever happens to me, I’ll keep them safe.”

“Believe it or not, that doesn’t make me feel better!” Stiles exclaimed quietly, well aware of his dad asleep down the hall. How could Derek talk so calmly about potentially being killed, and his pack not doing a thing to stop it?

“Stiles, breathe,” Derek murmured, his hands gripping Stiles’ shoulders just tight enough to snap him out of his spiralling anxiety attack. “Scott will be okay.”

“Fuck Scott!” Stiles retorted. “Is it really a surprise that I would like you to not be dead? I held you up in that pool for two goddamn hours!”

Derek blinked, taken-aback. Stiles’ heart ached for him; he thought his life was rough because none of the pack would text him back. What state was Derek in that he didn’t think people even cared if he died? “Derek, tell the pack. They’ll try harder if they know it matters. They’re being dumb teenagers right now — you went and picked a bunch of betas with authority issues, and then tried to become the new authority without any reason other than ‘I’m the alpha’ and some intense murder-brows. No wonder they’re fighting you. Show them what pack can be, tell them why it’s so important, and they’ll come around. Even Scott.” If he didn’t, Stiles would make him.

Derek’s lips pursed, and Stiles tried not to think too much about the older man’s hands on his shoulders, their knees pressed together. Now was not the time. “I don’t understand,” he said eventually. Stiles gave him a confused look. “Pack… I’ve never had to try this hard. Before, my family— everyone wanted to be pack. Mom didn’t have to make them. Now, you’re the only one who gives a damn, and you’re human.”

“Yeah, well, sorry we can’t all be werewolves,” Stiles muttered derisively. Derek’s grip tightened.

“Human isn’t a bad thing,” he said quietly.

Stiles held his breath until Derek moved away; not far, just enough to put some actual space between them. Slowly, his pulse started to return to normal. “You’re not alone anymore, Derek,” he said tentatively, fully expecting to be thrown against the wall with claws at his throat. This was the longest conversation he’d ever had with Derek Hale, and he was waiting for the man’s patience to snap. Instead, Derek merely looked like Stiles had gutted him. “We’ll never replace your family, but we can be something like it. We can’t do it without you, though; scowly, growly Sourwolf is great in a fight, but not so welcome at pack movie night, y’know? You gotta let your guard down, dude.”

“Don’t call me dude,” Derek snapped reflexively, making Stiles grin. “When I let my guard down, people die.”

“You’ve had a pretty shitty run of it,” Stiles agreed, grin fading. There was no point in arguing that. “But it sounds like people will die if you don’t let your guard down, now. You being one of the major ones. And I don’t know about those dumb beta wolves of yours, but I for one quite enjoy having an alpha that isn’t dead, or a power-hungry psychopath. So, y’know. Please try and keep it that way.”

Derek’s brows scrunched together, like he wasn’t quite sure what to make of Stiles’ words, and Stiles tried to will his blush away. Derek needed a wake-up call, and he was happy to be the one to
give it to him. No one else in the pack seemed to be stepping up, all too involved in their own angst and drama.

A yawn struck Stiles, and Derek stiffened. “I should go. You should sleep.” He reached for his boots, and within moments was back on his feet, shoulders hunched and gaze flitting to the window. Stiles bit back a sigh; he’d been so close to getting Derek to actually chill out for once.

“Did you run or drive?” Stiles asked, trying to look for signs of either.

“Drove,” Derek replied. “It’s not a bad trip. Not this late at night.” Stiles wasn’t sure which of them he was trying to convince, but his lips curled in a faint smile.

“Well, drive safe. I’ll look into the symbol and text you if I find anything,” he promised, gesturing to the scrap of paper on the bed that both of them had forgotten about. Derek nodded sharply.

“Thanks.” With that he left, and Stiles was alone again. The teen shook his head, letting out a long breath. His nerves were still going haywire — the thrill of being alone in his room with Derek that he didn’t think would ever go away, the lingering fear from the threat of the Alpha Pack, the utter confusion at why Derek was coming all this way just to see him. He’d acknowledged that Stiles could text him, so presumably his phone still worked. Why the hell was he coming in person?

Stiles sighed and set about packing the books back under his bed, swearing quietly at the time. One day, he’d stop being confused by Derek Hale. Today was not that day.
To Stiles’ delight, he was offered a job at the library; three days a week, 9 til 3. His dad took him out to celebrate, Hannah insisting she needed some time alone and practically throwing them out of the house, promising to call if she needed anything.

They went to a diner in town that Stiles had seen but not had the chance to try yet. The sheriff didn’t even complain too much when Stiles ordered a double serving of curly fries. “I guess with all that running you’ve been doing, you’ve earned them,” he said when the waitress left. “What kicked that off, anyway?”

Stiles scrambled for a reason that wasn’t ‘I need to be prepared to run away from terrifying monsters’. “I really wanna make first line next year,” he said eventually. Not completely a lie. “If I can work on my fitness, maybe practice my aim a little… a guy’s gotta dream, right?”

“After your performance at the end of last season, I’d say it’s a pretty reachable dream.” His dad grinned, before both of them were reminded of what happened after the game; though the sheriff was under the assumption Stiles had been beaten up by members of the rival team. “I’m glad you’ve found something to do here. The running, the library. Hannah and I were worried you’d be a little isolated. There’s not many other kids in Redford around your age.”

Stiles had seen a few around town, eyeing him suspiciously, but to be totally honest he wasn’t sure what he’d do if they ever approached him. Somewhere along the line he’d lost the ability to interact with normal kids his age. At least back home they were used to him being a weirdo.

“Yeah, I’ve got enough to keep me busy. Though, I was wondering… any chance we could take a trip to the gun range, like we used to? Next time you have a little time off, or whatever. Or when we’re back home. I don’t even know if there is a gun range nearby.”

The sheriff’s eyebrows rose. “Stiles, are you in trouble?”

“What? No!” Stiles insisted, hating how easy it was to lie to his dad. “I just… being here with Aunt Hannah, it’s reminded me there’s a lot of things we used to do that just kinda dropped off as I got older and life got in the way. I miss that.” He reached for his soda, ducking his head. “I miss spending time with you, Dad.” That one wasn’t a lie. He just wished hanging out with his dad didn’t come with so much avoidance and misdirection.

“I miss it too, kiddo,” the sheriff agreed softly. “I’ll see what I can do. I’m pretty sure there’s a range out in Hollow Springs, that’s not too far. Maybe we can go next time Hannah gets sick of us,” he joked, winking. Stiles snorted.

“So tomorrow?”

The sheriff laughed, shaking his head. “She loves having us around. She loves having you around,” he insisted. “She just hates that she can’t do all the stuff she wants to do with us here.”

“We should come back out and visit next summer,” Stiles suggested. “When she’s all healed up. Do some of the cool hikes she talked about, maybe go down to the river.”

“I think she’d like that a lot.”

A comfortable silence fell between them, and Stiles realised just how long it had been since he’d spent any significant length of time alone with his dad. He studied the man sat across the table from
him. “How are you doing, Dad?” The sheriff had been back to Beacon Hills twice already in the
week and a half they’d been in Redford. The adjustment wasn’t going quite so smooth as they’d
planned.

“You don’t need to worry about me, kid,” his dad said. “I’m doing just fine.”

Stiles hummed, but distraction came in the form of a mountain of curly fries, delivered by an amused-
looking waitress.

He couldn’t really blame his dad for lying to him. He was doing the same, after all.

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Only a few days after the last visit, Derek Hale climbed gracefully through Stiles’ window at a little
past midnight, not even asking before kicking off his boots and making himself comfortable on the
bed, dumping a satchel on the mattress next to Stiles with a pointed glance. Stiles snorted to himself,
but didn’t say anything, just reaching for the satchel curiously. When he saw the contents, his breath
caught in his throat.

When Derek said he had some books from his old pack, Stiles had anticipated textbooks about magic
and monsters and werewolf life, maybe even a version of ‘Puberty And You: Werewolf Edition’.
Not this.

The books Derek had brought him were old, some looking even older than the Argent books. Most
were leather-bound, but there were a few hardback journal-style books — when Stiles opened one,
he was awed to see handwritten notes and sketches filling every page, the name inside the front
cover declaring it to belong to ‘Emissary Natalie West-Hale, 1932’. The others were similar; journals
from past alphas and emissaries and pack members, dating right back to the early 1700s, full of
anecdotes and information about things they and their pack had encountered.

At the very bottom of the pile was a book so old and worn but clearly well-loved that Stiles was
almost too afraid to touch it. The peeling silver lettering on the front declared it to be ‘The Hale
Pack: Origins, Codes and Lineage’, the symbol underneath the same triskele Derek had tattooed on
his back. He opened it with careful hands, seeing several different peoples’ handwriting filling the
pages, including at the very end a five-page entry signed by Talia Hale herself.

“Derek…” he breathed, staring at the woman’s neat, flowing signature.

“Every Hale Alpha since the beginning of our pack has written in this book,” Derek told him, his
voice hardly louder than a whisper. “Some more than others. It’s to help keep the pack traditions
alive, remind us where we came from. It was in the safe when the fire happened. Most of these
were.”

Stiles’ chest tightened at the realisation of just how important the books and journals must be, to have
been so protected above all else in the Hale household. For Derek to be trusting him with them…
“Thank you,” he murmured sincerely, meeting Derek’s gaze. “I’ll be super careful with them. I’ll
even wear gloves, if you want.”

“That’s not necessary. They look old, but they’ve been through a lot. They had to survive
werewolves, after all,” Derek pointed out with the barest of smiles.

“Still,” Stiles said. “You can trust me with them. I’ll type everything up as quick as I can, then you
can put them back somewhere safe. Make sure that the information isn’t lost, even if… even if the
worst happens.” He was itching to start reading, wondering what kind of knowledge the Hale family
thought vital to pass down through generations. If he could get it all in digital, at least that knowledge would be protected. Just in case the universe wasn’t done shitting on the Hale family.

“Sounds good.” Derek leaned back against the headboard, drawing one knee up. This time his socks were dark green with pale grey spots, and it made Stiles chuckle. If he told any of his packmates that Derek Hale wore anything other than plain black socks, they’d never believe him.

Since Derek didn’t seem to have anything else to say to him, Stiles reached for the first book on the pile, opening a brand new project document on his laptop. True to his word, he’d keep it all totally separate from the rest of his research. This was for Hale Pack eyes only.

He was humming under his breath as he typed, but Derek didn’t seem to mind. The werewolf had picked up one of the books and was flicking through it himself, brows drawn in an unreadable expression. Stiles wondered if he’d read through them all since the fire, if he’d even read through them before then. He’d been sixteen when the fire had happened; pack history probably wasn’t his priority.

“I started renting a loft,” Derek said abruptly, making Stiles glance up from the page he was transcribing.

“Yeah?”

“It’s not much, but it’s better than the train car.” Derek looked cautious, and Stiles offered him an encouraging smile. Sometimes, talking with Derek was like trying to coax a stray cat in from the rain. One false move, and he’d be gone for weeks.

“I bet Isaac’s pleased.” From the few texts Scott had sent him and the posts he’d seen online, Isaac was living more at the McCall house than anywhere else. Derek’s expression closed up a little.

“I haven’t told him yet. I don’t want to make him choose.”

“But there’s a room for him?”

“Oh course,” Derek assured, affronted that Stiles might have thought otherwise.

“Then it won’t be a choice. His own room in a loft with his alpha versus the pull-out mattress on Scott’s bedroom floor? He’ll be over the moon. Heh. Wolf, moon,” Stiles added, grinning at his own unintentional joke. Derek rolled his eyes.

“I need to get a couple things fixed up first. I’ll tell him soon.”

If Isaac didn’t know, that was a good chance the rest of the pack didn’t know; possibly even Peter was unaware. Was Stiles the only pack member Derek had told? “Have you got pictures? Of the loft,” Stiles clarified, and Derek shook his head. “Dude, you have to take some and text them to me. I gotta get you a housewarming gift. Maybe a plant. Everyone needs a little greenery in their life. Oh. Is there werewolf catnip? I should definitely get you werewolf catnip.”

Derek was scowling, but it was the ‘Stiles, you’re an idiot’ scowl, not the ‘shut up before I rip your face off’ scowl. Stiles wondered when he’d learned to tell the difference. “There’s not werewolf catnip. And don’t call me dude.”

Stiles snickered, turning back to his work. “I bet these books will tell me if there’s werewolf catnip. Some Hale family secret.”

He kept typing, the silence only broken by the turn of a page and his occasional humming, before
something occurred to him. “Do the rest of the pack know you’ve been coming to visit me?” He was pretty sure he already knew the answer — he definitely would have had some angry calls from Scott if he was aware. But surely Isaac wondered where Derek was going at night? Maybe not, if he was always at Scott’s house.

“No,” Derek replied simply, offering no explanation. Stiles wisely kept his mouth shut, turning back to his laptop. But he couldn’t stop the smile that tugged at his lips.

He liked the idea of these late-night visits being just between the two of them, their little secret. Within these walls existed a Derek Hale that Stiles had never encountered before; one who wore dumb patterned socks, and cared about making his betas happy, and shared priceless family heirlooms without even blinking. One who, dare he say it, kinda actually enjoyed Stiles’ company. He had to, right? To keep coming out here. Research was the flimsiest excuse in the world.

There was a reason Stiles hadn’t told anyone about hanging out with Derek, and it was probably the same reason Derek hadn’t said anything either. He didn’t want any of the pack to get involved, or start judging — or worse, say something to make Derek stop coming.

-.-.-.

Derek stayed later than anticipated thanks to the journals they both got caught up reading, but Stiles was still up early, his sleep haunted by Gerard Argent and what might have happened if no one had come. He padded down to the kitchen, offering a weary smile to Hannah, who had a cup of steaming coffee on the table in front of her, an iPad propped up against the edge of an empty cereal bowl. “Hey, Stiles,” she greeted, surprised. “You’re up early. Your dad just left; he might be in Beacon Hills overnight, so he said to text him if you need anything from the house.”

“Will do, thanks.” He shuffled towards the coffee pot, relieved to find enough left for one more cup.

“I’m surprised you didn’t go with him,” Hannah remarked neutrally. “You haven’t been back since you got here.”

He’d been away from home for over two weeks now, and honestly he wasn’t missing it as much as he’d expected. He had a routine in Redford now, and while he’d hardly heard from anyone back home, it wasn’t bothering him as much. He dreaded to think how different that would be if Derek hadn’t started showing up. At least he had proof that one person he considered a friend was missing his presence.

“Everyone’s busy,” he deflected. “Scott has summer school. People are doing stuff.” If they couldn’t be bothered to reply to his texts, they probably couldn’t be bothered to make plans, and he’d rather not go home at all than go home and spend the whole time alone. He’d thought about going to see Derek, but he didn’t want to break this tenuous change in their relationship that only seemed to exist in Stiles’ temporary bedroom between the hours of midnight and four.

He’d be much happier spending his time typing up the Hale journals and hanging out with his aunt. “Besides, I though the whole point of us coming here was to make sure you weren’t alone for too long. We can’t both go to Beacon Hills,” he added, grabbing an apple out of the fruit bowl. Hannah huffed.

“I can be left alone for a night without dying,” she muttered. Stiles raised an eyebrow at her. Her breaks were in the lower legs, so she still had pretty good mobility when it came to pulling herself around, but she still needed help getting dressed and getting in and out of her shower chair. Stiles had lost all embarrassment about that pretty quickly, especially after the reminder that she’d changed his diapers.
“I want to stay here and hang with you,” Stiles told her, before yawning widely.

“You look like you’ve hardly slept. Are you doing okay?” Hannah asked, concerned. Stiles shrugged. He couldn’t exactly admit what kept him up so late.

“I don’t sleep so great these days. Takes a while for my brain to shut down, y’know? And being away from home is still weird.” Multiple times, he’d woken up in his room here, wide-eyed and panicked for the few moments it took him to remember where he was.

Hannah’s lips curled in a frown. “I’m sorry,” she started, but Stiles shook his head.

“Not your fault,” he said, not for the first time.

“Still. I could’ve accepted the nurse the hospital offered to send home with me. I can afford it.”

“I’m glad you didn’t,” Stiles insisted, completely truthful. He might have complained about it when his dad first told him, but being away from Beacon Hills was doing him a world of good. “I just wish it hadn’t taken all this for us to come visit you. We should’ve been up years ago.” He wondered what life might have been like if he’d had his aunt to turn to when he couldn’t talk to his dad or Melissa. He didn’t blame his dad or Hannah for letting distance get the better of them, but it was nice to have bridged that gap again.

“Let’s make cookies,” Hannah declared impulsively. Stiles cocked his head. “You said you wanted to learn the Stilinski family recipe, and I need to do something that isn’t reading or watching TV. So let’s make cookies and eat them all before your dad gets back. You game?”

“Definitely,” Stiles said with a grin, downing the rest of his coffee and tossing his apple core in the trash. Hannah easily manoeuvred herself over to the cabinet she’d stashed the baking supplies in, pulling out a mixing bowl and an electric mixer.

“Okay, first thing’s first. Flour, sugar, cocoa powder; below the microwave, go.”

Stiles happily let his aunt order him around, taking keen note of each ingredient and measurement as she instructed him. “I have it written down somewhere, but honestly I’ve made this recipe so many times it’s practically instinct. I’ll try and find the recipe paper for you though.”

“Let’s see how I do without,” he declared, plaid sleeves rolled up to his elbows as he carefully measured out the dry ingredients.

The last time he’d made cookies with his aunt, he’d been six years old, and his assistance had mostly been in the form of licking the spoon and making a mess. Now, Hannah pretty much let him do the bulk of it, only intruding to show him the secret tips that made the family recipe just perfect.

“So,” she said, watching him cut butter into cubes. “Talk to me. What’s really going on in the life of Stiles Stilinski? I’m sure there’s a bunch of stuff you didn’t want to mention in front of your dad. You can trust me, promise; I have a lifetime of experience hiding things from my nosy big brother,” she added with a grin. Stiles froze for a moment, before he realised she probably didn’t mean werewolves and murder.

“Honestly, it’s not that interesting,” he insisted. “I go to school, I play video games with Scott, I spend too many hours on the internet. Normal teenage stuff.”

“How is Scott, anyway? You haven’t talked about him much since you got here.” Hannah had met Scott when he and Stiles were kids.
“Eh,” Stiles grunted, shrugging. “He’s Scott. He has a girlfriend now, sorta. He’s on the lacrosse team. First line. He’s in summer school at the moment, which sucks for him, but he super bombed like five classes.” He’s a werewolf now, no big deal, he added mentally, snickering to himself.

“Ohh,” Hannah said knowingly. Stiles turned to her.

“Ohh, what?”

“Girlfriend?” Hannah’s blue eyes were sympathetic, and it made Stiles scowl.

“Not at the moment. They broke up. But it barely mattered, they still spent all their time together as ‘just friends’. She’s in France for the summer with her dad.”

“That must suck for Scott,” his aunt said, keeping her tone purposefully neutral. “His best friend and his sorta-girlfriend leaving while he’s stuck in summer school.”

Stiles snorted. “He’s got Isaac, he’s doing just fine.” He’d already explained the Isaac situation to Hannah, as much as he could; that Isaac’s dad was abusive and Melissa was housing him until he was old enough to live by himself.

“You miss him, huh, sweetie?” Hannah murmured, reaching out to catch Stiles’ hand and squeezing it. He bit his lip.

“He’s busy,” he dismissed. “I get it. People change.” They both had in the last year. He’d seen a side of Scott he never wanted to, been let down by him in life-or-death situations. He still loved him like a brother, but… it wasn’t the same. It never could be.

Hannah brought Stiles’ hand to her lips, kissing it before she let go. “Grab those chocolate chips,” she instructed, pushing past the awkwardness in pure Stilinski fashion. “What about other friends? Sweet kid like you, you’ve gotta have people other than Scott.”

Swallowing back a retort about how ‘sweet’ didn’t really cut it in high school, Stiles tentatively told her a little about his packmates, having to heavily edit the stories of how they became friends. It was easier, talking to his aunt about them than his dad; the sheriff had too many questions about where and when and how things happened. Questions Stiles couldn’t answer. Hannah was just happy to hear about his dumb teenage life, taking it for granted that all these people would want to spend time with Stiles.

“This one time we were all hanging out at Lydia’s place, and Erica bet Scott she could eat a whole large pizza faster than him. I thought they were both gonna puke. She beat him, of course; he had to buy her coffee before school every day for a week.” He laughed at the memory of watching Scott’s cockiness fade as Erica practically inhaled half her pizza before he’d finished his first slice.

“Lydia’s, hmm?” Hannah’s impish smirk lit up her face. “You’re friends with her now, then? How’s that ten year plan working out?”

Stiles’ cheeks flooded in embarrassment, and he focused on the cookie dough in his hands, filling a second tray while the first was in the oven. “Yeah, not so much a thing anymore,” he admitted. “She’s happy with Jackson, and she’s become a good friend.” When she wasn’t pretending she was too good to acknowledge his existence, at least. School was still the same as it always was, but outside, with pack, they were tentatively friends, sometimes. Besides, after everything with Jackson and the kanima situation, he wasn’t dumb enough to think he’d ever have a chance. His priorities had changed.

“Damn, kid. Never thought I’d see the day,” Hannah mused, leaning on one elbow as she looked up
at him. There was a small smear of peanut butter on her left cheek, not that she noticed. “Good for you, though. I couldn’t bear tell you at the time, but idolising a person that much? Never gonna end well.”

“Yeah, figured that out eventually,” he replied wryly.

“So anyone else you’ve got your eye on, then? Any cute girls… or guys?”

Stiles almost dropped the hot tray he was holding. “What?” he asked, laughing awkwardly. “What makes you say that?”

“Just a hunch, but that reaction confirmed it,” Hannah remarked. She reached out, taking the tray from him and setting it on the counter, beckoning him to sit at the table with her. “Anything you wanna tell me?”

Stiles looked her in the eye, seeing nothing but openness and support. “Promise nothing I say gets back to Dad?”

“Your secrets are safe with me,” she vowed. “Though, for the record, I don’t think he’d give a damn about this. Noah just wants you to be happy, and he’s never been prejudiced.”

Stiles grimaced. “I know, I just… don’t know how to bring it up.” His dad would want to know how he knew, and that would open a whole other can of worms he definitely didn’t want to get into. “Even Scott doesn’t know.”

“You wanna talk about it?”

“God, yes,” he blurted before he could help himself, and Hannah laughed.

“Cookies and milk, go,” she ordered. Stiles jumped up, pouring two glasses of milk and plating up some of the first batch of cookies. They were still warm, and his mouth watered. When he was back at the table, sat opposite his aunt with the cookies between them, she propped her elbow on the arm of her wheelchair and gave him a pointed look. “Okay, spill. Circle of trust, right here.”

Stiles ran a hand through his hair, wondering where the hell to start. What to say without making his aunt think he’s crazy. Taking away all the werewolf stuff didn’t leave him much to explain. But he’d never had anyone so earnestly willing to listen to him talk about his feelings before, not like that. He needed to talk about it to someone who wasn’t going to judge his choices.

“So, there’s this guy,” he began, anxiously reaching for a cookie and nibbling at the edge. Hannah nodded in a wordless ‘go on’ motion. “He’s… older. Dad wouldn’t like it. Or him.” Very firmly didn’t like him, as a matter of fact. Hannah’s grin widened.

“Ooh, a bad boy?” Stiles nodded — that was a bit of an understatement. “Sexy. Tell me about him.”

“He’s got these really dumb, scowly eyebrows that are about ninety percent of his facial expressions and at least fifty percent of those expressions threaten murder,” he said, the words coming before he could think to stop himself. “But he’s such a marshmallow and he doesn’t seem to realise that I can’t take him seriously anymore because I know he’s got all of the emotions. He’s so damn overprotective and sweet and he pretends like he doesn’t care about anything but it’s all lies and I just wanna give him a hug so bad because I honestly don’t know the last time someone hugged him for real.”

“Damn, kid, you’ve got it bad,” Hannah crowed playfully, and Stiles groaned, stuffing another cookie in his mouth.
“I know,” he said around a mouthful of hot, gooey deliciousness. “It’s the worst. He’s the worst. I want to hate him and his stupid face and his stupid muscles but instead I just wanna kiss him on his stupid scowly mouth.”

“So what’s the deal?” Hannah asked, scooting closer and dunking a cookie in her milk. “Is he like, hot neighbour that barely knows you exist? Works in your favourite diner? Older brother of a friend? Dad of a friend?”

“Hannah!” Stiles exclaimed, scandalised.

“What! You said older!” she argued. He laughed, shaking his head.

“He’s twenty-three,” he assured her. A fact he only knew thanks to some careful yearbook-stalking. “He knows I exist. We’re kinda friends? Maybe? It’s hard to tell. He’s not good at emoting. He has kind of a rough past.”


“Tell me about it. So for now, I pine from a distance, and pray to God that he never notices how I feel about him. And that Dad never finds out. I know he won’t mind about the guy thing,” he added before Hannah could go back to reassuring him. “I’ll tell him about that. Eventually. But the specific guy… that would be a dealbreaker.”

“You never know,” Hannah replied optimistically. “You should have seen some of the guys I dated when I was your age. Your dad is very used to having to keep his opinion to himself on those matters.” The sheriff was eight years older than Hannah, so he’d been in the police academy when she was in high school.

Stiles doubted any of his aunt’s ex-boyfriends had been accused of murder, but he didn’t bring it up. No need to go down that rabbit hole. It was pretty nice, being able to gush about Derek to someone who didn’t already know him, who didn’t have preconceived notions based on the scowling and the eyebrows and the suspicious movements. “We’ll see,” he said eventually. “It’s not like he’d ever date me, so it doesn’t really matter anyway.”

“You underestimate yourself,” Hannah said. “He’d be lucky to have you. Besides, don’t they say absence makes the heart grow fonder? Maybe this summer away is exactly what you need for him to realise how much he cares.”

Stiles smiled wryly; that only worked if the other person actually stayed away long enough for the absence to matter.
Stiles definitely felt a lot closer to his aunt after their cookies-and-crushes bonding session. To cheer him up about Derek, she’d told him all her own dating horror stories, from the awkward first dates to the time Stiles’ dad walked in on her having sex with a guy. When the sheriff got home the afternoon after, he could tell that something had changed, but true to her word Hannah kept her mouth shut. He just seemed happy to have his son and his sister enjoying each others’ company.

“I saw Scott while I was home, by the way,” the sheriff declared over dinner that evening. “He told me to tell you hi. So did the other kids he was with — Isaac, and is it Erica? And Boyd?”

“Isaac told you to say hi to me?” Stiles asked skeptically, eyebrows raised. The sheriff frowned.

“Well, no, he didn’t really say anything. But Erica said so, on behalf of the boys.” Stiles gave a half-smile; that sounded more likely. “You gonna go home and see them any time soon?”

He shrugged, nudging a roast potato around his plate. “Maybe. I don’t know. I’ve got work now, and they seem to be doing fine.” Every time he text them, he got some version of ‘can’t talk, wolf stuff’, so Derek was clearly working them hard. Or they just didn’t want to talk to him. The hollow feeling in his chest that he thought was his pack bonds was still present, though Derek’s visits eased it significantly.

“Taking time for yourself isn’t bad, but you should still make time for your friends,” Hannah told him gently. “Teenagers are dumb, but I’m sure they miss you. Even if it doesn’t seem like it.”

“I’ll think about it.” He was kinda enjoying his little solo zone of work, bumming around Redford, playing single-player video games and transcribing the Hale journals. He was learning so much about werewolves and pack life from the books, he couldn’t wait to be finished so he could share it all with Derek.

Conversation turned to Hannah’s upcoming doctor’s appointment, and Stiles stayed down after dinner to do the dishes and help get his aunt settled on the couch with her legs propped up on a pillow. He watched an episode of some crime drama with her, both of them mocking the sheriff for his muttered comments about inaccuracy and proper protocol, then made his excuses to go up to his room.

To his surprise, Scott was online when he logged in to Skype, and after a moment’s hesitation he clicked the call button, listening to it ring. An even bigger surprise was Scott actually picking up, his face filling Stiles’ laptop screen. He grinned widely. “Hey, buddy!” Scott greeted brightly. “How’s it hangin’?”

“Y’know, same old,” Stiles replied. “Nothing to report. How about you? What’s going on back home?” He’d text Scott pretty much everything interesting about his life in the last couple of weeks — Derek-related incidents not included — but his best friend had been pretty quiet in reply.

“All quiet on the home front,” Scott assured him. “There was a brief scuffle the other day with some pixies in the preserve but we sorted it without any real injuries. Derek’s been kicking our asses with this stupid training program. Apparently the Alpha Pack are judging us and they’ll kill us all if he’s a shitty alpha, or whatever. I don’t get why we should suffer for his faults. It’s not like I wanted to be part of Derek Hale’s pack.”

“Well, you’re out of options there, buddy. Unless you want to go omega.” Which, Stiles was
learning from the Hale journals, was even more dangerous than he’d previously thought. Omegas didn’t last long before they went feral and needed to be put down. “Besides, it’s not about him being a shitty alpha. It’s about you guys being shitty betas. Pack takes all of us to work, so stop dodging his calls and skipping pack meetings. Derek has a lot to teach you — so does Peter, as much as I hate to admit it.”

“How do you know I’m skipping pack meetings?” Scott asked. Stiles shot him a peeved look.

“Because unlike the rest of you, Derek actually bothers to keep me updated on what’s going on with the pack,” he sniped. “Scott, please. Actual lives are at stake here, okay? Just try. For me? I don’t want to come home to find all of you were murdered by alphas.”

“We won’t get murdered,” Scott promised, which was as good as Stiles was going to get. He sighed, not wanting to get into an argument with his best friend after hardly talking to him for weeks.

“So I saw on Facebook that Danny had a house party at the weekend. Did I miss anything good?”

Scott lit up, immediately launching into a description of one of the lacrosse guys getting wasted and deciding to try and make a move on Lydia, believing Jackson was out of the picture. Lydia had retaliated with her stiletto heel right in the guy’s crotch. Stiles grinned, trying to ignore the twisting in his gut from hearing his friends having fun without him. He was going to miss things, it was just a fact of life. He could still have a fun summer. Allison and Jackson were missing things, too; that didn’t mean they’d be forgotten about.

The call ended quickly when Isaac showed up, Stiles getting sick of the two of them talking to each other and forgetting he was even there. It left him feeling anxious in a weird way, like his skin didn’t fit right, the hollow feeling in his chest getting worse. Despite the late hour, Stiles grabbed a hoodie and changed into a pair of shorts, digging his tennis shoes out from under the desk. A run would help clear the weird feeling; at the very least, it would give him some other aches to think about.

For once, Stiles wasn’t already researching when Derek climbed through his window that evening; he was taking a hard-earned break, watching Netflix on his laptop. He immediately paused his show, opening a new web browser. “Hey, Sourwolf. What am I looking up tonight?”

“Nothing,” Derek said, sinking onto the edge of the bed and unzipping his boots. Stiles grinned at the dark red and gold striped socks; was Derek claiming Gryffindor alignment? Personally, his vote was more for Hufflepuff.

“Okaay… Wanna watch Daredevil with me?”

Derek leant against the headboard, his shoulders slumping as he let out a huff. “I need your help,” he said, looking physically uncomfortable at the admission. “With the pack.”

“What’s Scott done now?” Stiles asked flatly, setting his laptop aside and turning to sit cross-legged facing Derek, his knee just barely resting on the man’s shin. Derek snorted.

“Surprisingly, he’s not the problem,” he remarked. “Isaac and Erica keep fighting. It’s driving me crazy. Even Scott can’t talk Isaac around, and those two are practically attached at the hip these days.” Derek winced as soon as he said it, no doubt hearing the stutter in Stiles’ heartbeat. Stiles pushed down his jealousy, clenching his jaw.

“What are they fighting about?” he asked diplomatically, fingers twisting in the hem of his pyjama pants. Derek shrugged.
“That’s what I can’t figure out.” He told Stiles about a couple of the fights, and the pieces started to fall into place.

“That’s what I can’t figure out.” He told Stiles about a couple of the fights, and the pieces started to fall into place.

“Dude, they’re fighting over you,” Stiles said once Derek went quiet. The alpha choked. “Not like they wanna make out with you, or whatever,” he clarified quickly. “But think about it. Isaac’s dad was a Grade A douchebag, and any time he gave Isaac attention it was the wrong kind. Erica’s parents barely notice she exists, especially now she’s not having seizures anymore. You’re their alpha; that puts you in a weird mix of dad and big brother for them, and they’re comfortable enough that they’re now fighting for your attention. When was the last time you spent time with Erica, by herself?” Derek’s blank face answered that one. “And even when you’re home with Isaac, do you guys actually spend time together or just exist in the same space?” Another blank face. Stiles groaned. “Derek.”

“It’s not like they ask me to hang out with them!” Derek protested.

“Well of course they wouldn’t! They want you to want to hang out with them. It’s not the same if they have to ask for it. That just makes them feel needy.”

There was a beat of pointed silence, and Stiles’ cheeks flushed. That sort of self-analysis was not what he was hoping for tonight. “Look, it’s easy. Find out something they wanna do, and do it with them. Talk to them about what they like, how they’re feeling. Yes, Sourwolf, you’re actually going to have to use your words. Get to know them as more than just your betas. They’ll stop arguing then, I bet.”

“Boyd is so much easier,” Derek muttered under his breath, making Stiles snort.

“Truer words have never been spoken,” he agreed. He bounced one knee, blushing when it came into firmer contact with Derek’s leg. “How are the rest of the pack doing, anyway?” Despite his conversation with Scott earlier, he was feeling achingly cut off from the world of Beacon Hills. Everyone was too busy to do more than text every couple of days, and Stiles didn’t want to bug them with incessant messages. Derek shrugged.

“The same as they were the last time you asked me,” he replied. Stiles rolled his eyes. “Helpful as ever,” he murmured, before looking up. “Okay, actually, you know what, don’t tell me about all the fun my friends are having without me, or any of the things they’re doing that they haven’t bothered to tell me about themselves. I can’t take that kind of hit today. We’re watching Daredevil. Would you like a cookie?”

Derek blinked, taking a second to decipher the influx of word-vomit. “Cookie?” he settled on, and Stiles grinned, bouncing off the bed to reach for a tupperware sitting on the desk.

“My aunt and I made cookies while Dad was away, they’re an old family recipe. Chocolate peanut butter. They’re amazing and I’m hiding the last of them from my dad so he doesn’t find out we made and ate a batch without him, so help me dispose of the evidence.” He brought the tub of cookies back to the bed with him, this time sitting next to Derek against the headboard, dragging his laptop onto his lap. He set the open tupperware between them, staring expectantly at Derek until the man took one. He took a small bite, chewing cautiously, his eyes going wide. His next bite devoured the whole cookie, and Stiles snickered. “Told you, they’re amazing.”

Grabbing his own cookie, he restarted the episode he was watching, giving Derek a brief run-down of what had happened so far in case he hadn’t seen the show before. He was glad he’d already watched the first half of the episode, because all he could concentrate on was the proximity of Derek’s body to his. If someone had told him two weeks ago that he’d be sitting in bed with Derek
Hale watching Daredevil and eating homemade cookies, he would have sent them to Eichen House.

“You like being with your aunt?” Derek asked quietly, when the credits began to roll and Netflix counted down to start auto-playing the next one. Stiles glanced to the side. At some point in the episode, he and Derek had shuffled closer together so their knees were touching again, their elbows just barely brushing at their sides. Stiles couldn’t stop drawing his gaze back to his own bare feet next to Derek’s striped socks, their toes almost touching.

“Yeah, it’s nice,” he said, getting back to the question and trying to stop staring at their feet like a weirdo. “I haven’t really seen her since… since my mom died. When everything happened, Dad kind of withdrew, and I guess he never really reached back out ’til now. I missed her. She’s his younger sister, and she’s so much like my grandpa was — like Dad always says I am, too. I guess that’s why we get along so well. It’s just really nice to reconnect with family.” He froze, suddenly realising who he was talking to. “Shit, I’m sorry, I—“

“Don’t be,” Derek cut him off. “You can talk about your family. I’m glad you have the chance to get a little part of it back.”

“I wish you could have that too, Derek. I really do.” The next episode was playing but neither of them was really watching it. “You’d like her, I think. Aunt Hannah. She doesn’t talk as much as I do, but she’s super funny, and she wouldn’t take any of your shit.”

“Just like you, you mean?” Derek said with a snort. Stiles smirked.

“Alright, Sassy-wolf,” he teased. They turned back to the screen, and Stiles thought that was it until Derek spoke again.

“Laura would have liked you,” he declared, and Stiles stilled. “She didn’t take any of my shit either. Always said I was too dramatic and brooding for my own good. When we were in New York, she’d always force me to go out with her and her friends, saying she’d be a terrible alpha if she let me become a hermit before I was thirty. And she was so smart. Always right, and God, did she know it.”

“Sounds like my kind of woman,” Stiles murmured fondly. Derek shook his head.

“You two would have made my life hell together,” he said vehemently. Stiles bravely reached out, curling his fingers around Derek’s wrist and squeezing gently.

“I wish I could have known her.”

“Me too,” Derek replied, his voice cracking ever so slightly. He didn’t move away, and they stayed like that for the entire rest of the episode.

When it ended, Derek let out a long breath, sitting up properly. “I should go. It’s getting late.” It had gone far past ‘late’ and was heading into ‘early’, but Stiles merely shrugged, backing out of Netflix.

“Hey, did you run or drive tonight?” he asked, knowing Derek did both. Derek held up his car keys as explanation, and Stiles grinned, hopping off the bed to dig through the bottom of his wardrobe.

“Present,” he announced, handing his prize over to Derek. It was a fist-sized black plant pot with a fuzzy cactus inside. If you looked carefully, there was a faint geometric design in the pottery, outlined in very dark green. “It’s not werewolf catnip. And I have a feeling you’re the kind of guy who kills most houseplants. So, hopefully this little guy will survive.”

“You got me a cactus,” Derek said, dumbfounded. Stiles nodded.
"Plants are a good housewarming gift," he insisted. "Take care of him. Or her. Or them. All cacti identities are valid."

"Thanks," Derek replied eventually, holding the cactus carefully as he climbed through the window. "Goodnight, Stiles."

Stiles’ heart didn’t stop pounding until long after Derek left, when his laptop was closed and he was tucked under his duvet, trying to sleep. He rolled over, freezing when he caught Derek’s scent on one of the pillows. The hollow feeling in his chest eased, a faint trickle of warmth taking over him.

God, he was screwed.

Derek’s visits weren’t usually on consecutive nights, so Stiles almost jumped out of his skin when the window opened a little after midnight the next day. He tensed, expecting the worst, and did a double-take at the almost-smile on his alpha’s face. "Long time no see," he greeted, shuffling over to make room for Derek on the bed. "More pack trouble?"

“I did what you said,” he said, making himself comfortable. Tonight’s socks were solid purple. Stiles didn’t know why he was so fixated on Derek’s choice of footwear. “I took Isaac shopping for stuff for his room in the loft. And I have plans to take Erica to a movie on Friday night.”

“That’s great!” Stiles said, genuinely pleased for him. “How’d it go?”

“It was… actually kinda fun?” Derek replied. He sounded surprised. “I don’t think Isaac’s ever been allowed to make choices about his stuff like that.”

Stiles listened to Derek recount the trip to Ikea, and then the brief time they’d spent at the mall before the noise and people made them angry and they went home, deciding to order a bunch of stuff online. It warmed his heart to hear Derek letting his guard down around people other than him.

“One time when I was about seven, my mom took me to Ikea,” Stiles volunteered, smiling at the memory. “I got sidetracked by all the bright colours and wandered off. It took her an hour and a half to find me, buried in a box of giraffe plushies. Dad about died laughing when she told him.”

“My cousin Max got lost in the mall once,” Derek said. “There were so many people we couldn’t sniff him out. Dad was worried sick, but Laura insisted she had it handled and refused to let us do a call-out on the speaker system. She found him in Hot Topic, hiding in the dressing room because he was stuck in a pair of skinny jeans. Mom took pictures.”

Stiles burst out laughing, imagining a bunch of Hale siblings bursting into a Hot Topic. He would bet anything Derek shopped there as a teen. “Oh, man, that’s gold.” He was about to ask to see those pictures, before he realised what likely happened to them. “You know, I think I remember your mom.”

Derek raised his eyebrows, and Stiles continued. “She used to come over and have tea with my mom sometimes. I remember her hair was always perfect.” His memory was a little fuzzy, but he definitely had recollections of his mom introducing him to ‘Ms Talia’.

“Yeah, she would always have some amazing hairstyle going on. Her wardrobe, too. I don’t think I ever saw her look anything less than camera-ready; even in her pyjamas, she looked like a model. She always said being a werewolf was no reason to look like we lived in the woods,” Derek reminisced. Stiles tried to think back, sure he had more memories of the Hale family. They’d been pretty big, and Talia was fairly involved in community life. He was sure he’d met most of the Hales at one point or another — he even had a vague memory of a twelve year-old Derek with the most
adorable bunny teeth, but he couldn’t tell how much of that was just his imagination.

“You had a little sister, right? Around my age? She was homeschooled.” Stiles remembered seeing her once and asking his dad why she wasn’t at school with him.

“Cora,” Derek confirmed, hands clenched into fists at his side. Stiles wasn’t quite brave enough to take his hand, but he did press his knee to Derek’s thigh. “She struggled to control her wolf, it wasn’t safe for her to go to school. She hated being at home all the time. All she wanted to do was go to school with the other kids so she could play sports on a team.” He smiled to himself, though his eyes were hard. “She used to pester me into playing basketball with her. I was on the school team,” he added. Stiles didn’t want to admit that he knew that already, because then he’d have to admit to stalking Derek’s high-school career. “Laura always refused, and she was the oldest so Cora didn’t argue with her. It was mostly me, but sometimes some of the cousins would play too. I always let her win, because if she lost she got mad and wolfed out. Wrecked so many of my basketballs.” Derek shook his head, rubbing the bridge of his nose. “Man, I haven’t thought about that in… years.”

Stiles stayed silent. What could he say to something like that? Gathering his courage, he finally let his fingers creep out and wrap around Derek’s clenched fist. Derek’s eyes shot up, meeting Stiles’ with a gaze that was almost wild. For a second, Stiles thought the werewolf might cry. “I bet you were an awesome big brother.”

“I couldn’t protect her,” Derek argued, a hint of a growl in his voice. Stiles squeezed his hand.

“You were fifteen. There was nothing you could have done.”

Derek didn’t respond, breathing slowly and staring at Stiles, the tension slowly leaking out of his shoulders. He glanced down at their joined hands, and Stiles didn’t let himself draw away. “I’m rebuilding the Hale house.”

“What?” Stiles frowned, sure he’d misheard.

“The lawyer called me a couple weeks ago,” Derek said. “The government threatened to claim the land unless I did something. So I’ve started levelling it, and I’m working on a design for something new. Not an exact replica of the old house. A fresh start, for the pack.”

“Derek, that’s… wow. Do the pack know?”

“Not yet. I might tell them once I’m at the building phase, make it into a pack project, but right now… I need to level it myself. Peter knows. He’s helping. It’s… hard.” Stiles didn’t think he meant physically. Leaning in to bump his shoulder against the alpha’s, he smiled.

“That’s awesome. You’re doing all the building yourself? And the design?”

“I was halfway through an architecture degree when I left New York,” Derek revealed. This was actually brand new information, and Stiles gaped at him. “Never finished, but… I know enough to draw a blueprint that’s up to code. I did some construction work for a while before college, when I was still figuring out what I wanted to do. I’ll get professionals for the electrics and plumbing, but the rest is up to me.”

“I bet it’ll be great. And I’m sure the pack would love to help. I wield a mean paint-roller,” he added with a grin. Derek snorted.

“I’ll take your word for it.”

Stiles hoped the work was cathartic, for both Derek and Peter. As much as he disliked Derek’s
creepy uncle, he was still pack, and Stiles could recognise that there was a lot messing up the man’s brain that he couldn’t really be blamed for. He was all Derek had left, so he couldn’t hate him completely.

“I should get running. It’s supposed to rain tonight, I don’t wanna get caught in it,” Derek said eventually. Stiles, who had been steadily dozing off and drifting ever closer to Derek’s shoulder, sat up straight, taking his hands back into his own lap.

“Right, yeah. Don’t wanna get all wet.” Derek sat up to put his boots back on, and Stiles almost bit his tongue swallowing a plea for him to stay. He didn’t want Derek going home to be alone after talking about his family. He knew he wouldn’t want to be alone after that. But what could he do? If the pack noticed him gone in the morning they’d freak. If the sheriff came in in the morning, he’d shoot without asking questions. “Y’know, you don’t always have to visit me at night,” he said eventually, watching Derek stand up and shrug back into his leather jacket. The werewolf frowned in query. “There’s this great invention called daytime? It’s when normal people like to socialise, maybe eat food together, that sort of thing.” Derek’s brows drew together, and Stiles laughed. “No one around here cares what I do all day, dude. You could come see me during the day. That way you’re not wasting all your sleep hours travelling back and forth.”

“Werewolves need less sleep than humans,” Derek tried.

“If I wasn’t best friends with Scott McCall, I’d believe you,” Stiles retorted. “Just... think about it. We both know you’re not coming here for research anymore.” That brought a pink flush to Derek’s cheeks beneath his stubble, the colour spreading to the tips of his ears. It was kind of adorable.

“Goodnight, Stiles,” Derek said, climbing out of the window. Stiles chuckled to himself. Classic Derek avoidance.

He got ready for bed, not even bothering to pretend to himself that he wasn’t cuddling up to the pillow Derek had leaned against. What had his life become, that out of all of the pack, Derek was the only one who bothered to come visit him?
Stiles didn’t see Derek for almost an entire week after that; the longest he’d ever gone between visits. He was sure he’d scared him off — whether with the talk of family, or the suggestion that he visit during the day, Stiles wasn’t sure.

He tried not to let it get him down, throwing himself into work at the library and transcribing the Hale journals, running twice a day on most days. His clothes were starting to fit him a little differently, and it made a tiny bubble of confidence grow every time he noticed. Even Hannah commented on it, as well as complimenting his choice to grow his hair out. That was less of a choice and more of a procrastination, but Stiles was starting to like the way it looked.

He swore loudly when, at around noon on Saturday, his bedroom window slid open. Derek hurried through, looking a lot less graceful climbing through windows in the daylight. “Derek,” Stiles greeted, stunned. He quickly gathered his wits, offering a grin and setting aside the book he’d been reading. It was the one Deaton gave him, which had been sat on the back-burner since Derek had brought him the journals. “What are you doing here?”

“You said I could visit during the day,” Derek said, as if Stiles was a particularly slow toddler. “You don’t work on Saturdays, and your dad’s not in Beacon Hills.”

Stiles didn’t ask how Derek knew all that. “Won’t the pack notice you’re gone?” Usually they had some sort of training thing on the weekends, from what Scott and Erica had told him. Derek shrugged.

“Lydia decided the pack needed a beach trip. They’re gone all weekend. I didn’t feel like joining them, and I don’t think they really wanted me there either.”

Stiles stiffened, doing the math in his head. In order to get to the beach, they would have had to drive somewhat past Redford; not directly, but close enough that they could have detoured to pick Stiles up on the way, or even had him meet them there. But no one had text him in days.

Something must have shown on his face, as Derek’s brows knitted together anxiously. “Do you wanna go get lunch?” he offered. “You can show me around this town you keep talking my ear off about. Maybe get some ice cream?”

Whatever hurt Stiles held at being left out of the pack beach weekend softened at the earnest expression on the alpha’s face. Did Derek know he hadn’t been invited, or had he come all this way on the off chance Stiles would be around? “That sounds great,” he agreed. “Let me go tell Dad and Hannah I’m heading out. I’ll pick you up at the end of the road? Unless you drove here.”

“No, I ran. I’ll wait for you there.” Derek ducked back out the window, vanishing from sight.

“Stupid werewolves, running a hundred miles without even breaking a sweat,” Stiles grumbled lightly, turning to the mirror mounted on the front of his wardrobe. He’d dressed for comfort, in loose jeans and a faded Captain America t-shirt. Not exactly going-out clothes. Especially not going-out-with-Derek-Hale clothes. Not that they were going out, just going outside, and if he changed now surely Derek would notice, and then what would he think? But really Stiles should at least change his shirt, seeing as he’d slept in it the night before, and Derek probably didn’t want to smell that all day.

Decision made, he hurriedly changed into a navy t-shirt with a geometric star design all over it,
tugging on a nicer pair of jeans while he was at it and refusing to acknowledge why. Grabbing his wallet, phone and jacket, he jogged downstairs, sticking his head into the living room where his dad and aunt were watching a football game. “I’m gonna go for a drive, hang out in town for a while,” he declared, trying not to look too shifty.

“Sure thing, kid,” his dad replied, barely taking his eyes off the screen. “Pick up some cereal while you’re there? We’re almost out.”

“Yessir,” Stiles affirmed, shooting off a finger gun that turned into a wave and turning to find his shoes.

He drove slowly down the road, keeping his eyes peeled for a familiar black-clad figure. How Derek could wear so much black in the middle of summer, Stiles didn’t know, but damn if it didn’t look good on the man. He eventually saw him waiting by the stop sign at the end of the street, his head turning in Stiles’ direction when he saw the car approach. A slow smirk crossed the werewolf’s lips, making Stiles’ gut flare with heat, and he lifted his arm, staring Stiles dead in the eye while he stuck his thumb out pointedly. Stiles snorted, winding the passenger window down.

“You’re hilarious,” he said flatly, rolling to a halt in front of Derek. The smirk widened. “Get in, loser, we’re going shopping.”

“I hate that I know what movie that’s from,” Derek declared, hopping in and buckling his seatbelt. Stiles snickered.

“I’d disown you if you didn’t know what movie that was from.” Pulling back onto the road, he started the familiar fifteen-minute journey into the centre of Redford.

It was surreal, driving with Derek in the passenger seat as if it was something that happened every day. “You haven’t mentioned the Alpha Pack in a while,” he broached tentatively. “Everything going okay?”

“I don’t think they’re gone, but they haven’t made any moves. The pack is doing… better. Maybe they haven’t found enough of a reason to get rid of me yet,” Derek said with a shrug.

“That’s good, I guess. If we’re lucky, they’ll just move on.”

“When have we ever been lucky?” was Derek’s rueful reply. Stiles couldn’t argue there.

He pulled into his usual spot in the one parking lot in town, and paused when he and Derek were stood in front of the Jeep. “Food or tour first?” he asked, bouncing on his heels and not waiting for a response. “I think food first, then tour, then ice cream, because if you need to leave you can get a milkshake for the road, and I can take ‘shakes back for Dad and Hannah and they’re less likely to ask what I’ve been doing all day.”

“Sure,” Derek said when Stiles was finished, looking amused.

“Perfect. This way.” He led the way to his favourite diner, waving at one of the waitresses he vaguely recognised. She smiled in reply, which quickly turned into a look of shock when she saw Derek walk in right behind him. She made a beeline for them once they’d chosen a table.

“Hey there,” she greeted chirpily, her gaze flicking between the two of them like she couldn’t quite figure out what someone like Derek was doing with Stiles. Honestly, Stiles was right there with her. “Can I get you two something to drink?”

“I’ll have a Diet Coke,” Stiles ordered.
“Just water, thanks,” Derek said quietly, completely oblivious to her practically eating him with her eyes. She sent a look to Stiles that he translated as something along the lines of ‘who is this gorgeous specimen and can I get his phone number?’, to which Stiles just shrugged. He refused to get involved in that one.

She disappeared to get their drinks, leaving them with the menus. “Everything is great here, but my favourite is the pulled pork,” Stile recommended. “Or the BBQ chicken.” Derek merely hummed, scanning the menu contemplatively. Stiles didn’t even bother looking at his; he knew exactly what he wanted.

It was fairly busy, but the waitress still managed to be back with their drinks almost instantly, returning her admiring gaze to the ever-oblivious Derek. “Do you need a moment to decide, or are you good?” she asked, leaning towards Derek with a too-sweet smile. Stiles gestured for Derek to go first, and the werewolf nodded.

“I’ll have the cheeseburger. No onion, no pickle. With a salad on the side.”

“A salad, seriously?” Stiles complained, mock-shaking his head. “Live a little, Sourwolf. I’ll have the pulled pork sandwich, no pickle, extra curly fries, thanks. And if you steal my fries I’m making you walk home,” he added to Derek, aware of how much of a non-threat it was. Derek barked out a laugh, flashing his teeth.

“Try me,” he challenged. The waitress glanced between the two of them, looking a little perplexed. “Anything else for you?”

“No, thanks.” She disappeared, and Stiles leant forward on his elbows. “So, this is the best diner in Redford. Surprisingly, not the only diner in Redford; there’s another one a couple blocks over that claims to serve homemade pie and cake, but they’re full of lies,” he hissed dramatically. Derek’s eyebrows drew together in amusement. Stiles was pretty proud of how well he was learning to interpret Derek Hale brow-speak.

He filled the silence between them with mostly-nonsensical rambling about the wonders of Redford, his brain screaming at him to just stop talking. It was different, somehow; being with Derek in the daytime. When it was just the two of them in his room at night, everything felt softer, easier, like the barriers between them were down. Now, it was almost like being back in Beacon Hills with the pack, and he could see Derek’s eyebrows furrowing slowly in a way that was more confused than annoyed, but starting to verge into annoyed. Shit, he was screwing this up.

The punctuality of the waitress was his saving grace, as she returned with their food and interrupted his story about the weird figurines he’d found in the junk store. Derek stared wide-eyed at the mountain of curly fries on Stiles’ plate. “I thought Scott was joking about that,” he declared. Stiles smirked.

“Never joke about curly fries, Derek. They’re sacred. And all mine,” he added, curving his arms protectively around his plate. “You can live with your salad choices.”

“Do you need extra sauces or anything?” the waitress asked, but they both shook their heads, and she bobbed with a bright smile. “Enjoy your meals!” With one last look at Derek, she left, and Stiles reached for his sandwich. He had minor regrets about eating something so messy in front of Derek, but was there really any hiding with a guy who’d seen you bleeding, vomiting and running on two hours sleep and a double dose of Adderall? (Not at the same time, he had to clarify).

“How is Scott, anyway?” he asked absently, refusing to let the hurt at being excluded from the beach
trip dig in too deep. “I’ve Skyped him a couple times, but never for long, and Isaac’s usually there.” He was hoping that with the loft, Isaac would spend less time at Scott’s, but that didn’t seem to be the case.

“He’s fine, as far as I know. Still moping about Allison being gone. Honestly, you’d think she was never coming back, the way he talks. He’s stopped avoiding me, though, and comes to pack stuff. Thanks.” Stiles didn’t deny his involvement. “I think he spends most of his time with Isaac these days. At least, that’s always where Isaac is when I’m looking for him.”

It was like a kick in the gut, and for a moment Stiles didn’t feel like eating his curly fries. Derek’s knee knocked against his under the table. “Isaac has a crush on Scott.” Stiles’ head snapped up.

“What?”

“He doesn’t think I’ve noticed, but it’s obvious,” Derek said, tapping his nose pointedly. “Scott is Scott, so he has no idea. So unless you have a crush on Scott too, I think it’s safe to say you’re not being replaced.”

It took Stiles a minute to reconcile Derek’s words with what he knew of Isaac — of course Scott hadn’t noticed, he was an idiot about anything subtle. He couldn’t deny it eased a little of his jealousy. Not all, but some.

“Poor Isaac,” he murmured, shoving a fistful of curly fries into his mouth. He was the master of crushing on the wrong people, and it wasn’t a fun feeling.

“He’ll get over it. Especially once Allison gets home. If she and Scott don’t get back together within the first month, I’ll sell my car,” Derek muttered, making Stiles snort.

“Hell, I give it a week. Three months apart, she can’t stay guilty for that long.”

Derek hummed in agreement, biting into his burger, and there was a comfortable silence between them — mostly facilitated by the number of curly fries Stiles had to keep him quiet. He wanted to ask more about pack stuff — how the training was going, whether they’d come up against anything new — but there were way too many people around.

“You went to the movies with Erica last night, right?” he settled on eventually. Derek nodded. “How was that?”

“The movie was terrible,” Derek confessed. “Some shitty action comedy thing. Honestly I think Erica only picked it because she never would’ve been able to before. Too many flashing lights,” he explained. “Other than that, I think we had a good time? She’s stopped fighting with Isaac. More than usual, anyway. This is Erica.”

Stiles snickered, nodding in agreement. Erica argued for fun. He missed that; having someone willing to debate movies or comics or politics with him. Most other people got annoyed with him and gave up.

“So what kind of movies does Derek Hale prefer?” Stiles asked teasingly, curiosity burning. The few times Derek had watched Netflix with him, he’d just gone along with whatever Stiles was already watching.

“I like history movies,” Derek told him. “Schindler’s List, Invictus, 300. And Lord of the Rings. Laura was huge into sci-fi/fantasy, she always made me go with her. She dragged me to the midnight release of one of the Harry Potter books, once.”
“Dude, I begged my parents to let me go to those,” Stiles said enviously. “They almost caved on Order of the Phoenix, but then…” Then his mom got sick, and priorities changed.

“We went for the third one, I think. Laura had just got her license, so she drove us into the city and we stayed the night with a friend of Mom’s. It was… weird. There were a bunch of people in costumes.”

“Don’t lie, I bet you’re a secret nerd,” Stiles ribbed. He didn’t want to know if that was true — Derek being a nerd on top of everything else might just tip him over the edge.

The werewolf’s cheeks flushed, but he didn’t respond.

Derek finished his meal before Stiles did, and just as he was taking his last bite of pulled pork sandwich, one of Derek’s hands shot out and grabbed a couple of curly fries from the dwindling pile on his plate. Stiles glared at him. “Don’t do it,” he warned. Derek stared him down, opening his mouth and slowly biting down on the fries, smugness radiating from every inch.

Stiles swallowed, his jeans growing tighter as his gaze zeroed in on Derek’s lips. Was it hot in there, all of a sudden? “You asshole,” he hissed, and Derek merely laughed, reaching for more fries.

“You promised me a tour. You’re taking too long,” he declared simply.

Rolling his eyes, Stiles gathered the last of the fries and inhaled them before Derek could steal any more. He raised a hand at the waitress, wordlessly requesting the bill, but when she brought it Derek swiped it from her hands before she could give it to Stiles. “It’s on me,” the alpha insisted. Stiles scoffed.

“No, dude, I can pay, you came all the way out here,” he reasoned. Even if he hadn’t driven that time, he still did on occasion, and that was a lot of gas money.

“I’m paying,” Derek told him, and if they weren’t in public Stiles was sure his eyes would have flashed red. “You can get ice cream.”

“And I’ll get lunch next time,” Stiles said curtly. Bold of him to assume there would be a next time, but Derek merely nodded with a faint snort, handing his card to the waitress, who was now staring between them as if she’d drawn a conclusion that Stiles could only wish were true. His cheeks heated, and he ducked his head.

She brought Derek’s card back, and Stiles was a little surprised she hadn’t left her phone number on the receipt. Derek shoved his wallet back into his pocket, getting to his feet. Stiles followed, hiding a smile when Derek held the door for him on their way out. It was probably just his protective alpha tendencies showing, but to Stiles, it felt almost like they were on a date. If only.

The comprehensive tour of Redford only took a couple hours, a lot of which was spent in the bookstore, to Stiles’ surprise. It shouldn’t have shocked him that Derek was into reading, but he stood there watching Derek read the blurbs of half a shelf full of historical fiction novels before selecting two to buy, looking sheepish when he realised Stiles was waiting for him. “You really are a history nerd, huh?” he teased lightly, his own choice of book — a sci-fi novel the thickness of both Derek’s books combined — tucked in the crook of his arm. Derek shrugged.

“I almost majored in it,” he said.

“What made you pick architecture instead?”
“Laura said it paid better,” Derek answered dryly. When they reached the till, he snatched Stiles’ book out of his grasp and added it to his own purchases, nudging Stiles out of the way before he could reclaim it.

“Seriously?” Stiles exclaimed, shooting an annoyed look at Derek’s satisfied smirk. The cashier merely looked amused by them both. On the way out, Stiles elbowed him. “Is this some kind of alpha thing? Showing you can provide, or whatever?” Derek coughed sharply, his face turning red.

“Something like that,” he muttered. Stiles rolled his eyes.

“Well, thank you, but it’s really not necessary. I have a job and everything. Which— wait a minute, do you even have a job?” Stiles had always assumed Derek lived off the money of whatever life insurance policies his family had. Fairly comfortably, if he was able to afford to rebuild the Hale house.

“I started working at the garage in town a month or so ago. But I don’t need it for the money.” A sideways glance confirmed Stiles’ theory, and he didn’t push it any further. “I buy food for pack meetings all the time. Erica and Lydia took my credit card to the mall last week. I think I can afford to get you curly fries and a book.”

“Well, you do know how to show a guy a good time,” Stiles said with a hand over his heart and an over-exaggerated wink. Derek rolled his eyes in exasperation, but his lips were curled in the tiniest of smiles. It made Stiles’ pulse skip a beat, and he hoped Derek didn’t notice.

There were a lot of things about the day that he hoped Derek didn’t notice.

As promised, they ended up in the ice cream shop, where Stiles learned that Derek’s favourite flavour of ice cream was mint chocolate chip. “Possibly the only thing you have in common with my dad,” he remarked, licking his own cookies & cream ice cream before it could start dripping down his hand.

“Your dad has good taste, then,” Derek said, grabbing several napkins from the dispenser and setting them in the middle of their table expectantly, giving Stiles a pointed look that he refused to dignify with a response.

It became very clear to him very quickly that he hadn’t thought his plan through at all. Going to get ice cream with Derek sounded great in theory, but it came with the reality of having to try and watch Derek eat ice cream without getting an inappropriate boner. The werewolf didn’t seem to be aware of how he was affecting Stiles, his tongue swirling around the pale green treat. It was like watching porn. Better than watching porn.

Stiles tried to concentrate on his own cone, mainly on not getting it all over his face. “So what will you do for the rest of the weekend, without the pack around to keep you busy?”

Derek shrugged, leaning back in his chair. “Keep working on the house. We’re making pretty good headway, we’re just about down to the foundation. Then I’ll be able to see if my blueprints will work with the space I’ve got.”

“That’s great.” Stiles tried to imagine what it would look like, the wreckage of the house completely cleared away. He couldn’t wait to see what Derek would build on the foundations. “Do you have pictures of the blueprints?”

“I do, actually. Had to email them to the county clerk’s office to get permission.” Derek flipped through his phone for a minute, then passed it over to Stiles. Trying his best to zoom in without
getting ice cream on the screen, Stiles let out a low whistle.

“Derek, these are amazing.” The blueprints were crisp and professional, showing plans for a huge three-storey house with a wrap-around porch. The kitchen was enormous — Stiles instantly had visions of cooking a huge meal for the whole pack, slapping Scott’s hand away from the food before it was ready, Derek growling at his betas every time they got on Stiles’ nerves. He blushed brightly, shaking the image out of his head. No need to get ahead of himself, there. “Seriously, wow. It’s going to be beautiful.”

“I hope so,” Derek murmured, accepting his phone back. Something occurred to Stiles, and he smirked.

“So I have a question,” he started, and Derek raised an eyebrow. “Why, if you admit you have email, did you run all the way here to ask me to research something for you the first time you came over?”

Derek blushed, scowling. When he spoke, Stiles had to crane his neck to hear his muttered words. “I don’t like having my pack split up,” he admitted. Stiles’ heart melted a little.

“What was that?” he teased, both of them knowing full well he’d heard the first time.

“I don’t like having my pack split up,” he repeated bitingly. “It feels… wrong. And I can’t go and visit Jackson in London, but I can come and see you. Especially since you’re in unfamiliar territory. Once my scent was in your new room, it was easier, but… I still don’t like having you so far away. Either of you,” he added hastily. Stiles frowned.

“What about Allison?”

“She’s an Argent,” Derek growled, as if that explained everything. On some level, it did. “She’s not pack. She’s Scott’s girlfriend. Hell, Scott’s barely pack. She’ll have to commit to us a lot more if she wants to be part of it.”

The answer surprised Stiles, but it made sense; Allison hadn’t really done anything to prove herself as pack, and she wasn’t tied to it like the wolves were. It was reassuring that he was clearly part of the pack enough to make Derek anxious to come check on him, though.

“You were scenting my room? Weirdo,” he joked. Derek growled at him, flashing his eyes briefly since the shop was mostly empty.

“What are your weekend plans, after this?” Derek asked, keen to change the subject. Stiles shrugged.

“Nothing, really. Read, work on the journals, go running. I’ve been thinking about maybe starting some kind of self-defence class, or something like that. I might look into it tomorrow, but I don’t know if there’s anything around. I just know I need to do more exercise than just running.” He needed to build muscle and technique if he was going to fight alongside his packmates.

“I gave Lydia a routine to follow, to keep her working alongside the rest of the pack. I can do something similar for you, if you want. A self-study thing, so you don’t have to pay for a class,” Derek offered. “That way you guys can practice together once you’re home.”

“That would be great, yeah,” Stiles agreed. Derek was really getting the hang of the whole alpha thing. It was kind of endearing.

When they had both finished their cones, and Stiles had wiped the ice cream stickiness from his fingers, Derek checked his phone and grimaced. “I should get going. I told Peter I’d be around this evening to help move some beams.”
“Right, yeah.” For a minute, Stiles had forgotten the world existed outside the two of them. His dad and aunt would be wondering where he was, too.

He got two milkshakes to go for his family, walking beside Derek on the way to the car, their shoulders brushing every couple of steps. “Thanks for this, Derek,” he said quietly, drawing a curious eyebrow from the taller man. “I’ve been going a little stir-crazy lately, away from the pack and everyone. Don’t really get out much for fun. This was really nice.” And if his heart fluttered at the knowledge that Derek had chosen hanging out with him over going to the beach with his pack, that was nobody’s business but his own. They could have their stupid beach weekend; he’d just had the perfect not-date with Derek Hale.

“It was good,” Derek agreed, voice soft. They reached the car, and Stiles smirked.

“It’s also nice to see you have more facial expressions than just scowling and glaring,” he teased, dancing away when Derek made to elbow him in the ribs, careful not to spill the milkshakes.

“No one would ever believe you,” Derek assured, giving his best murder-face. Stiles just laughed.

They drove as far as the stop sign at the end of Stiles’ road, where he pulled over; from here, Derek could easily run to the woods to get home without being seen. “See you later, I guess,” Stiles said, letting the engine idle. Derek nodded, reaching out to squeeze the back of Stiles’ neck briefly.

“Stay out of trouble.” He stepped out of the Jeep, shutting the door carefully before sprinting off into the trees. Stiles drove the last little stretch to Hannah’s driveway, carefully juggling the two milkshakes and the door.

“I come bearing gifts,” he announced as soon as he stepped into the house, listening out for a response.

“About time you showed up,” his dad called in response, voice coming from the kitchen. Both Stilinski siblings were in there, and their eyes lit up in identical ways at the sight of the white to-go cups.

“Best nephew,” Hannah declared, slurping noisily at her strawberry malt. “Had a good day?”

Stiles couldn’t stifle the smile that overtook his face, though he tried his best not to look too obviously lovestruck.

“Yeah, it was pretty good.”

If nothing else happened the entire summer, it would be worth it for that one afternoon with Derek.
After that first daytime visit, things slowly started to change. Not only did Derek start stopping by during the day as well as at night, but communication from the rest of the pack started to increase. Stiles was mostly staying off social media, wanting to avoid seeing evidence of all his friends hanging out without him, but perhaps his absence at the beach had made them remember he actually existed, for in the next week he’d had calls and texts from every single pack member — even Boyd. None of them directly mentioned the beach trip. Stiles was pretty sure they just weren’t willing to admit they forgot about him.

It was nice, having his friends to talk to again. He’d been telling himself he was doing fine without them, but his anxiety was far more manageable now he had people that weren’t Derek or his family. Not that he didn’t love talking to Derek and his family.

Having the werewolf over in the day was a little more risky than his nighttime visits — only once had Derek had to hide on the roof while Stiles’ dad came in — but Stiles would put up with that risk if it meant getting to actually leave the house sometimes and hang with Derek. Mostly they stayed in Stiles’ room, watching Netflix together or reading in companionable silence. On one memorable occasion, Stiles bullied Derek into playing Call of Duty with him — and then proceeded to get his ass kicked by the werewolf, who admitted he’d been pretty into video games before the fire.

But sometimes, when Stiles was itching to get outside and he was confident that his family were too busy to question his whereabouts, they went out. They only went into Redford one more time, Stiles paranoid his dad would talk to someone in town who would mentioned the broody, leather-jacket-wearing older man his son was hanging out with. Instead they just drove randomly, or went out into the woods. Derek had shown Stiles the exercises for the training routine he’d sent, helping him out with some of the basics. They hiked, or went running together, or just walked and talked; Stiles did most of the talking, but Derek contributed sometimes. He didn’t even seem to mind when Stiles spent half an hour rambling about some random subject, just watching with amusement and asking when Stiles found time to breathe.

It was surprisingly normal. If you ignored that their friendship was a complete secret.

None of the pack asked him about Derek. Scott actively avoided talking about the alpha, unless he was bitching about the work Derek was making him do. Even with the renewed communication, Stiles didn’t tell any of them that Derek was coming to see him practically every other day. It was none of their business.

It was raining outside, so Derek and Stiles were holed up in his room, Derek reading one of his history novels while Stiles typed up the last of the Hale journals, occasionally asking a question about the contents. Every time he thought about it too hard — that Derek would drive three hours each way just to sit and read on Stiles’ bed — his heart hurt in all sorts of confusing ways. It was better to just roll with it.

His phone beeped, and Stiles reached for it, grinning at the video Erica had text him. It was Scott and
Isaac balanced on Scott’s shoulders while they tried to fight Boyd, getting knocked to the ground within twenty seconds.

“What are those two idiots doing now?” Derek asked, clearly hearing the video. Stiles snorted, leaning over so Derek could see the screen, and the alpha watched with an exasperated face. “Of all the betas, I got stuck with them,” he muttered, shaking his head.

“You chose them,” Stiles corrected laughingly. “Well, Isaac, at least. Scott’s a freebie.”

“Lucky me,” Derek deadpanned.

“Pack is pack, Sourwolf. For better or for worse,” Stiles’ phone beeped again several time in quick succession, a flood of texts from both Scott and Isaac begging him to ignore anything Erica sent him. He laughed. “Too late, suckers.”

“Things are going better with them, then?” Derek asked, with the constipated expression he always got when he tried to talk about Stiles’ emotions. Stiles leaned back against the headboard, nodding.

“Yeah, I guess they finally remembered I exist. Even Lydia texts me sometimes, even if it’s just about something she’s translated.” He hadn’t told anyone except Derek about his bestiary project — he wanted to get the bulk of it done before someone could tell him it was a dumb idea.

“Good.” Derek gave an approving nod, and Stiles eyed him suspiciously.

“Wait. Did you— did you alpha-glare them into talking to me again?” His heart sank; were his friends only texting him because Derek had ordered them to?

“What? No!” Derek’s voice was firm, but Stiles’ gaze narrowed.

“Derek.”

“I didn’t alpha-glare, that’s not even a thing,” he argued. Stiles would definitely say otherwise — when Derek flashed his eyes and used his ‘I’m the alpha’ voice, it tugged hard on the pack bonds. It wasn’t mind-control, but it was damn hard to ignore an order like that.

Stiles kept staring him down, long past the point where Derek could actually threaten him with teeth and claws. Eventually, Derek cracked. “I didn’t alpha-glare them,” he insisted. “I just… reminded them they hadn’t spoken to you much. I didn’t make it sound like you said anything. They don’t even know about this,” he added, gesturing between them. Stiles almost latched onto that, wondering what the hell Derek thought ‘this’ was — he sure as hell had no idea — but there was a bigger issue at hand.

“You reminded them,” he said flatly. Derek nodded, brows furrowing. Stiles cursed, his stomach turning to lead. “Of course you did.”

“Well you sure as hell weren’t gonna say anything,” Derek snapped. “What was I supposed to do?”

“Maybe not have to remind my so-called friends that I exist,” Stiles retorted hotly. Derek’s expression closed off, and Stiles’ heart stuttered. He reached out, grabbing the werewolf’s forearm. “I’m not pissed at you,” he said. “Well. I am. But I’m mostly pissed at them.”

He’d thought their renewed communication had come from a group realisation that none of them had spoken to Stiles in a week. Not from their alpha having to smack their heads together, like Stiles was some sort of obligation they kept forgetting about.
Derek’s lips narrowed in a flat line. “You were sad,” he said quietly. “I could— I don’t like it when you smell sad. I was able to fix it, so I did. I’m sorry if that was wrong.”

Stiles blinked, unsure if he’d just misheard — had an actual apology come from Derek Hale’s lips? Was the sky falling in? “I smelled sad, huh? You do know how weird that sounds, right?” His teasing was affectionate, and he bumped Derek’s foot with his own, hoping to convey that he wasn’t really mad. Derek’s nose twitched.

“Werewolf,” he pointed out. “Not that weird.”

“If you say so,” Stiles retorted. “So sadness smells bad and you don’t like it. What do you like me smelling like, Derek?” he drawled, wondering exactly how sensitive that nose of his was. Scott was pretty useless with that part of his werewolf-sense, unless it was about Allison, and Stiles had never been able to ask Derek about it before — not without being shoved into a wall.

Derek’s ears reddened, his hazel eyes going wide, and Stiles blushed when he realised what other things Derek might have smelled on him, if he could apparently smell emotions. Oh, God. Could he…? Did he…? Stiles immediately regretted his line of questioning, his pulse skyrocketing so abruptly that Derek could definitely hear it, butterflies erupting in his gut. He opened his mouth to make some kind of joke and change the subject.

“Stiles!” He jumped. It was Hannah, calling his name from downstairs. “Can you come here a minute? The TV remote rolled under the couch!”

Derek was up off the bed in a flash. “I should get going,” he murmured, already shoving his boots back on. “Pack meeting tonight. You go help your aunt.” Before Stiles could say anything, he was gone.

Stiles swore quietly, slumping back against the wall with a loud thunk. “Fuck,” he muttered again. His heart was still racing. What the hell had just happened?

He forced himself to stand, shoving the interaction from his mind. “Coming!” he yelled in reply, walking with unsteady legs across his room. He wasn’t sure whether to kiss or curse his aunt for the interruption — what would Derek have said, if he hadn’t run away? For a second it was almost like… no. Stiles was definitely imagining things.

It was probably for the best, that Derek had left. Stiles would have almost certainly put his foot in his mouth in a pretty spectacular way.

So why did he feel so let down?

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After two Derek-less days, Stiles was embarrassed by the grin that split across his face when he read the five words that lit up his phone screen one sunny afternoon. ‘I drove. We’re going running.’

Every time Derek left on some kind of awkward note — which, thanks to Stiles, was pretty often — he worried the alpha would never come back. He’d long stopped pretending that Derek’s visits weren’t the only thing keeping him going. If they ended, he wasn’t sure what he’d do.

Stiles had spent more hours than he’d care to admit mentally analysing his last interaction with Derek. He had definitely been flirting. Because he was a reckless, impulsive idiot. Had Derek noticed Stiles was flirting? He could be pretty oblivious to that sometimes. Hopefully he just wrote it off as Stiles being weird. But if he could smell Stiles’ fucking sadness, surely he could smell… other things.
‘Give me five minutes’ he replied, getting to his feet. He changed into appropriate running gear — shorts, and a Spiderman t-shirt that was starting to get a little tight across the shoulders, to his utter delight. Grabbing his phone and wallet, he sought out his dad, who was in the living room reading. Hannah was nowhere to be found, and Stiles belatedly remembered her mentioning earlier she wanted to take a bath after her PT appointment. His dad could handle things without him, surely?

“Hey, I’m gonna run into town, I might be a while. You good here?” After the first time he’d gone running with Derek — and not come home until four hours later, where he discovered his dad about ready to drive out and start a search party — Stiles had learned that telling the sheriff he was running to town and back was the best way to get several hours of uninterrupted time.

“Yeah, I’ve got it covered. Call me if you need picking up.” The sheriff still seemed skeptical that Stiles was capable of running all the way into Redford and home again, but he looked proud every time Stiles said he was doing it. He’d feel bad, if he wasn’t probably capable of actually making the run without dying. He’d come a long way from the start of the summer.

“Later, Pops.”

Derek was waiting in the Camaro at the same stop sign Stiles often picked him up at, and Stiles swung smoothly into the passenger seat — and then almost choked on his own tongue.

Usually, even when they went running, Derek was in jeans. Often, his leather jacket as well. When Stiles asked, he pointed out that he would probably be wearing similar clothes if he ever had to run for his life, so he may as well get used to it. He also didn’t have to worry about sweating as much as a human.

Not today.

Today, Derek was wearing a tight grey t-shirt, his biceps practically bursting the sleeves. And shorts. Actual black basketball shorts. Stiles could see Derek’s knees. His toned calves, covered in dark hair. More of Derek’s bare leg than he’d ever seen outside of a life-or-death situation. For a minute, he couldn’t breathe.

“Shut the door, let’s go,” Derek urged impatiently, oblivious to Stiles’ brain shorting out. Stiles let out a sound that was maybe some kind of affirmation, reaching out and pulling the door shut, fumbling with his seatbelt.

He wasn’t going to mention it. Wasn’t going to draw attention to Derek’s attire, or make it look like he’d noticed. Don’t make it weird, Stiles. Don’t. Make. It. Weird.

“I didn’t even know you owned shorts!”

Fuck.

He had one job.

Derek’s ears turned red, his jaw tightening. “Believe it or not, I do have pants that aren’t jeans. It’s like a hundred degrees out, even werewolves have their limits.”

His brain, which had slowly worked past the sight of Derek’s calves, was now stuck on the sight of Derek’s biceps. A more common sight — Derek often took his leather jacket off when he was in Stiles’ room — but nonetheless equally brain-melting, the smooth tan skin covering muscles of steel that Stiles knew from experience could pick him up like a ragdoll. It said a lot about him that he found that more hot than scary by now.
Derek turned onto a narrow dirt road, and Stiles glanced over at him, forcing his eyes away from the unexpected bare skin to land on the man’s face. There was something… off. Had Stiles done something to piss him off? Or was something going on back home?

“How’s the pack?”

“Surely you know how they’re doing. Or have they stopped texting again?” Derek asked sharply.

“No, no, they’re all good now. But that doesn’t mean they’d tell me if something sketchy was going down.” The only reason Stiles knew they all knew about the Alpha Pack was because Derek had told him. They never brought up anything like that.

“Everything’s fine.” Derek didn’t look fine, though. Stiles studied him closer. Was he mad at Stiles? No, those weren’t his mad-at-Stiles eyebrows. They were more… anxious?

“Hey, thanks,” Stiles said quietly, putting the pieces together. Derek raised an eyebrow at him. “For reminding the pack to talk to me. It’s not your fault they’re useless, and… things have been way more bearable with more people to talk to. So, thanks.”

Derek’s shoulders seemed to lose a bit of tension. Stiles bit back a smile; of course the giant marshmallow doofus was worried about having upset Stiles with his meddling. What a dork. “Things are progressing with the house. I might not be able to come over as much,” he remarked. “I didn’t want you doing anything stupid without anyone to talk to.”

“Heard you say that, but all I hear is ‘I’m a big softy-wolf and I didn’t want Stiles to be lonely without me’,” Stiles teased, laughing when Derek growled at him.

They pulled over into a small gravel lay-by, and Derek motioned for Stiles to get out. They were right on the edge of the treeline, a faint dirt trail leading into the woods. “Where are we?”

“I Googled it,” Derek said, which wasn’t really an answer. He shouldered a backpack, moving towards the trailhead. “It’s a real trail. Doesn’t seem to be used much these days, though. Let’s go.”

He took off, leaving Stiles no choice but to follow him. If he purposefully stayed a few strides back in order to admire Derek’s ass in the shorts, that was his little secret. Derek didn’t let him get away with it for long, though, dropping back to run at Stiles’ side whenever the trail was wide enough.

Stiles kept his breathing steady, his mind slipping into that comfortable space he got from running where he could think about everything and nothing at the same time, his whole focus narrowing down to the rhythm of his feet on the trail. Derek kept pace, running at the perfect speed to push Stiles without making him hyperventilate and die. Neither of them was trying too hard; the trail was way too beautiful not to enjoy the journey. It took them deep into the woods, crossing a narrow creek several times, the tall trees shading them enough that the heat of the day wasn’t overwhelming. Birds chirped pleasantly, the breeze rustling through the leaves. Stiles wished he could experience it with wolf senses, all the sounds and smells of the forest — he didn’t know if it was a pack thing or a him thing, but he felt calm in nature like he couldn’t anywhere else, even when it wasn’t Hale land. It energised him, in a weird way.

He lost track of time as they ran, and was surprised when Derek began to slow to a walk. He followed suit, catching his breath and rolling out his shoulders. “Drink some water,” Derek urged, reaching into his backpack and pulling out a water bottle, tossing it Stiles’ way. Stiles suddenly realised how thirsty he was, sucking down the cool liquid greedily. Derek had another bottle for himself, and Stiles’ eyes fixed on the alpha’s throat as it bobbed with every swallow. He was very glad for his baggy shorts right then.
They’d reached the end of the trail by the looks of it, the narrow path turning into a small clearing, a few logs piled up in a vague bench-like fashion. Stiles slumped down on one, his muscles aching comfortably. “Man, this place is beautiful,” he declared, leaning back on his elbows. Derek dropped down beside him, backpack by his feet.

“When you get home, we’ll go running in the preserve,” he offered. “There’s a whole bunch of trails through there. Some pretty scenic hikes, too.”

“That sounds cool, yeah,” Stiles agreed, trying not to outwardly freak out at Derek’s confirmation that he’d continue hanging out with Stiles after the summer was over, when they didn’t have the weird anonymous bubble of Redford. “Hey, you said you were making progress with the house,” he said. “How’s that going?”

Derek’s face brightened. “We’ve finished levelling the foundation,” he told Stiles, looking the closest thing to excited that Stiles had ever seen on Derek. “Poured new concrete, checked the pipes and power lines. And I got the blueprints approved. We can start building tomorrow.”

“Dude, that’s awesome!” Stiles enthused. “How does that even work? Building a house, I mean.” He knew the theory behind it, obviously, but he’d never seen a house be built from start to finish. Except for a few episodes of Extreme Home Makeover that one time he had the flu, but he was pretty sure that wasn’t how it usually went.

“I already spoke to some people about materials,” Derek said. “So they’ll get delivered tomorrow. Peter and I will get the framework built, then I’ll start getting the pack involved. Once we have the bones of the house up, I can call in contractors to do all the difficult stuff. As long as I have someone check we’re up to code at various points in construction, I can pretty much do what I want.” He reached for the backpack. “Here, take a look.” He pulled out a roll of paper, shuffling closer to Stiles and unrolling it over their laps.

It was a blueprint, all measured and professionally drawn, with notes on dimensions and such made in Derek’s neat handwriting. Most of it was the same as the one Stiles had seen pictures of, but a couple of minor details had changed, and it was amazing seeing it all there on paper. This was going to be a house. A house that Derek and the pack would build, for the pack to live in.

“Damn, Derek. This is really impressive, y’know?” he murmured, smiling when Derek made a constipated grimace. The guy needed to learn to take a compliment. “I’m proud of you. Is that a weird thing to say?” He shrugged. “I don’t care. I’m so proud, dude. You could’ve just let the county take the land and never gone back there. After everything that happened, no one would blame you. Instead you’re taking this awful thing that happened and turning it into something new, something good. This is like, pro-level alpha.”

Derek’s expression could only be described as bashful, his head ducking even as a small smile crept across his face. “It was my fault,” he said eventually. “The least I could do was fix it.”

“It was Kate’s fault,” Stiles insisted fiercely. “Don’t you dare blame yourself for what that crazy bitch did.”

Derek stiffened, shaking his head. “She got to them through me. It’s my fault.”

Stiles was definitely missing something big. He pressed his shoulder to Derek’s, unsure if the comfort would be welcome. Derek didn’t pull away. “You were fifteen. There’s nothing you could have done that would make you in any way at fault for a hunter burning down your house.”

The werewolf didn’t respond, rolling up the blueprints and tucking them safely back in his backpack.
“There’s a lot you don’t know, Stiles,” he said eventually, getting to his feet. “Come on, we should start heading back.”

“Derek,” Stiles sighed, reaching for the man’s arm, tugging him to a halt. “Don’t beat yourself up over shit that happened when you were a kid. It was awful, and I’m sorry, and you’re right that there’s a lot I don’t know. But I do know that you’re a good person who would never hurt his family, his pack. You’re a good alpha. And I’m going to hug you now, so please don’t rip my throat out.” He eyed Derek carefully, but he didn’t move, so Stiles slowly wound his arms around the alpha’s waist. It was awkward at first, Derek stood tense with his arms by his side, but Stiles pushed through, resting his forehead against Derek’s shoulder and squeezing him tight. He was probably sweaty and gross, but it was too late to back out, he’d committed to the hug. After a moment, Derek relaxed marginally, bowing his head until his nose pressed against Stiles’ neck. He didn’t exactly hug back, but it was a start. Stiles’ heart raced. He was hugging Derek Hale, and Derek was letting him.

Not wanting to push his luck, he dropped his arms and stepped back, flashing Derek a grin. “Race you to the car.” Catching the man’s look of surprise, Stiles laughed as he sprinted back to the trail, unsurprised when Derek overtook him with inhuman speed. The alpha could have run to the car in five minutes, but he stayed tauntingly just out of Stiles’ reach the entire time. Stiles maybe tripped over a root once or twice, his eyes on Derek’s legs rather than on the trail. He was clumsy, it happened.

The hug wasn’t mentioned when they got back to the car, but the furrow between Derek’s eyebrows was gone, and he teased Stiles about challenging werewolves. “What you’re trying to say is, you cheated,” Stiles accused, making Derek snort. “I see it more as a natural advantage. You should know better.”

“Whatever, cheater,” Stiles grumbled, slumping back in his seat as Derek started to drive. He cracked the window, both for the fresh air and to save Derek’s wolfy senses from his sweaty self, grinning faintly. He’d had lots of fantasies about his summer during the school year, including plenty about driving down empty roads in glorious sunshine with the windows down. Only in the wildest of those fantasies had he been in the passenger seat of Derek’s Camaro. It never got any less surreal.

About fifteen minutes into the drive, Stiles’ stomach started to rumble. Derek rolled his eyes. “I swear to God, you have a tapeworm.”

“I’m a growing boy!” Stiles argued indignantly. “Who just worked very hard and burned a lot of calories. And don’t you dare talk to me about tapeworms, I’ve seen your betas eat. I’ve seen you eat.” Derek was more polite about it, but he could still eat an entire cow and then go back for seconds.

“There’s some trail mix in my backpack.”

“Oh, Sourwolf, you do care,” Stiles sighed, squirming around to reach into the back seat for the backpack. He dug through it, careful not to damage the rolled-up blueprints. He found the packet of trail mix, squished in the bottom beneath a plain black sketchbook. Curious, Stiles pulled out both the food and the sketchbook, flipping it open. The pages were full of architectural drawings and blueprint mock-ups, several things crossed out or re-drawn with notes around the edges. It was his initial sketches for the house, Stiles realised.

“Do you mind?” Derek asked flatly. Stiles ignored him, studying the drawings with interest. They were rougher than the final blueprint, free-hand and unmeasured, just to get a feel for the space. One double-page spread towards the end of the book showed the full floor-plan, a pretty close match to the final design from what Stiles could see. He smiled at the notes — kitchen window facing the
yard; mom’s old veggie garden? — Peter’s old library, move to basement. Safer. — Make loft room like Laura used to have? Echoes of the Hale family creeping into the new building, reminders of a time when love and laughter were present. Stiles hoped they could bring that back.

Looking closer, he saw the many bedrooms were labelled; on the official blueprint they were merely numbered, but this sketch had names. ‘Mine/Ours?’ in the largest bedroom on the second floor. ‘Erica & Boyd’ in a room next to ‘Scott & Allison’. Optimistic of Derek to assume they’d be back together, but not unfounded. He scanned the sketch, wondering where Derek had put him. Only… he wasn’t there. “Dude, what the hell?” He looked up, hurt gathering behind his ribs, even as he tried to keep his tone joking. It could just be a mistake. It was an early draft, his room could be on another page somewhere. Derek eyed him, perplexed. “Everything I’ve done for the pack, and I don’t even get a room?” There were at least four rooms labelled as guest rooms, but nothing with Stiles’ name on it.

Colour drained from Derek’s face. He jerked the steering wheel, abruptly pulling over into a grassy verge. They were the only ones on the road. “Stiles, it’s not what you think,” he grit out. The reaction made Stiles’ heart clench painfully — it definitely wasn’t a mistake.

“I don’t know what else it could be, Derek,” Stiles argued. “You gave rooms to everyone else in the pack except me. So what, you assumed I wouldn’t want to? I know I have my dad, but Scott has his mom and you still gave him somewhere! Or is that just a room for when he and Allison want to fuck without her dad threatening to shoot him?” Why was Derek bothering with him all summer, if he was just going to kick him to the curb soon?

“I’d hoped by the time the house was finished, you wouldn’t need your own room,” Derek told him, his tone even, as if he wasn’t ripping Stiles’ heart out with every word.

“So what, you hoped I’d have left the pack by then? Decided to go back to my normal life? Or were you planning on kicking me out, once you realised the useless human couldn’t be trained up after all?” Stiles felt the corners of his eyes burning, and he hated it, wishing more than anything that he wasn’t stuck in the middle of nowhere with no way to get away from Derek fucking Hale. “You said humans mattered to pack, Derek. You said I mattered.”

Derek growled low in his throat, and before Stiles could move a hand snapped out to grab him by the collar of his t-shirt, yanking him forwards. Their lips collided roughly, Derek’s other hand gripping his shoulder. Stiles’ eyes went wide.

Derek was kissing him.

He was too stunned to do anything but sit there, his seatbelt digging into his neck, until Derek let him go. The alpha looked horrified at his own action, his hazel eyes wide. “Stiles, I—“ he faltered. Stiles’ tongue flicked out to run over his bottom lip, as if he could taste Derek’s own mouth left behind.

Half of his brain was insisting he had passed out in the woods somewhere and this was all a hallucination. The other half was rapidly piecing things together, stunned by the conclusion his long-bred detective skills were leading him to. No way.

“Oh,” he breathed, meeting Derek’s gaze head on. The label ‘mine/ours?’ suddenly made sense. “You didn’t give me a room because you wanted me in yours. You wanted to be sharing your bed with me.” It was beginning to click in his mind — coming all this way to visit Stiles under the guise of research, the journals, asking for help with the pack, the diner, the fucking bookstore — but the answer seemed so ridiculous Stiles didn’t dare believe it could be true. “Oh my God, you’ve been wooing me.”
Derek’s whole face was red by now, his hands clenched in his lap. “You didn’t notice anything. I was so confused. Your scent, your heartbeat — I knew you were interested, but nothing I did worked.”

Holy shit. Derek Hale had been flirting with him the whole summer. And he, oblivious, idiotic Stiles Stilinski, had been completely unaware.

Unbuckling his seatbelt with shaking fingers, Stiles lunged forward, catching Derek’s lips with his own and sliding a hand into the alpha’s dark hair. Derek gasped against his mouth, and Stiles took the opportunity to slip his tongue between Derek’s lips, heart racing so fast it felt like it would burst out of his chest. Derek’s fingers cupped his jaw, deepening the kiss, and Stiles moaned softly.

“For future reference,” he said breathlessly once they parted, foreheads still pressed together. “Blunt is better. You could have asked me out the first time you came through my window and I would have said yes.” He would have wondered if it was all some elaborate joke in which Derek would murder him and leave him in the woods, but he would have said yes all the same. Hell, Derek could have asked him out months ago and he would have agreed. He’d been Derek’s for longer than even he could pinpoint.

“Well now I know that,” Derek murmured, smirking against Stiles’ lips. He unhooked his own seatbelt, shifting so the steering wheel wasn’t digging into his back.

“God, you’re such a dork,” Stiles said, smiling so wide he thought his face might break. Looking back at the last few weeks in a new light, he couldn’t believe he’d been so blockheaded. He was worse than Scott.

“I was on the verge of pinning you against the wall and kissing you,” Derek said. “I was trying but you just weren’t getting it.”

Stiles’ arousal sparked at the mental image. “Yes, please, anytime, wall-pinning is a firm green light,” he babbled, watching Derek’s eyes darken. “Also, how the hell was I supposed to know when you didn’t use your words. I thought you were just being a good alpha, checking up on me. At best I thought we were friends. I mean, look at you, you’re way out of my league, I figured I had no chance in hell.”

“I’d say you have a pretty good chance,” Derek replied teasingly, thumb stroking Stiles’ neck.

“You aren’t kicking me out of the pack, then?” Stiles clarified. Derek growled again, shaking his head and flashing red eyes. “Good. As for sharing your room… let’s see where we’re at when the house is built, okay, big guy?” But now that he knew where they were headed, well.

Derek had a pretty good chance, too.

The pair of them shifted to get a little more comfortable, sliding the passenger seat back so Derek could crowd Stiles’ space, practically pinning him with his body. Stiles was not complaining one bit. He reached up, running fingers over Derek’s stubbled cheek. It was softer than he’d always expected. “How long have you wanted this?” he asked, still utterly confused. Before Redford, Derek had never given any indication he thought of Stiles as anything other than an extreme annoyance and occasional ally.

Derek shrugged. “A while,” he said evasively. “There was never a good time. And then you left.”

“So you followed,” Stiles finished, leaning up for a short kiss. “Sappy-wolf,” he teased. Derek’s chest rumbled. “I’m glad. Even without this,” he gestured between them, “my summer would have
been lonely as hell if you hadn’t broken in through my window. And reminded our pack that I exist. But it’s been… pretty great so far.”

“There’s still half the summer left,” Derek pointed out. Stiles smirked.

“Then there’s plenty of time for it to get better.” He winked, hands resting on Derek’s waist. “Although as much as I am into this, we should probably, uh, cool it down.” Derek’s proximity was giving him some major issues in the pants-region, and while he could hardly believe he had a hot-as-sin alpha werewolf all up in his space, he wasn’t quite ready to actually do anything about it. Up until twenty minutes ago, he’d never kissed a guy before. He’d barely even kissed girls.

“You’re right,” Derek agreed, awkwardly clambering back into the driver’s seat. “For the record, I did not intend to jump you in my car in the middle of an empty road. I, uh, had a plan. Kinda.”

Stiles snorted. “One with less serial killer vibes, I hope,” he joked, even though it was his fault things had gone the way they had. If he’d kept his nose out of the sketchbook, how long would it have taken for Derek’s plan to come to fruition? Leaning over to kiss Derek again, he hummed happily. “God, I could do that all day,” he mused.

His stomach rumbled, reminding him of what had started it all. The trail mix, now abandoned on the floorboards.

“I should get you home so you can eat,” Derek said regrettfully, turning the engine on. “And then get home myself.”

Stiles sighed, tempted to ask Derek if he wanted to come up to his room for a little while when they got back. But he knew Derek’s plan was better; he needed some time to readjust his worldview. To get used to living in a reality where Derek Hale wanted to make out with him.

He ate the trail mix as they drove back to Hannah’s house, and when Derek pulled over at the stop sign, Stiles leaned across for another kiss. “Text me later?” he requested, knowing his brain would probably be doing dumb things in about an hour. Derek nodded, running a hand over Stiles’ neck and squeezing.

“As soon as I get home,” he promised. Stiles snuck one more quick kiss, then reluctantly opened the car door, hopping out.

“Later, Sourwolf.” Derek just waved, and then he was off.

Stiles turned towards his aunt’s house, checking his face in his phone camera to make sure he didn’t look like he’d just been making out with the hottest guy he knew. Any flush to his cheeks could be explained by the exercise, and his lips weren’t that swollen. Good.

He kept his emotions bottled down until after he was home and showered, making smalltalk with his dad and aunt before escaping to his room. Only then, with the door shut and the window closed, did he shove a pillow to his face and scream into it, everything from the last couple hours finally starting to process.

He’d made out with Derek Hale, multiple times. Derek wanted him. Derek wanted to share a room with him, in the house that he was building. What the hell sort of alternate dimension had he stumbled into?
Chapter 9

Stiles had spent the first month of summer wishing his dad would go to Beacon Hills less often — any time he went back, Derek wouldn’t visit as much, as he didn’t want the sheriff to realise he wasn’t in town and get suspicious. Now, Stiles was practically begging his dad to leave. His deputies were finally getting the hang of working with the sheriff away, so not only was he staying in Redford, but he had much less work in general. He wasn’t locked in the office all day — he actually wanted to spend time with his son.

Ordinarily, Stiles would have been all over that. Getting his dad’s undivided attention was a rare treat, and so far they’d gone to the shooting range twice, gone hiking while Hannah was at a friend’s house, and spent many evenings in the living room watching movies with Hannah. It was closer than Stiles had been to his dad in a year; and almost made up for the amount of lying he was still doing.

Except his secret had just gotten a whole lot bigger. And Stiles missed the time when his dad barely noticed what Stiles was doing during the day, when he could spend the whole afternoon with Derek without anyone the wiser.

Because Derek was his boyfriend now.

Not that they actually used that word. But they were a definite thing. Derek had kept his promise of texting Stiles as soon as he got home after they first kissed, and Stiles had basically bombarded him with messages asking to DTR, still utterly bewildered that Derek would be interested. They were together, in an exclusive, feelings-having sort of way. Neither of them had any idea what they were doing, but they knew they wanted to be doing it with each other.

Now, two weeks later, the sheriff’s constant presence was making it nigh-on impossible to get any decent alone time with Derek. Hanging out at night was still easy, Stiles relishing in being able to curl into Derek’s side and rest his head on the werewolf’s chest while they watched Netflix together. Other than the physical contact, not much had changed in the way they hung out, and really that should have been Stiles’ first clue to Derek’s feelings for him. Back when he’d let himself dream about what would happen if Derek ever showed interested him, he’d imagined the two of them falling into bed pretty quickly, his horny teenage self desperate to get naked with another human, especially one that hot. And the first time Derek had visited after the kiss, he’d wondered if that was what Derek expected of him. He’d fumbled around like an idiot for at least ten minutes before Derek rolled his eyes, tugged him down to cuddle, and told him to play the damn movie. They didn’t need to rush to get physical. Derek wasn’t going anywhere.

Stiles had to repeat that to himself a couple times, when he was alone. Derek wasn’t going anywhere. Derek was his.

Spending time together during the day was a whole different story. Every time Stiles tried to make plans with Derek, his dad showed up and dragged him out to something, or decided it was time he and Stiles fix the leak in the gutter, or re-caulk Hannah’s bathtub. He still got to see his boyfriend, but their time was constantly getting cut short, and it was driving Stiles crazy. He was running out of reasonable excuses to leave the house, or be late home from working at the library.

That wasn’t to say he and Derek hadn’t spent any time together outside. They’d gone hiking together when Stiles told his dad he had to go and get his Jeep serviced, and they had dinner after Stiles’ shift at the library which was easily explained away by Stiles needing his curly fries fix and having dinner by himself. But it wasn’t enough. Derek could come over every day and it still wouldn’t be enough. It was a cruel joke of the universe that Stiles was finally dating someone, and they were three hours
apart from each other.

It all came to a head one evening when the three of them were sat down to dinner, Hannah and Stiles gushing about the latest Marvel movie they’d just seen. The sheriff had stayed home, wanting to give the two of them bonding time — and insisting he’d sat through enough superhero movies during Stiles’ childhood. “Oh, man, Dad, it was so good,” Stiles enthused. “I need to call Erica and ask if she’s seen it.”

“Weren’t the two of you supposed to go together?” the sheriff asked, and Stiles’ enthusiasm faltered.

“Yeah, but she doesn’t have a car, and every time I say I’m thinking about coming home for a day or two everyone just tells me how it’s not a good time because they have a million things going on,” he dismissed, shrugging. He was mostly over it. At least they were talking now.

“Well I’m glad you went with your old aunt instead,” Hannah cut in, reaching across the table to squeeze Stiles’ hand. “Even if you did have to sit in the weird seats by the disabled bay.”

“Anything for you, Aunt Hannah,” Stiles replied, smiling. He was glad, too. They’d gone for waffles after, and had a great time.

“Are you sure everything’s been okay with you and your friends, Stiles?” the sheriff asked, concern in his eyes. “These last few weeks you’ve been… different. Spending a lot of time by yourself.” He paused. “Melissa told me about the beach trip.”

Stiles grimaced. Of course, he should have known his dad was still in regular contact with Melissa. “It’s fine, Dad. I’m fine.”

“It’s not fine. They drove right past you! Scott should have thought to call you.”

“When does Scott ever think?” Stiles retorted, bitterness creeping into his tone. “Honestly, Dad. I’m over it. We talked, they apologised.” Technically untrue, but Stiles couldn’t really say that Derek growled at them until they changed their ways.

“Then what the hell is going on with you? When you’re not at work, you’re locked away in your room, or out doing God knows what and not telling me a thing when you get home. Redford can’t be as interesting as the amount of time you tell me you spend there, Stiles.” The sheriff ran a hand over his hair, looking haggard. “I tried to let you have your space. I thought things were going better, since we came out here. I’m worried about, you kid — it’s starting to feel like the school year all over again. It’s like I barely know you anymore.”

Hannah — who knew one secret of Stiles’ that she knew his dad definitely didn’t, and probably thought that was all there was to it — reached for Stiles’ knee under the table, offering a supportive look. Stiles froze.

“Dad, I’m fine, you don’t need to worry. I’m just… figuring some stuff out,” he attempted. The sheriff raised an eyebrow.

“I’ve never known you to figure anything out without a constant monologue and at least two spreadsheets,” he pointed out. “This silence, it’s not like you. I don’t like the idea of you spending all this time alone, it’s not good for you. Are you sure you don’t wanna go home for a day or two?”

“I’m not alone,” Stiles blurted, clapping a hand over his mouth in horror. Thinking fast, he tried to salvage the situation. “I’ve been seeing someone. Like, dating. That’s why I’m in town all the time. And I didn’t tell you because the person I’m dating is maybe kinda male? I’m bisexual, Dad. I’m dating a guy.”
“Dating?” Hannah muttered, eyes wide. Stiles was all ready to jump in with a story about some guy he’d met in Redford who wasn’t out to anyone and therefore would be too shy to ever meet Stiles’ family, eyeing his dad warily. He wasn’t worried about his reaction to his sexuality — okay, maybe he was a little worried. A lot of people weren’t prejudiced until it directly involved their loved ones. But his dad wasn’t like that.

The sheriff’s face was unreadable, and Stiles could hear his own heart racing. Eventually, the man sighed, looking Stiles in the eye. “Does this have anything to do with the fact that Derek Hale’s Camaro has been seen crossing county lines pretty regularly in the last few weeks?”

“…Shit.”

“Wait,” Hannah cut in. “Hot older guy with the murder-brows, Derek Hale?” She looked at Stiles to clarify, and the sheriff’s eyebrows climbed higher.

“You knew about this?”

“I knew he had a crush!” Hannah told her brother. “He told me it was unrequited.”

“Yeah, I’m as surprised as you are,” Stiles remarked.

“When were you going to tell me about this?” the sheriff asked, his cutlery abandoned on his plate. Stiles shrunk in his seat a little.

“I mean, ideally, never,” he mumbled. “I wanted to wait until we were home, at the very least. ’Til we’d figured out how things are gonna work, once I’m back. No one else knows.” Every time he thought about mentioning something to the pack, he thought he was going to vomit. His dad’s reaction would have nothing on Scott’s.

“So you just thought you’d keep secretly dating a murder suspect under my nose all summer?”

“Murder suspect!?” Hannah yelped. Stiles ignored her.

“He was cleared! Derek never did anything wrong,” he defended hotly. “This is exactly why I didn’t tell you! He’s a good guy, Dad. I know things were kind of sketchy for a while, but he’s trying his best after he was dealt a shitty hand. And he cares about me.”

“He’s six years older than you,” the sheriff argued.

“You were five years older than Mom!” In a few years, their age difference wouldn’t be anything to fuss over.

“You’re underage!”

“We’re not doing anything like that!” Stiles insisted, blushing bright red. “It’s only been two weeks.”

The sheriff was silent for a long moment. “He’s been driving all this way to visit you?”

Stiles nodded. “Couple times a week.” His dad definitely didn’t need to know about the nighttime visits. “Please, Dad. I really like him. Just give him a chance.”

His lips pursed, the sheriff eventually nodded. “I want to meet him, properly. Invite him over for dinner. I can reserve judgement until after that.”

Stiles figured that was probably the best he was going to get, under the circumstances. He beamed, jumping out of his chair and hugging his dad around the shoulders. “You’re the best. Is tomorrow
good?” he asked, knowing Derek didn’t have any evening plans then. The sheriff glanced at Hannah, who nodded.

“I can’t wait to meet him, sweetheart,” she encouraged, grinning. “Noah, quit scowling. I know nothing about this Derek kid, but he can’t be worse than Zachary.”

Stiles had heard about Zachary. The pinnacle of Hannah’s high school dating horrors. Just the name made his dad grimace. “That remains to be seen,” he muttered.

Not wanting to push his luck, Stiles excused himself to his room, immediately pulling his phone from his pocket and dialling Derek. “Hey, where are you?” he asked when his boyfriend picked up, wanting to make sure he could speak freely.

“Just leaving the building site. We’re good,” Derek assured, his voice fond. “What’s up?”

“So, my dad knows,” he blurted, ripping the band-aid off in one. There was a beat of silence.

“So I need to start running?”

“He wants you to come over for dinner. Tomorrow, if you’re free. You can meet him without being in the back of his cop car. And meet Aunt Hannah, too.” He knew Hannah and Derek would get on great, if Derek could relax enough to let his snark out.

“Dinner. With your family,” Derek repeated, sounding like Stiles had just asked him to face the Alpha Pack alone with both arms tied with wolfsbane rope.

“Please? He’s willing to reserve judgement until after he’s talked to you outside of a murder investigation.”

“So no pressure, then,” Derek snorted. Stiles heard him let out a long breath. “Fine. I guess it was bound to happen eventually. I just thought we had more time.”

“Me too, but apparently I’ve been spending too much time out of the house by myself, he got suspicious. So you’re in?” Stiles grinned, excitement bubbling in his stomach. He would be able to introduce Derek to someone as his boyfriend. Even if that someone was his dad, and his aunt. At least Hannah would be happy for him.

“What time do you want me there?”

“Let’s say seven?” Stiles was already mentally going through the contents of the fridge, wondering what he could cook that would be impressive but not trying too hard, and meet the appetite of an alpha werewolf.

“Seven works. Look, I’ve got to get to a pack meeting. I’ll see you tomorrow,” Derek said. There was the slightest hint of hesitation in his voice, and Stiles smirked.

“Derek, you’ve faced hunters and crazy werewolves and all kinds of monsters. My dad is nothing in comparison. You got this.”

“I didn’t care what any of the monsters and hunters thought of me,” Derek retorted. Stiles’ heart clenched.

“He’ll think you’re great, same as I do. Have fun with the pack, I’ll see you tomorrow. Goodnight, Sourwolf.”
He heard his dad’s footsteps out in the hall, and let out a sigh of relief when they went into the master bedroom, rather than towards Stiles’ bedroom. He was probably going for the bottle of scotch he thought Stiles didn’t know he had. There was a pang of guilt at having driven him to it. Hopefully after dinner with Derek he’d realise how wrong he was.

Heading downstairs, confident in the knowledge that his dad wasn’t there, Stiles went into the kitchen for a glass of water. Hannah was in there, putting the last of the dishes in the dishwasher. She looked up at him, and smirked. “So. Derek, huh?”

Stiles blushed. “Like I said, I’m as surprised as you are.”

“I’m not surprised,” Hannah said. “You’re a catch. But damn, brother dear was not impressed. Should I be worried?”

“The first time Dad met Derek as an adult was when he was arresting him on suspicion of murdering his older sister,” he explained, watching his aunt wince. “Yikes. As an adult? He met him as a kid?”

“He and Mom knew Derek’s parents. And then Dad picked him up after his entire family except his sister and his uncle were killed in a house fire.” It had taken a lot of digging on Stiles’ part to find out that his father was the first officer on the scene at the Hale fire, and had been responsible for Derek in the hours it took Laura to get back from the beach, where she’d gone for a weekend with friends. He didn’t think even Derek knew that he knew.

“Shit. You do know how to pick ‘em, huh, Stiles?” Hannah mused dryly.

“Derek had a rough past. But I told you, he’s a big ol’ marshmallow on the inside. I just… I never thought he’d go for me, ever. I’m still pinching myself.” He wanted his family to meet his boyfriend. He wanted someone to see how Derek was around Stiles, to realise that Derek wasn’t the scary guy he portrayed himself as — to assure Stiles that he wasn’t imagining things, that this was real. He wanted to be able to sit down with his boyfriend and his dad and his aunt and have a nice, normal dinner.

“I bet he thinks the same thing about you,” Hannah told him. “After all you said about him, I’m excited to meet him. I’ll help keep your dad on a leash.”

“Thanks, Hannah,” Stiles replied, leaning down to hug her. He took a deep breath, sipping his water. Everything would be fine.

Derek text Stiles before he left Beacon Hills, and Stiles spent the subsequent three hours alternating between freaking out, obsessively measuring slices of potato, and freaking out some more.

“I’ll watch the steaks, you go upstairs,” Hannah urged, wheeling in front of the oven and nudging him out of the way. “Get pretty for your boyfriend.”

Stiles blushed, but did as instructed, heading up to his room. He wasn’t sure why he was panicking over his wardrobe so much; it wasn’t like this was their first date. He wasn’t the one who had to make the good impression, here. But he wanted to look good. He’d spent the morning trying on practically every shirt he owned, coming to the conclusion that he was definitely going to have to go shopping before the end of summer. Eventually he settled on dark jeans and a crisp white t-shirt, a red and black plaid shirt over the top. Checking his face in the mirror and messing with his hair, which was now actually long enough to mess with, he mentally thanked whatever powers had
decided that men weren’t expected to wear make-up. He didn’t need more things to be self-conscious about.

Heading back down to finish up the cooking, he grinned at his aunt’s thumbs up. “Looking good, kiddo. Your dad’s in the living room, brooding. I gave him a beer, that should chill him out soon.” Stiles snickered.

“Thanks.”

He’d gone all out with steak, homemade fries and mixed veggies, happily admitting to buttering his dad up with the forbidden meat in order to win him over to Derek. He was just letting the steaks rest when the doorbell rang, and his hands trembled. “I got it!” he yelled unnecessarily, rushing to the hall before his dad could even think about getting the door.

Derek stood on the doorstep, a foil-covered pan in one hand, a nervous smile on his face. Stiles’ mouth went dry — he was wearing a dark grey button-up, the sleeves rolled to the elbows to show off strong forearms, the tails tucked in to fitted black jeans. “Hey,” Stiles greeted breathlessly. “You look. Wow. Hi.”

“Hi,” Derek echoed amusedly, eyes roaming pointedly over Stiles’ form. “The running is definitely doing you some good,” he drawled, gaze darkening. Stiles blushed. Aware that they could be interrupted at any moment, he leaned forward, capturing Derek’s lips in a firm kiss.

“Everything’s going to be fine,” he murmured, not sure which of them he was reassuring. “What’s that?” he added, gesturing to the pan. Derek ducked his head.

“Brownies. I was going to bring beer, but I, uh, didn’t want to remind your dad I’m old enough to do so?”

“Good call,” Stiles agreed, before the first word caught up to him. “You made brownies? Like, from scratch? Oh my God, you’re adorable.”

“Mom’s old recipe,” Derek told him, ears going pink.

“Stiles! Are you going to let him in, or just spend all night being awkward on the front porch?”

Hannah’s voice called amusedly from the kitchen.

“Right. Yeah. Come in,” he urged, beckoning Derek into the hallway. Rather than daring brave the living room first, Stiles led the way into the kitchen, where Hannah was practically bouncing in her chair. She’d made an effort, too, putting on make-up and a cute floral sundress that mostly covered the casts on her lower legs. She looked Derek up and down while Stiles put the brownies on the counter.

“You weren’t kidding about the murder-brows, huh,” was the first thing she said. Derek’s gaze whipped to Stiles.

“Murder-brows?” he asked flatly. Stiles held his ground.

“Yeah, you know, those two angry little caterpillars on your forehead?” Stiles teased, running his fingers over the brows in question. “Don’t act like you’re surprised, you know what your face looks like.”

Hannah laughed, moving forward a little and holding out a hand. “Hannah Stilinski, it’s a pleasure.”

“Derek Hale,” Derek replied, shaking her hand. “It’s nice to meet you. How are your legs healing? If
you don’t mind me asking,” he added hastily. Hannah waved him off.

“Not at all. They’re doing great; I should be out of the chair and on crutches by the end of the summer. Which is great, because Stiles here has to go back to school.”

“Do I?” Stiles asked quietly, making Derek snort.

The humour was sucked out of the room as Sheriff Stilinski entered — he might not be wearing his uniform or gun, but that was definitely the man who just walked into the kitchen. Derek straightened up, squaring his shoulders, and Stiles was treated to the amusing sight of an alpha werewolf trying his best to look non-threatening.

“Derek,” the sheriff greeted neutrally.

“Sir,” Derek replied with a nod, not looking the man in the eyes. There was a long silence, before Stiles groaned.

“Dad, be nice,” he pleaded. “You promised. I cooked steak.” As far as he was concerned, that was a binding agreement.

“On that note, let’s eat before it gets cold,” Hannah urged, heading for the plates. Stiles helped her dish the food up, taking it to the table he’d set and re-set multiple times since lunch. The sheriff pointedly sat directly opposite Derek.

“This looks great, Stiles,” Derek said softly, giving a quick smile. Stiles grinned, bumping their knees together under the table.

“Yeah, thanks, Stiles. It looks delicious,” Hannah complimented.

There was silence for a while as everyone dug in, but when the sheriff looked like he was about to talk, Hannah cut in quickly. “So, Derek, tell me about yourself.”

Derek glanced to Stiles, who gave a minute shrug. He wasn’t sure where to start on that one, either. “I, uh, grew up in Beacon Hills. Moved to New York with my sister when I was fifteen. Our parents died, so she became my guardian, even though she was only nineteen. Got my GED, went to college, got halfway through an architecture degree when Laura… died. Then I came back to Beacon Hills.” That was the extreme cliff notes version of Derek Hale, but Stiles didn’t blame him for wanting to skip all of the… everything.

“I’m so sorry,” Hannah murmured. “What do you do now? Did you finish your degree?”

“No, but I might in future. My credits are still valid.” Stiles’ eyebrows rose; he didn’t know Derek was thinking about that. “I work part-time in the auto shop in town, and I’m working on rebuilding my family home with the insurance money.”

“You’re rebuilding the Hale house?” the sheriff asked, surprised. “I didn’t know that.”

“His design is awesome, Dad,” Stiles bragged. “He did it all himself, it’s gonna look great when it’s all finished.” Derek ducked his head shyly.

“That’s impressive,” Hannah said. “Stiles, you’ll have to send me pictures when it’s all done.” They turned back to their meals, and Stiles leaned in to Derek.

“You’re thinking about going back to college?” he asked quietly. Derek shrugged.
“Seems a waste of two years not to. Probably online school. I don’t want to have to move again.” The I don’t want to leave the pack went unspoken.

“Wait long enough, and you can go when Stiles does. Y’know, since he hasn’t finished high school yet,” the sheriff cut in. Stiles rolled his eyes.

“We get it, Dad, there’s an age gap. You said you’d give Derek a chance.”

“Have I shot him yet? No. There’s your chance.”

“If I didn’t have two broken legs, I’d kick you,” Hannah snapped at her brother, huffing. “Derek, ignore him. This is my home, and you’re very welcome here. Anyone who makes Stiles smile like that is good in my books.”

Stiles felt his cheeks go bright red. “Aunt Hannah!” he hissed, making her grin sweetly. Derek boldly reached over to take Stiles’ free hand on the tabletop.

“Ask anyone else and they’ll tell you that I don’t have any expressions except scowling, so the smiling thing is definitely mutual.”

“Oh my God, you sap,” Stiles whispered, unsure whether to be touched or amused.

“Stiles, you were right,” Hannah declared. He raised an eyebrow at her. She winked. “Total marshmallow.”

“What exactly did you tell your aunt about me?” Derek asked skeptically, making Stiles groan.

“In my defence, this was before we got together. You were wildly out of my league, and I was a poor soul blinded by your scowly face and six-pack abs,” he teased. “More to the point, you’ll never know.” He ignored Hannah mouthing ‘I’ll tell you later’ across the table. Were they ganging up on him already?

With Hannah’s help, dinner went by without the sheriff interrogating Derek too badly, though he did make a few more cracks about the age gap. The only downside to Hannah’s help was that it came in the form of multitudes of embarrassing stories about Stiles as a child. After one particular tale about the time he got stuck in a tree trying to ‘rescue’ a squirrel, Stiles stood abruptly.

“I think it’s time for those brownies,” he declared. The sheriff raised his eyebrows.

“You made brownies?”

“Derek made brownies,” Stiles corrected. “Because he’s awesome.” Pulling back the foil, he grabbed a knife and cut four generously sized brownies, wishing he could surreptitiously taste them before serving them. He was willing to lie to Derek to spare his feelings, but his dad certainly wouldn’t, and if the brownies sucked that may be enough to tip him over the edge.

“There’s ice cream in the freezer, sweetie. The good stuff,” Hannah informed him. Sure enough, there was a pint of vanilla from the ice cream shop in town, and Derek perked up at the sight of it.

“That place does pint tubs? I thought they just did single-servings?”

“You have to ask, but they do have them. You’ve been?” Hannah asked, surprised.

“We, ah, went there on our first date.”

Stiles dropped the spoon he was holding. “Excuse you, mister, that was not a date,” he argued. “A
date requires the words ‘Stiles, do you want to go on a date with me?’: Not you just showing up and telling me you’re buying lunch.”

“I paid, it totally counts,” Derek insisted, though his cheeks were red beneath his stubble, his eyes flicking to Hannah and a reluctantly-amused sheriff. Stiles could get used to blushy-wolf.

“It doesn’t, but bless you for trying,” Stiles consoled, kissing him on the cheek. The blush rose higher.

To Stiles’ immense relief, the brownies were delicious. He mentally added baking to the list of Derek’s hidden talents. “Yeah, so, any time you want to bring me baked goods, you go right ahead with that,” he told the werewolf, grinning. “These are delicious, holy crap. You said it was your mom’s recipe?”

“I thought they tasted familiar. Damn, Talia’s brownies were legendary,” the sheriff murmured. “Everything she baked was. Stiles, your mom used to joke that she was going to leave me and marry Talia, purely for her strawberry shortcake recipe.” He chased the last scrap of brownie around his plate. “They taste just like hers did, Derek. Good job.”

“Thank you, sir,” Derek said, looking touched. “I don’t have many of her recipes left, but that one didn’t need writing down. She made us all help with them so many times.” Stiles pressed their knees together again, offering his support.

When the dishes were cleared away, Derek insisting on helping, Stiles decided on a tactical retreat to his room. “Door stays open,” the sheriff warned, and Stiles saluted, before dragging Derek upstairs. When they were safely in his room, he let out a long breath, flopping down onto the bed.

“That wasn’t as awful as I thought it would be,” he declared. Derek stood in front of him, and Stiles reached up with grabby-hands, beckoning him to lie down.

“You’re a werewolf,” he said amusedly. Derek shrugged.

“You could make you choose between him and me. I don’t ever want you to have to make that choice.”

Stiles shuffled closer, tugging Derek into a kiss. “I won’t,” he promised. “I won’t let him make me. Besides, I think he kinda likes you. He didn’t even mention the murder charge all evening.”

“I’ll take your word for it.” Derek gently manhandled Stiles until they were both more comfortable, Stiles propped on Derek’s chest. “Your aunt’s pretty great.”

“Oh my God, I can’t believe she told you some of that stuff,” Stiles groaned, hiding his face in Derek’s shirt. “I hate her.”

“You were a cute kid. You forget, I was there.” When Stiles glanced up, Derek looked smug.

“You remember that? Me, back then?”

“A little. I remember you were too curious for your own good. And had big brown eyes that got you out of more trouble than they should have. Not much has changed,” Derek teased, kissing his nose. Stiles chuckled.
“I just remember the one time you came over with your mom and Cora. You wouldn’t give me the time of day, and I thought you were the coolest. Even with those dorky bunny teeth.”

“I’ll show you bunny teeth,” Derek muttered, dragging Stiles into another kiss. Aware that the door was open and the sheriff was just looking for an excuse to shoot Derek, they didn’t let things get too heavy. Stiles eventually grabbed his laptop, setting them up to continue the movie they hadn’t been able to finish a few nights ago.

“Y’know, this was kinda nice,” Derek said quietly, his hand running through Stiles’ hair. Stiles hummed inquisitively. “Doing the whole family dinner thing. It’s been a while for me. But… I’d missed it. Even if your dad does make me feel like a cradle-robber.”

“The age gap isn’t that bad,” Stiles whined, for the tenth time that night. Derek snickered.

Stiles rested a hand on Derek’s chest, thinking to himself while they watched Inception. “If the house is all ready by then, we should host pack Thanksgiving. Dad and I usually have it with the Mc_calls, but I’m sure they’d be down for expanding the group a little. That kitchen/diner you’re designing would be perfect for it.”

Derek’s throat bobbed as he swallowed tightly. “We?” he asked, not quite hitting the mark on teasing. Stiles smiled.

“You invited me to share your room. That means sharing your kitchen, too.” He pressed a kiss to Derek’s chest, over his heart. “I want you to have a family again, Der. You deserve it.”

Derek was silent for almost a minute, his breathing steady. Stiles wondered with a stab of fear if he’d overstepped. Eventually Derek tipped his head, nose pressing against Stiles’ hair. “I’d like that,” he admitted in a whisper. “So much.”

Stiles’ smile grew, and he squeezed Derek’s waist gently. He was going to give Derek the best pack Thanksgiving ever.

Around the time the credits began to roll, there were footsteps on the stairs. Stiles felt Derek tense, but refused to let him move away; they weren’t doing anything wrong. Clothes were on, the door was open, they were just watching a movie together. The sheriff appeared in the doorway, and Stiles met his gaze unflinchingly, daring him to comment. He merely surveyed them, then cleared his throat. “It’s getting late, kiddo. Hannah’s gone to bed. Derek should probably get going, he’s got a long drive ahead of him.”

Stiles sighed, but he couldn’t really argue with that, so he sat up and set his laptop aside, stretching out his arms with a yawn. “Yeah, okay. You good, Sourwolf?” Derek hummed in affirmation, reaching for his shoes.

The sheriff followed them down the stairs, and seemed happy to wait in the living room doorway with his arms folded over his chest while they said their goodbyes. Stiles tried to ignore him, opening the door and offering Derek a smile. “I’ll wash the brownie pan and get it back to you when we’re done with them. Which, honestly, will probably be in like two hours, I’m definitely going back for round two.”

Derek huffed a quiet laugh, then, with a brief glance back at the sheriff, ducked down to kiss Stiles. He tried to make it quick, but Stiles grabbed him by the hips, turning it into a proper goodbye kiss. If his dad didn’t want to watch, he could leave. “Drive safe,” he said when they parted. “Text me when you get home.”
“I will. Goodnight, Stiles.” He looked back at the sheriff. “Thanks for the invite, sir. And thank Hannah for me, too.”

“I’ll pass on the message.”

Derek dropped one last kiss on Stiles’ forehead, then turned to walk to his car, which was for once parked in plain sight behind Stiles’ Jeep. Stiles stayed at the door until the taillights disappeared from view. “Damn, kid.” The sheriff’s voice made him jump. Stiles watched his dad smirk, shoving his hands in his pockets. “You’re totally gone on him, aren’t you?” he teased. Stiles scowled, gently punching his dad on the shoulder as he passed him on his way into the living room. The older man sobered up, shaking his head. “You sure as hell are a Stilinski. Falling hard and fast.”

“It wasn’t that fast,” Stiles denied, thinking of how long things had been building between him and Derek without either of them realising. He made no mention of how hard he’d fallen.

“Be straight with me, son,” the sheriff asked, sinking into his usual armchair. Stiles couldn’t help but snort at the unintentional joke. “I’ll admit, my judgement has been a little clouded due to everything, and you know him better than I do. Is he a good guy? Honestly. If you were me, would you trust him with your son? Knowing everything you know about Derek Hale.”

Stiles thought about the question seriously, trying to look at things from his dad’s perspective. The sheriff had no idea just how much Stiles knew about Derek Hale. “He’s the best kind of people, Dad,” he said softly. “He’s had a lot of shitty things happen to him, and he’s closed himself off from the world because of it, but… underneath all the leather and the scowling and the eyebrows, he’s a big, squishy dork who just misses his family. I trust him with my life.”

He wondered if he’d revealed a little too much in his eagerness to win his dad around — namely, that he was in way deeper than he had any right to be after three weeks. His dad leaned back, reaching for the beer bottle on the side table.

“The Derek Hale I remember before the fire was a good kid,” he said slowly, “if a little odd. I guess I can excuse him a few rough years, considering everything.” He set his beer down, meeting Stiles’ gaze. “If he treats you right, if he’s good to you, then I guess he’s alright in my books.”

Stiles brightened, beaming at his dad. “Really? You’re okay with it?” He’d meant what he said when he told Derek he wouldn’t allow his dad to make him choose, but the man’s approval still meant the world.

“Hannah’s right. He makes you smile. I haven’t seen you smile like that in years.” His face grew serious. “But just remember you’re not eighteen for another nine months,” he said, and Stiles winced, anticipating a lecture about legal age of consent and the joy of waiting. “So if you’re planning on doing any law-breaking, could you please keep it well within my plausible deniability?”

Stiles’ shock clearly showed on his face, as the elder Stilinski laughed. “I know better than to tell you not to do something, kid. I just don’t wanna know about it.”

It was far better than ‘have underage sex and I’ll shoot your boyfriend’, so despite Stiles’ embarrassment he agreed. “If anything like that happens, you’ll never have to acknowledge it,” he vowed.

“Good. Now turn the TV on so I can watch the game and forget any mental images of you and Derek Hale doing anything.”

Laughing, Stiles reached for the remote, obediently turning over to the football replay from earlier in
the day. “I’m gonna go read for a while. I won’t sleep ’til I know Derek’s home.” He got to his feet, moving behind his dad’s chair to hug him around the shoulders, kissing his temple. “Love you, Dad.”

“Love you too, kiddo. Sleep tight.”

Stiles was beaming when he settled into bed with a book, his phone on his nightstand waiting to light up with a text from Derek. His dad knew, and he didn’t completely hate Derek. His summer was definitely getting much better than he’d expected.
Hannah wouldn’t stop teasing Stiles about the lovestruck grin on his face the next morning over breakfast, especially since the sheriff was up in his office. Stiles suffered through it good-naturedly, blushing into his cereal, far too happy to let it bring him down. “God, you’re cute. And he’s cute. You’re so cute together! And trust me, Stiles — a boy brings homemade brownies to dinner with your parents, he is a **definite** keeper.”

“I wasn’t expecting the brownies,” Stiles agreed. “He is cute, isn’t he?” One of the reasons he wasn’t bowing to her teasing was that he was so damn glad to have someone to talk about Derek to that wasn’t his dad or Derek himself. There was no way he could tell the pack about the change in their relationship, but also no way his dad would sit there and listen to him wax poetical about Derek Hale. As he said over breakfast — he loved his son, but he’d put in more than enough time on that front during the Lydia phase.

“Those eyes, ooh boy,” Hannah remarked. “Even with those eyebrows, they’re killer.”

Stiles covered a snort with a cough; if only she knew. “I like the eyebrows. He looks like Grumpy Cat.”

“Oh my God, he does,” Hannah crowed with a laugh. She moved around to Stiles’ side, tugging him down with her hands on his cheeks to press a firm kiss to his forehead. “He seems like a sweetheart, if a little quiet. I’m happy for you, baby, and I know your dad is too, deep down. He’s just gotta reconcile some stuff in his mind.” She let him go, then smiled. “So, any grand plans for the day?”

“No really. Reading, maybe gonna hit the gym. Exciting times,” he joked, making her laugh. “You?”

“Your dad wants to get some of the old photo albums out of my loft, scan them onto his laptop. So I guess I’ll be looking through a lot of photo albums today,” she said with mock-enthusiasm. Stiles winced.

“Good luck with that.” Setting his bowl and spoon in the dishwasher, he retreated up to his room, surprised when his phone started buzzing in his pocket. “Good morning, Sourwolf,” he greeted with a smile, shutting his bedroom door. “How’s things?”

“I’m taking the pack to start work on the house today,” Derek told him. “But I can come over after, if you want? It’ll be late.”

“Der, babe, you don’t have to come over every day, it’s a long-ass drive, especially if you’re only here a couple hours. I won’t die if I don’t see you.”

“…Did you just call me babe?”
Stiles facepalmed. “Too much?” he asked, kicking himself for letting it slip. Derek was silent for a moment.

“Well, it’s better than ‘dude’,” he said eventually. Stiles took that as ‘I like it but I’ll never admit to it because I’m a big strong alpha who don’t need no pet names’, and grinned. “And I don’t mind the drive, really. I can stay home if you want to get an early night, though.”

“It’s up to you,” Stiles replied. “I mean, I pretty much always want you here. But I also don’t want you crashing your beautiful car because you’re running on three hours sleep a night after driving six to visit me.”

“I’ll try and make it before one,” Derek told him. Stiles sighed; there was no reasoning with that man.

“Looking forward to it.” He flopped back on the bed, staring at the ceiling. “So dinner went really well last night. Extra boyfriend points for the brownies; well done, sir.”

“Laura did teach me a few things about socialising while we were in New York,” Derek said, amused. “I mean, I didn’t really date while I was there, but she tried. And I learned from her mistakes.”

“Well you officially have double Stilinski approval. Dad admitted he may have misjudged you, we had a moment, it was heartwarming. So you know what this means?”

“I don’t have to park down the street anymore?” Derek guessed dryly. Stiles barked out a laugh.

“That, and I don’t have to think of excuses when we want to go out somewhere. Though if you’re coming after ten PM you definitely should still park down the street. What Dad doesn’t know won’t hurt him, there.”

“Yeah, I don’t think sneaking through his son’s window would earn me any points, no matter how many brownies I bring him,” the alpha agreed. “So one hurdle down?”

“Many more to go, but that’s a future problem,” Stiles replied, stretching his back and wincing when it clicked. “Finally showing the pack the house? Hope that goes well. If you end up getting all shirtless and sweaty while you’re building stuff, have someone send me pictures.

“Because that won’t be suspicious.”

“It’s a beautiful sight, and should be shared with the world. And by the world I mean me.” Stiles closed his eyes, imagining Derek stripped to the waist and glistening in the summer sun. Heat pooled low in his belly.

“No pictures,” Derek insisted. “But maybe we can work something else out.” His voice was a low rumble that went straight to Stiles’ dick, and he couldn’t resist the urge to slide his free hand over the growing bulge in his sweatpants.

“I’ll hold you to that, Sourwolf.” He tried to focus, clenching his fingers at his side.

“What are you doing today?” Derek asked. If he could hear Stiles’ breathing change, he was ignoring it admiringly.

“A whole lot of glorious nothing. I’ll write some stuff for the bestiary. Probably go to the gym. You aren’t the only one who can get hot and sweaty today,” he teased.
“Give it the rest of the summer, your muscles will give mine a run for their money,” Derek replied. Stiles laughed.

“I doubt that, but I appreciate the optimism. I’ll leave the muscles to you, big guy. You wear them so well.”

“I aim to please.” Derek’s tone was deadpan. “You’re in a good mood today.”

“Why wouldn’t I be? My boyfriend is hot, bakes awesome brownies, has won over my dad, and is coming to visit me tonight. Also it’s a beautiful day and I’m lying in a very comfortable bed right now.”

“I wish I was still in bed,” Derek grumbled. “I’ve been up since seven driving all over the county for building supplies.”

Stiles knew Derek hadn’t gotten home until after 1am, and made a sympathetic noise. “I wish you were in bed too. My bed, specifically.”

“Stiles,” Derek groaned. “Don’t start something you can’t finish.”

“Who says I can’t finish,” Stiles drawled, breath hitching as he curled his fingers around himself through his sweatpants.

“Are you doing what I think you’re doing,” Derek asked in a strangled voice.

“Maybe.” Stiles drew the word out, slipping his hand beneath his waistband with a sharp breath. “What are you wearing?”

“Stiles, I’m driving,” Derek bit out. Stiles pouted.

“You’re no fun.” He didn’t stop what he was doing, groaning softly as he stroked himself.

“Stiles.”

“Hey, just because you’re busy doesn’t mean I can’t enjoy myself. Like you said, I’m in a good mood today.” He hissed as he tightened his grip, Derek’s voice in his ear making every nerve in his body pay attention. “You gonna help me out, babe?”

“I’m gonna crash my car if you don’t stop,” Derek growled in reply. The noise made Stiles whimper.

“I have faith in you.”

“Stiles, there’s nowhere to pull over.”

Stiles sighed, but didn’t move his hand. “I guess I’ll let you get on with your day, then. Since you’re busy and all. Have fun with the pack, I’ll see you tonight.”

“Stiles, don’t—” Stiles stayed on the line just long enough for Derek to hear him moan as he worked his hand slowly around his length, then hung up, dropping the phone on the pillow with a self-satisfied grin. Let Derek have that in his mind all day with the pack.

For now, Stiles was going to enjoy the mental images his brain was providing.

As he’d told Derek he would, Stiles did eventually end up going to the gym, taking his second
shower of the day when he was back home. He was starting to enjoy the training routine Derek had given him, excited to get home and show the pack what he’d been working on.

After lunch, he dug Deaton’s book out from under his bed, thumbing through to the last page he’d read and opening his laptop to take notes. He only had a couple chapters left to read, and he still wasn’t sure why Deaton had given it to him. It spoke a lot about Druids and the things they could do with their magic, where their magic came from. As he started the penultimate chapter, his eyes narrowed, and he sat up a little straighter.

‘Magic, once awakened in a Spark, is merely about force of will, and requires training like any other muscle. Not anyone can become a Spark, but any Spark can become a Druid with enough commitment and focus.’

Spark. He’d heard that before. Deaton had called him one, multiple times. Was he suggesting…

“No way,” he murmured, reading further. The book went on to explain that an untrained Spark would suffer no ill from never using their magic, but if they chose to undertake Druid training they were committing to a way of life that was all about serving nature and preserving the balance of magic and life.

Feeling something buzzing under his skin, Stiles sped through the last two chapters, then set the book aside and scrambled over to his desk. He grabbed a pencil, setting it flat on the surface and sitting in his chair, keeping about half a foot of distance between himself and the desk.

He stared. Nothing happened.

Taking a deep breath, he remembered what the book said about Druids needing focus and determination for their power. He tried his best to envision clearly what he was trying to achieve, willing the pencil to lift off the desk. He kept his thoughts focused, trying to draw up whatever power Deaton seemed to think he possessed — he’d done it before with the mountain ash, surely it was in there somewhere.

The pencil wobbled. Stiles bit his lip. Slowly, millimetre at a time, the pencil rose off the desk. By the time it was about an inch in the air, Stiles’ knuckles were white, and the instant he broke focus it clattered back to the desktop. But he’d done it.

He sat wide-eyed for several minutes, unable to believe what he’d just done. Finally, some of Deaton’s cryptic remarks were beginning to make sense.

“I’m a Druid,” he breathed, awed. “Well, potential Druid. I’m a Spark. I can do magic.” He moved back to his bed, exhausted by the simple feat of magic, and reached for the book again. He wanted to start it all over again, a whole new meaning to the words now he knew what he could do. Potentially, if he trained hard.

The book said it was like any other muscle. Well, he was already working on the rest of the muscles in his body — what was adding one more to the training routine? He’d keep this one secret, though, until he had more control. Levitating a pencil for a few seconds wasn’t very impressive; he didn’t want to tell Derek and the others until he could really do something cool. Something useful in a fight.

He grinned to himself, preparing to start taking even more detailed notes than he had the first time around. He wouldn’t be the useless human for much longer, if he had anything to say about it.

As promised, it was just past midnight when Derek eased Stiles’ window open, creeping into the
room. Stiles was in bed but awake, his bedside lamp on and his book abandoned on the side table. He smiled sleepily. “Hey, Sourwolf.” Stiles sat up, but Derek waved him off, shedding his leather jacket and kicking off his boots.

“Hey.” He laid down next to Stiles above the duvet, sighing when he stretched out on the bed. He breathed in deeply through his nose, then stiffened. A quiet groan escaped his throat. “You’re gonna be the death of me,” he muttered, pulling Stiles into a kiss, his stubble scraping Stiles’ jaw. Realising exactly what the werewolf could smell, Stiles smirked.

“It can’t be the first time you’ve smelled that,” he pointed out, wriggling out from under the duvet to wrap himself around Derek like an octopus.

“No, but it’s the first time I know it’s because of me,” Derek replied, voice a little hoarse. “It’s… a lot.” He buried his nose in Stiles’ neck, inhaling deeply. Stiles assumed that was a wolf thing.

“All the other times have been because of you,” Stiles informed him. “In this room, at least. And a lot in my old room, too.” Derek let out another groan, the sound vibrating through his chest and into Stiles’.

“You can’t just say that,” he breathed, sounding raw. He drew Stiles closer, and Stiles shifted, tugging Derek on top of him. Having the heavy weight of the alpha on top of him made something settle deep in his bones, a contented sigh escaping his lips. One hand tangled in the hair at the back of Derek’s head, pulling him into a slow kiss.

The kiss soon became nothing but teeth and tongue, one of Derek’s hands next to Stiles’ shoulder, bracing him above the teen. Stiles moved a hand down Derek’s back to his ass, smirking against his lips as he squeezed gently. Derek hissed, the movement bringing their hips slightly closer together, just enough to get friction where it was sorely needed. “Mm, Derek,” Stiles groaned, his hand trailing up and under Derek’s t-shirt, fingertips brushing smooth skin over rock-hard muscle. “You’re so hot.”

Derek dropped one knee between Stiles’ thighs, pressing closer, rocking down into Stiles’ hardness with his own. “Stiles,” he breathed, the hand that wasn’t holding him up cupping Stiles’ jaw. “God, Stiles.” With a groan that sounded like it physically pained him, Derek pushed up and away, rocking back on his heels. He was breathing hard. “We need to slow down.”

“What, hey, no, come back here,” Stiles pleaded, reaching up to grab Derek’s shirt. Derek closed his fingers over Stiles'.

“Stiles,” he repeated, shaking the lust from his eyes. Stiles frowned, tugging his hand back.

“Do you… not want this?” Had he misread the situation? Derek’s eyes widened, and he shook his head.

“No, God, believe me. I want you. I thought that was obvious,” he added, gesturing to the straining zipper of his jeans. Stiles tipped his head back, needing to take a second to get over Derek kneeling over him, looking wrecked and sexy as hell, the words I want you coming from his lips. “But I want to take this slow.”

“We don’t have to go zero to sixty, but we can still have some fun. Like, zero to twenty, maybe?” Stiles suggested, his blood very much not in his brain. Derek shifted to sit beside Stiles, putting a little distance between them.

“Stiles, it’s only been a couple weeks, and you’ve never… I don’t want to take advantage of you. I
“Don’t ever want you to feel like I’m pushing.”

“Do I look like I’m not into this?”

“It’s easy to get swept up in things when someone hot and older is interested in you,” Derek argued quietly. There was something in his tone that gave Stiles pause.

All at once, several things fell quietly into place, and his arousal instantly died as horror took its place. He sat up, reaching for Derek’s hand. “Derek,” he said, voice firm. “Derek, you’re not Kate. You’re nothing like Kate.” How had it taken him this long to piece things together? Kate’s taunting of Derek, Derek’s reaction to her returning to town, his insistence that he was at fault for the fire. The math quickly appeared in Stiles’ head — Kate must have been about twenty-six when Derek was fifteen. Not exactly the same age gap, but... it was enough.

“I thought I wanted it,” Derek whispered. “She was beautiful, and older, and all the other kids at school were talking about sex like it was the best thing in the world. I wanted to want it.” Stiles edged closer, resting a hand on Derek’s knee. Derek looked up, his eyes full of pain. “Whenever I hesitated, she told me I was lucky, that I was wasting an opportunity that any of the other boys would jump at. She threatened to go find someone else, and I didn’t want her to think I was scared.”

“What she did to you is nothing like what you and I have,” Stiles told him, rubbing his thumb in small, soothing circles over the denim-clad skin. “She was using you to get to your family. She was trying to get you to trust her, get you to isolate yourself in favour of her. You’re not like that. You like me, right?” Derek nodded sharply. “Good. I like you too, a whole lot. You trust me?” Again, Derek nodded. “Then trust that I know you, and I know that you’re never going to make me do anything I don’t want to do. If I said stop, you’d stop, right?”

“Of course,” Derek breathed immediately, looking affronted that Stiles would ever think otherwise. Stiles smiled.

“Exactly. So you’re not like her. You care about me.” Stiles shuffled even closer, his knees pressed against Derek’s, moving like he was trying to spook a caged animal. Slowly, he reached for Derek’s shoulder, cupping the back of his neck like Derek so often did to him. According to something he’d read in one of the Hale journals, the neck was an important spot for wolves; it showed vulnerability. Touching the neck, depending on how it was done, could be a sign of comfort and security, of pack. Sure enough, Derek relaxed minutely. “Derek. Babe. We don’t have to do anything you’re not comfortable with, okay? We can go as slow as you like. I’m not in this for sex, as much as I wanna get my hands all over your gorgeous self. I’m in this for you, yeah? But don’t hold yourself back for my sake. If I’m not comfortable, I’ll say no, and you’ll listen, because you’re a good person. You’re not Kate.”

“I don’t wanna screw this up,” Derek confessed. Stiles pulled him into a hug, tucking Derek’s face into his neck. Derek gripped him tightly.

“You won’t screw this up, as long as you talk to me. This is good. Talking is good.” They sat for a moment, just breathing together, before Stiles ran a hand down Derek’s back. “You wanna lie down?” Derek nodded.

Carefully, Stiles manhandled them until they were lying down with Derek on his back, Stiles cuddled up against his chest, stroking a gentle hand down his arm. “I kinda ruined the mood there, huh,” Derek said hoarsely after a while. Stiles scoffed.

“Excuse you, we just had a beautiful moment of communication and bonding.” He squeezed Derek’s bicep. “Besides, we’ll have plenty of time for all that in the future. You’re kinda stuck with me,
Derek wrapped his arm tighter around Stiles’ shoulders, dropping a kiss on his hair. “Good,” he murmured against his scalp.

“Talk to me,” Stiles urged, craning his neck up. “How’d it go at the house today? I bet the pack were surprised.” He saw Derek’s lips twitch, hearing the werewolf’s heartbeat begin to return to normal.

“Lydia spent twenty minutes explaining to Scott how houses were built,” he relayed. “He was so confused. Erica was right in there claiming a room next to a bathroom — the exact room I’d picked out for her and Boyd.” Stiles knew Derek wasn’t going to assign rooms, despite having done so in his early draft, wanting his betas to pick their rooms. But Derek knew his pack well, and it wouldn’t surprise him if they all ended up right where Derek thought they would be. Stiles certainly had.

Derek kept talking, his words coming in fits and starts. He told Stiles how it had taken a little while for everyone to get the hang of working with the tools, but they eventually figured it out, making pretty good progress with the framework of the house. “It’ll be good for all of us, to learn to work together on something that isn’t destructive. I wish you could be there.”

“You don’t want me around power tools,” Stiles insisted. “You’d be taking me to the ER every other day.” Derek snorted, fingers tangling in Stiles’ short hair.

“Good point. We should be done with all the dangerous stuff by the time you get home.”

He kept talking, his soft, husky voice lulling Stiles to a state of almost-sleep. It was the most words he’d ever heard Derek say in one go, and the desire to keep listening was the only thing stopping him from completely drifting off. He was just so comfortable; warm and secure in Derek’s arms, his chest rumbling under Stiles’ cheek. Derek stopped talking all of a sudden, his hand in Stiles’ hair coming to a halt. “I should get going.”

“Nooo, stay,” Stiles whined, hugging him around the waist. Derek gently dislodged him.

“Stiles, I have to get home, it’s late,” Derek said apologetically. Stiles sighed, rolling onto his back and sitting up when Derek did.

“Stay, get some sleep. You can head out early, before my dad even notices.” The thought of sending Derek back to drive three hours by himself after what just happened sent Stiles’ stomach churning.

“I can’t,” Derek said. “Isaac will notice if I’m not home in the morning.” He leaned in, kissing Stiles softly. “I wish I could stay, but I really have to go.”

“I don’t think you should be alone tonight,” Stiles murmured, stroking Derek’s cheek. “Der, please.”

“I’ll be fine. I’m used to being alone.” That sentence, said so matter-of-factly, made Stiles’ heart break a little.

“That’s just it, you shouldn’t have to be. Not anymore.”

Derek’s smile didn’t reach his eyes, and he pressed his forehead to Stiles’ for a minute. “I’ll call you in the morning.” He kissed him one last time, then climbed out of bed, reaching for his shoes.

“Call me before then if you need me. I’ll wake up.” Stiles insisted stubbornly. Derek nodded in agreement, though they both knew he wouldn’t call. Stiles wriggled under the duvet, sat cross-legged as he watched Derek head to the window. He wanted to say something, to reassure Derek, to do anything to make those shadows in his eyes go away, but all he could do was smile and bid him
goodnight, watching him disappear out the window. Alone, he sighed, lying back down with a heavy heart.

Of course Kate Argent had fucked with Derek’s head more than any of them had ever guessed. He almost wished the bitch was still alive, just so he could kill her himself. What had Derek done to deserve all the crap he’d had piled on him?

No more, Stiles thought stubbornly, gritting his teeth. No more shit would be piled on Derek Hale if he had anything to say about it. His alpha deserved nothing but good things, and Stiles would make sure he got them.

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A few days later, they still hadn’t talked about the Kate thing in daylight. Derek had come over once more, a daytime visit where he’d sat and watched the first two Harry Potter movies with Stiles and Hannah, listening to them gently mock the tiny child actors and their hilarious squeaky voices. They hadn’t been alone for longer than five or ten minutes, and Stiles wondered if that was on purpose. His heart hurt, but he didn’t want to push Derek; he didn’t want to be anything like that bitch. They’d talk about it eventually. He hadn’t mistaken the way Derek had looked at him, had touched him. Derek wanted him. They just had some issues to work through. But they would.

He was sat in the living room texting Scott and Erica about their weekend plans, and Derek about continuing their Potter movie marathon sometime, when the sheriff looked at his phone and grumbled a curse. “Looks like I’m going home this weekend,” he remarked, and Stiles frowned.

“But you were just there.”

“I know. I guess there’s a bunch of files that they thought I didn’t need, but it turns out I do, so I have to go pick them up. God, I don’t know how Derek does that drive so often. He must really like you, kid.” Stiles flushed, ducking his head, before a thought occurred to him.

“Could I go pick them up for you?” he suggested. The sheriff raised an eyebrow. “Are they urgent? I could head down Friday, come back Sunday afternoon. Unless you need them ASAP.” It sounded like the pack might actually be around at the weekend if he went to see them; they were all getting pretty involved in the Hale House rebuild.

“No, they’re not urgent. You actually want to go back for a weekend?” The sheriff seemed surprised, and Stiles didn’t really blame him. He’d been full of excuses about going back to Beacon Hills since he’d arrived in Redford; honestly, he wasn’t really sure what he was avoiding. But the pack were on fairly good terms with him, and he was getting worried that if he didn’t go home at least once, he might not have anything other than Derek to come back to. Besides, that hollow feeling in his chest was getting worse, and from what he’d read in the Hale journals, he was pretty sure it was the pack bonds stretching thin.

“Yeah, if it’s cool with you.”

“One condition,” the sheriff said. Stiles could tell what was coming. “You don’t have to spend the weekend at Melissa’s, but you don’t have Derek overnight at the house.”

“That’s fair,” he agreed, though he was still disappointed. That would have been his one chance to try and make sure Derek actually got some sleep. “So I can go?”

“Yeah, kid. I’ll text the station, let them know to expect you.”

Stiles grinned, already picking up his phone to text Scott. Despite everything, he’d missed his best
friend. It would be good to see him again.
Chapter 11

Stiles told both Scott and Derek that he’d be coming home for the weekend, so, naturally, the entire pack knew within twelve hours. Friday morning, Stiles bid his dad and aunt goodbye and threw his backpack into the trunk of the Jeep, hitting the road back to Beacon Hills for the first time in a month and a half. It was weird, going back but knowing it was only temporary. To be just visiting his own home.

He spent a good portion of the drive on the phone to Derek, who was working by himself on the house, in preparation for the pack coming over to help after lunch. “I can’t wait to see the house,” Stiles enthused. Derek had shown him pictures of how the Hale house was looking, and he was desperate to see it in person.

“It’s not really a house yet,” Derek said modestly. “But we’re getting there.”

He hung up the call when Derek said the rest of the pack were approaching, promising to be over soon. They hadn’t talked about how they were going to act around the pack yet. Stiles was of two minds whether he wanted them to know; on the one hand, he wasn’t remotely ashamed of being with Derek. On the other, he didn’t want to deal with the outrage and bullshit and prying that would come with being out. Hell, no one except his dad and aunt — and Derek, obviously — even knew he was into guys. Was it worth ruining his weekend home with all that?

He’d leave it up to Derek. He didn’t want to do anything to make the other man uncomfortable, and he was the alpha; if he didn’t want his pack to know, that was his business.

The rest of the drive passed fairly quickly, and before he knew it, Stiles was driving through Beacon Hills like he’d never left; nothing had changed. It was small-town in a whole other way to Redford.

He pulled into the driveway with a smile on his face, looking up at the house. Damn, it was good to be back. He checked his phone once he was inside, smiling at a text from Lydia telling him to come to the Hale house as soon as he got in. He dumped his backpack in his room, inhaling a packet of chips and making a mental note to get real food on his way home, then headed back out to the Jeep to drive out to the preserve. He sent a quick text to his dad assuring him he made it okay, before the sheriff began imagining the worst.

His first look at the in-progress building made his breath catch in his throat. He slowed down as he drove closer, letting out a low whistle. The whole frame of the house was up now, and the floor was covering the basement he knew was beneath it. It was certainly impressive; it would be even more so when it was fully built. “Stiles!” As soon as he stepped out of the car, he was grabbed in a tight werewolf hug, and he laughed into Scott’s mop of hair.

“Hey, Scotty! Long time no see.” He pulled back, getting a good look at his friend. Scott was as tan and smiling as always, a little more muscle, his hair a little longer. Stiles didn’t get long to survey him, another werewolf slamming into his side; this one blonde and busty. “Catwoman!” Erica leaned up to kiss his cheek, taking a step back with her hands on his shoulders. Her eyes roamed his body appreciatively.

“Damn, Stiles. Redford is good for you,” she remarked, sounding pleased. “I like the hair.”
Stiles grinned, running a hand through it. His hair was getting to the length where he actually needed to start doing something with it. Hannah had been making noises about taking him to get it neatened up before school started. “It’s good to see you, too. Where are the others?” He looked around for signs of anyone else, and Erica hooked her arm through his.

“Come see the gun show,” she drawled with a wicked grin, tugging him towards the house.

They turned a corner, and Stiles’ eyes went wide. The back section of the porch was slowly taking shape, thanks to the three werewolves currently out there. Isaac and Boyd were holding the heavy beams of wood for the porch supports, lifting as if they weighed no more than a pool noodle, setting them carefully in place under Derek’s instruction. Nearby, Lydia stood with a clipboard in hand, sunglasses atop her head. She was in a tank top and shorts, but that wasn’t what Erica had been referring to; Boyd and Derek were both shirtless, and Isaac was in a ratty t-shirt with the sleeves cut off, their biceps all flexing magnificently in the afternoon sun. Derek’s eyes were on Stiles instantly, but it took the others a moment to notice him.

“Well, well, the prodigal son has returned,” Lydia greeted, stepping delicately over a pile of lumber to greet Stiles, eyeing him over in a less predatory way than Erica had. “You’ve been working out.”

“So have you,” he returned, seeing the subtle swell of muscle in her biceps and shoulders. It wasn’t much, but the definition was starting to come in. “You keeping these puppies in check, Lyds?”

“Someone has to, since you’re not around,” she replied drily.

“Pretty sure that’s my job,” Derek cut in, approaching with his arms folded over his chest. Stiles tried to force his gaze away from the alpha’s tanned chest. From Derek’s faint smirk, he wasn’t doing a very good job.

The older man stayed about ten feet from Stiles, looking at him with an unreadable expression. Stiles didn’t move any closer; if Derek wasn’t going to say anything, then neither was he. “Stiles,” the alpha greeted.

“Hey, Stiles!” Isaac called, holding a beam in place while Boyd secured it. “Like what we’ve done with the place?”


“You should see the blueprints,” Lydia told him. “Derek drew them, because apparently that’s a skill he has? It’s hard to envision it properly this early on, but this place has real potential. Sorry, we’ve already claimed all the best bedrooms.”

Stiles forced a smile down. No, he was pretty sure he’d have the best spot in the house. “Derek, drawing? No way,” he said, as if the news was new to him. Had Derek said anything at all to Stiles beyond pack stuff the last couple of months? “I wanna see.”

Lydia grabbed him by the wrist. “Back to work, boys and girls,” she instructed. “I’ll give Stiles the tour.”

Scott met Stiles’ gaze, giving him a raised eyebrow and looking pointedly between him and Lydia. It took Stiles a second to get what he was implying, and he rolled his eyes, shaking his head. Bless Scott, always a little slow on the uptake.

He left at Lydia’s side, not daring to look back at Derek. His stomach squirmed uneasily. Maybe Derek just wanted to ease the pack into it. Didn’t want to shock them. That made sense.
He’d stay quiet until Derek was ready. Until then, he had a pack to catch up with.

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After showing him the blueprints, Lydia shoved a hard hat on his head and gave him a tour of the construction site, pointing out where each room would be and how she envisioned them all decorated. It was clear Lydia had a very defined aesthetic in mind, and Stiles doubted she’d spoken to Derek about it. That was an argument he’d probably have to mediate when they got to the decorating stage.

He acted like it was all brand new information, even though Derek had given him a tour in pictures the day they’d finished the framework. It was different, of course, seeing it all in person. He wished it was Derek showing him around, as great as it was to see Lydia again.

The pack spent most of the day at the build site, carefully constructing the framework of the wrap-around porch. “We’ve got contractors coming on Monday to fit utilities,” Lydia informed him. “Then we can start filling in the walls and really make this place come together.”

It seemed like she’d appointed herself project manager for the site, making Stiles wonder how Derek and Peter felt about that. Peter, who was nowhere to be seen — had he decided his part was done, now he’d levelled the wreckage of the previous house? Or was he just sick of hanging around a bunch of teenagers?

Still, it was fun, spending time with the pack doing something constructive. He was amazed at the difference in them all; Derek’s three betas were relaxed and happy, no longer holding the lingering scars of the Alpha Pack in their minds. Scott didn’t seem to completely hate hanging out with them, even if he still growled at Derek sometimes. He and Isaac were constantly exchanging jokes and rough-housing, and it made Stiles ache with envy until he caught Isaac looking at Scott with huge, lovelorn eyes that turned sad when Scott mentioned how excited he was for Allison to come home and see what they’d been working on.

Lydia was possibly the biggest surprise. Gone was the haughty mask of the perfect princess — she actually got down and dirty laying decking, insisting the boys weren’t measuring properly. She still flaunted her intelligence, but it was because she was proud of it, not because she was trying to prove she was better than the rest of them. She and Stiles spent a long time discussing some of the books he’d been translating, enough time that the others groaned and threw things and told them to stop acting like they were in school. Stiles didn’t mention the Hale journals. That wasn’t his secret to share.

Through it all, Derek hardly spoke to him. Hardly spoke to anyone, except to bark instructions and keep them on task. The rest of the pack didn’t bat an eyelash, following their alpha’s orders with varying levels of obedience, like it was totally normal for Derek to be so quiet and standoffish. For them, Stiles supposed, it was.

It was like looking back at Derek from months ago, back before Gerard, when they could all barely stand each other and merely stuck together out of necessity. Stiles tried to pester him into conversation a couple of times, but Derek never gave more than a short response and occasionally a growl. Scott kept staring at Stiles like he was poking a bear, and even the other betas were wary. “I forgot how much of a death wish you have, Stilinski,” Isaac muttered under his breath, after Stiles was particularly bold and teased Derek about his murder-brows.

It baffled Stiles. How could the rest of the pack have made so much progress and yet Derek was back at square one? He would have blamed it on his own presence, except none of the pack seemed surprised or confused by Derek’s behaviour. This was how he always was around them.
Stiles thought he’d been doing better.

They ordered pizza when it started to get late, Erica rattling off Derek’s credit card number from memory, and the seven of them sat on the newly built back deck, devouring an obscene amount of pizza and catching Stiles up on everything they’d been up to lately; everything they hadn’t bothered to text him about. No one seemed to notice when Stiles’ smile grew more and more false, listening to in-jokes and stories about events that ‘were funnier if you were there’, all the great things his friends got up to without him.

“So how about you, Stiles? What have you been doing in Redford?” Erica asked, leaning back against Boyd with one leg dangling over the edge of the porch.

“Yeah, how’s Hannah doing? Tell her I say hi,” Scott added, the only one of the pack to have met his aunt before. Stiles managed a small grin.

“She’s doing good. Ready as hell to get out of that chair, but she’s got a few more weeks before they’ll let her graduate to crutches. As for me…” He thought about his summer so far — late nights watching movies with Derek, treasuring every little snippet he learned about the alpha’s life before the fire. Running, training, building his strength up so he could protect his pack better. Learning he had the potential to be a freaking Druid — nothing he could really share with the pack. Nothing he wanted to share. He liked the idea of having a totally separate aspect of his life, proving he could be happy without them. Just him, his family, and Derek.

Derek, who had been ignoring him all day.

“Oh, y’know. I’ve been spending a lot of time with my dad,” he said eventually. “We go hiking sometimes. And we’ve been down to the gun range a couple times, which was nice.”

“You, shooting live weapons?” Isaac remarked. “How many ambulances were needed?”

“My dad’s the sheriff, you think I can’t shoot?” Stiles retorted, trying not to take offence.

“The sheriff’s been taking Stiles to the range since we were kids,” Scott piped up. “It’s been a while, though.” He nudged Stiles’ shoulder with his own, smiling softly. “That’s really great, Stiles. I’m glad you’re getting to hang out with your dad more.” Scott was probably the only one there who really got it. Stiles’ dad was everything to him, and the last year or so had put a strain on their relationship in a way Stiles had been sure they wouldn’t be able to fix. Sure, he was still hiding some pretty big secrets, but things were better.

“Yeah. And it’s been awesome seeing my aunt, too. Hey, Scotty, she gave me the secret Stilinski cookie recipe,” he added excitedly. Scott fist-pumped.

“Yes! Oh, man, those cookies are the best. Okay, you’re forgiven for being away all summer. As long as you make me those cookies whenever I want,” he said, and Stiles laughed.

“I do that and we’ll have to roll you onto the lacrosse field,” he joked.

Conversation quickly turned to their predictions for next year’s first line, until Scott’s phone beeped. “That’s my mom, I gotta get home. Work in the morning,” he said with a grimace. “Isaac, you with us or at the loft tonight?”

Isaac glanced at Derek, who shrugged as if to say ‘it’s your call’. “I’ll come with you,” he decided, getting to his feet. “See you guys tomorrow?”

There was a round of goodbyes, and Scott hugged Stiles around the shoulders before he stood.
“Come over after I’m done with work tomorrow?” he asked hopefully. “We haven’t played video games in forever, dude.”

Stiles almost pointed out that he’d offered to play online several times in the last month, and Scott was always the one shooting him down. But he held his tongue — he wasn’t here to antagonise his friends. “Sure thing, bro.”

Their leaving seemed to be the trigger for everyone to realise how late it was, clearing away the empty pizza boxes and making their excuses. Stiles tried to catch Derek’s eye, wondering if he should stay back and talk to his boyfriend, but Derek merely stalked over to his Camaro before even saying goodbye. Lydia, who had offered to drive Erica and Boyd home, patted him on the arm gently. “As you can see, our esteemed alpha is still as brooding as always,” she sighed. “He’s doing better, but… I’m worried about the Alpha Pack. He’s been shifty, lately. Like, even more than usual for him. I think they might be getting ready to make a move.”

“I’m sure it’s nothing,” Stiles assured. Derek’s shifty was probably due to the amount of time he was spending with Stiles. Unless there was something he was hiding from all of them, him included. Before today Stiles would have insisted Derek would never do that, but now… he wasn’t so sure.

Stiles tried not to think about it as he drove home, making a brief detour to the 24-hour convenience store for groceries. When he was home, he wandered into the living room and put the TV on to some mindless hospital drama, staring blankly into space.

What the fuck was up with Derek?

Sure, Stiles hadn’t expected him to be the guy he was in private, not in front of the pack. But this was like a total personality transplant to the Derek he knew. It was like he’d stepped into some alternate universe, where his Derek didn’t exist and all everyone knew was the near-silent, brooding Sourwolf they’d dealt with since Scott got bitten. Had his entire summer just been some kind of vivid hallucination?

He shook it off, tucking his knees up to his chest. He’d try and talk to Derek tomorrow, see where they were at; see how he felt about telling the pack the truth. Stiles wasn’t sure if he even wanted to. He was used to being in a room full of people and feeling alone, but around the pack… it was odd, feeling the pack bonds in his chest practically sing with joy at all being together, while his heart and his head were fighting the urge to run, insisting that they hadn’t missed him even a little bit and were only hanging out with him because they felt bad about it.

Anxiety was a fun time.

Stiles sighed to himself, turning off the TV and getting to his feet, heading to lock up the house. Just because things hadn’t gone how he hoped they would, didn’t mean he needed to burn all his bridges and run. It would be fine.

He left his window cracked open when he went to bed, some small part of him hoping that with Isaac out of the loft, Derek would slip in for a visit and they could talk about what had happened.

He fell asleep alone.

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Stiles was surprised when, at around nine the next morning, his doorbell rang. Wondering if it was one of the neighbours coming to check Stiles wasn’t up to no good without his dad around, he grumbled to himself as he shuffled to the door, eyebrows rising at the sight of the person on the
doorstep. “Lydia,” he said dumbly, staring at the girl. Perfectly made up in a floral blouse and white denim shorts, backpack over her shoulder and two iced coffees in hand. Stiles looked down at the ratty shorts and old t-shirt he’d slept in, feeling incredibly underdressed in his own house.

She shoved one of the coffees at him, stepping through the door like she owned the place. “Derek mentioned you’ve been compiling some of the data from the Argent books,” she told him. “I’ve been working on translating the French ones in my spare time, I thought we could compare notes.”

“Derek said that?” he asked, sleepy brain still struggling to catch up. He’d been tossing and turning all night, waking multiple times in the hopes of seeing a familiar figure climbing through his window. Had Derek said anything else about him while he was gone?

“I asked if he knew where the book on North American Forest Beasts was, I needed it for research. He told me you had it, so naturally, I asked why.”

Stiles sipped at the coffee, willing the caffeine to start taking effect. “Yeah, I’ve done a little research,” he said, not sure how much he wanted to tell her. He didn’t want to share his database idea until he was sure it wasn’t going to be dumb. “Typing things up, getting keywords in so we don’t have to read through half our library just to find one thing we vaguely remember reading one time. Any translation work you’ve done would be super helpful.” He followed Lydia into the living room, and she started pulling books out of her backpack, setting them on the coffee table. “I’m gonna go get my laptop. And put on real pants,” he added, making her smirk, tossing her strawberry blonde hair over her shoulder.

“That would be good,” she agreed.

When Stiles came back down, wearing more presentable shorts and a t-shirt with less holes in, Lydia had made herself comfortable on the floor in front of the coffee table, her work spread out around her. Stiles set up his laptop, double-checking that everything to do with the Hale journals was in a separate, hidden file that Lydia would have no reason to stumble upon, before bringing up some of his project documents. “I haven’t really started organising any of it yet,” he explained, wincing at the mess of paragraphs and notes, compared to Lydia’s colour-coded files. “I just wanted to get as much of it written down as possible while I had the time.”

“Let’s see what you’ve got.”

They traded laptops, reading through the other’s work and occasionally throwing out a question, or remarking on something that was similar — or contradictory — in their own findings. It was surprisingly fun, and after they’d been at it for an hour or so, Stiles ran a hand through his hair. “Why are you here, Lydia?” he asked, utterly baffled. “Not that I’m not enjoying this. But before I left, we weren’t really… friends.” She’d used him, letting him take her to prom to get back at Jackson. Sure, he’d known he was being used and been absolutely fine with it, but it definitely hadn’t been an overture of friendship. She’d been pretty determined to handle all the research stuff by herself, in fact.

Lydia frowned, tucking her hair behind her ear and sitting back, looking Stiles in the eye. “With you and Allison gone, I’m the only human in the pack,” she said plainly. “It’s… exhausting. But I refuse to sit back and stay on the sidelines and just be Jackson’s girlfriend in all this, especially when he’s not even in the damn country.” Her voice cracked for a minute, and Stiles wondered if anyone had even asked her how she was doing without Jackson, after everything they’d been through. “We’re outnumbered by wolves. But that doesn’t mean we’re powerless.” Her lips curled in the smirk that had made her the queen of the school, the smirk that Stiles had been utterly in love with for the longest time. Now it just made him pity whoever she’d decided was in her way. “Us humans have to stick together, Stiles. There’s so much we don’t know yet, I was foolish to think I could learn it all
alone.” The smirk softened. “Besides, we’re the only ones with enough brains to put all this shit
together. They’d be dead in a month without us.”

Stiles snorted. “You’re not wrong,” he agreed wryly. “Okay. Team Human, for the win. And, while
you’re here,” he added, because it was long overdue and he wasn’t sure when he’d next get the
chance to say it, “I’m sorry for… everything.” He’d treated her like an idol for so long, acted like she
wasn’t even a person, and it was only in the past few months of seeing her outside of the perfect
Lydia Martin that he realised how much of a disservice he’d done her for that.

She smiled. “I think we’ve both grown up a little since then,” she said. “You’re forgiven. I didn’t
exactly… discourage you.” She looked over at him thoughtfully. “There’s something different about
you, Stiles. I can’t quite put my finger on it. Are you sure nothing’s been happening in Redford?”

Stiles almost laughed — where would he even start?

“Nah, Lyds,” he said with a shake of his head. “Nothing groundbreaking. Just… figuring myself out
a little. Not much else to do out there by myself all day.”

“If you say so,” she replied doubtfully. “Whatever it is, it’s clearly working for you.” She smirked at
him. “With a decent haircut and a new wardrobe, you might actually get hot this year, Stilinski.”

Stiles thought about how he might have reacted to that a year ago, grinning to himself. “Stranger
things have happened.”

The pair shared a look, then laughed. Oh, how true that was.

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After a morning hanging out with Lydia Martin, Stiles was prepared for the weirdness to continue in
his afternoon with Scott. He figured Isaac would be there, wondering if they too would have some
kind of profound bonding moment, in this weird backwards-world Beacon Hills had somehow
become in his absence. The whole pack were treating him like he hadn’t been gone — like he’d just
chosen to miss out on all their group activities, rather than not actually being invited. They seemed to
think everything was fine. Was he just overreacting? Was everything actually fine?

However, it was the complete opposite at the McCall house. Isaac was nowhere to be found when
Stiles and Scott got back from the vet’s office — Stiles surprised not to see Deaton around, sure the
man would want to ask him something cryptic about the book, to see if he’d figured it out yet — and
Melissa greeted them with homemade tacos, hugging Stiles tightly and kissing his cheek, gently
chiding him for not coming to visit sooner. The two boys went up to Scott’s room, and it was as if
they’d travelled back in time to Freshman year. No mention of pack, or Allison, or anything
supernatural — just two bros hanging out, playing unnecessarily violent video games. Honestly, it
was exactly what he needed.

It lasted until dinner, when Scott’s phone buzzed, and his face turned a mixture of excited and guilty.
“Hey, dude, that’s Allison. We were supposed to Skype tonight — this was before I knew you’d be
home, and with the time difference and all this is kinda the only time we can do this. We’re in a
really good place right now, with this whole friendship thing, I don’t wanna ruin it. Do you mind if
I…?”

“Yeah, no, it’s fine,” Stiles replied with a fake smile, that gnawing feeling returning in his gut. He
should have known it was too good to last. “Look, I’m heading out pretty early in the morning —
gotta get those files back to Dad — so I’ll just say goodbye now? I’ll see you later, yeah?”
“Oh,” Scott looked disappointed for a second, but bounced back, nodding. “Yeah, sure, dude. I’ll text you. Drive safe, buddy.” Scott hugged him so hard he lifted Stiles off the ground for a second, then disappeared upstairs, eager to see his not-girlfriend.

Behind him, Melissa sighed. “That boy,” she muttered exasperatedly, shaking her head. “You have kids, they tell you that everything’s fine until they start dating and then they become idiots. I had no idea how true that would be. Remember that, Stiles, for your future.”

Stiles turned to her, snickering. “I think my dad would argue that dating is the least of his problems with me,” he pointed out wryly. For a brief, reckless moment he thought about telling Melissa about Derek, wanting someone who knew him — knew the truth about Derek — to know how happy he was. But he kept it quiet; he couldn’t ask her to keep that kind of secret from her son.

“One day,” Melissa mock-warned. Stiles stood to help her with the dishes, and she bumped his hip with hers. “You’re doing okay, though? Your dad said you’ve been getting out a lot. Working at the library?”

As they cleaned up, Stiles told her a little about what he’d been up to in Redford. She was the first person he told about his online bestiary idea, confident in the knowledge that Scott was way too busy paying attention to Allison to eavesdrop. “I haven’t told the pack yet. I wanna get it up and running first. But I just think about what things were like when Scott first turned, how badly it could have gone — we didn’t know anything.” They were lucky not to have died. “If there could be some kind of online resource, something that I can make it so the people who really need it can find it, start sharing knowledge with other packs… it could really help people.”

If the Hale journals were just the few books that had been deemed invaluable enough to put in the safe, he couldn’t imagine how much knowledge the Hale pack had that had been lost in the fire. If there were other packs, with the same amount of knowledge, who might be willing to put that knowledge out there for others to benefit from… it could be the difference between life and death for some people.

“I think it sounds like a wonderful idea,” Melissa told him, pride glinting in her eyes. “Lord knows I would’ve loved at least a pamphlet — What to Expect When Your Son’s A Werewolf.” She snorted, and Stiles grinned. Maybe Derek wouldn’t mind if he slipped her some of the passages from the journals, the ones with tips for dealing with teenage wolves, from a parent’s perspective.

Thinking of Derek reminded him of who he hadn’t spoken to all day, and his good mood burst. “Thanks for the food, Melissa. I should head home.”

“Give your dad and Hannah my love,” she replied, hugging him tightly one last time. “Look after yourself.”

On the drive home, he thought about texting Derek. He’d made one attempt at conversation with the older man, before Lydia had showed up, that had gone a little something like this:

‘Hey Sourwolf, you busy today?’

‘Yes.’

That was it. Which, whatever. If Derek was going to sulk, Stiles couldn’t be bothered to deal with his shit. He was the one who had barely acknowledged him in front of the pack. Stiles was just following his lead.

When he walked through the door, Stiles almost called out to his dad out of habit, letting the words
die in his throat. He wasn’t used to being alone in the house — sure, there had been times when his dad was working so much it felt like Stiles was the only one living there, but he’d never truly been by himself for more than a night. His dad wasn’t the type of parent to take weekend vacations without his son — he was too much of a workaholic for that.

It was lonely. Stiles made himself a cup of hot chocolate, heading up to his room to watch Netflix on his laptop. The living room was too quiet, even with the TV on.

Stiles wasn’t sure what he’d expected when he’d decided to come home for the weekend, but all it did was cement his decision to stay away until school started. This whole thing was a mistake. It just proved that the pack had figured out how to exist without him, and he was better off keeping his distance until the next big supernatural disaster — until he could be useful. Team Human or not, Lydia could handle herself; and she had dozens of people to hang out with when the pack were doing wolfy things. She had Danny, and all the rest of her popular, pretty school friends. Stiles had no one. He was starting to wonder if he even had Derek.

He thought about packing up and getting in his car, driving all the way back to Redford tonight. It was barely past nine; he could be back before midnight, with the roads empty. But his dad would definitely know something was up, then.

No, he would leave in the morning. He’d picked up the files his dad needed on his way to pick Scott up from work. He’d have breakfast, then head out — maybe drive down to the coast for a while, kill some time so his dad wouldn’t question why he was back so early. Sit and stare at the ocean and think about life, like they did in all the good teen movies when having an existential crisis. Then he could just stay in Redford and not have to worry about the pack until school-time.

He locked the window before he went to bed.

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Stiles walked through the door of his aunt’s house at seven fifteen on Sunday evening, the scent of salt and sand clinging to his skin. He kicked off his shoes, forcing a smile when two voices called his name from the living room. “Your files, as requested,” he declared, dropping the stack of files into his dad’s lap with a flourish. “Also, Melissa says hi.”

“Thanks, kiddo. Sit down, tell me about your weekend. Did you want food? There’s some leftover pasta in the fridge.”

“No, I ate on the way home,” he said. “Actually, Dad, I think I’m just gonna go take a shower and read for a while before calling it a night. I’m pretty tired.”

The sheriff shared a look with his sister, frowning. “Everything alright, Stiles? Did something happen back home?” Hannah asked in concern.

“What did Hale do now?” the sheriff growled. Stiles snorted. His dad could claim to like Derek until he was blue in the face, but he’d still jump on the chance to get at him for doing something to Stiles.

“Nothing happened. Derek didn’t do anything,” Stiles said truthfully. Unfortunately, that was kind of the problem. “It was just a really long weekend. I need to sleep.”

Neither of the adults seemed to buy it, but Stiles didn’t care, heading out of the living room and up to his bedroom, resisting the urge to slam his door.

Staring at the ocean hadn’t helped. Singing angry songs at the top of his lungs while he drove down an empty road hadn’t helped. Adderall hadn’t helped. A shower and sleep was his last option.
Remember when I said I was using this fic as therapy? Yeeaaahhh. Sorry folks.

Also, I hit 100 comments on this fic yesterday, so THANK YOU <3 I'm so glad you're all enjoying it!
Chapter 12

Stiles was channeling his angst into magic. The Druid book said that strong emotions were a good focus for power, and even though Stiles couldn’t make sense of his own mess of emotions, he sure as hell had a lot of them. So he was sat in his room at 10PM, staring at a carefully managed fuel-less fire in a bowl on his desk, when his window rattled. Stiles looked away, the fire instantly dying. His shoulders tightened when Derek stepped into the room.

“What are you doing?” the alpha asked, eyeing him in confusion.

“Nothing,” Stiles replied evasively. “What are you doing here?” After the total brush-off at the weekend, Stiles hadn’t expected to see Derek any time soon.

The werewolf hunched his shoulders, shoving his hands in his pockets. “You left earlier than I expected yesterday.”

“Yeah, well, there wasn’t much of a reason for me to stick around,” Stiles retorted sharply. Derek winced.

“I’m sorry, about the text. It just seemed like you wanted to spend time with the pack, and considering you didn’t say anything to them, I figured I should just… stay away.”

“I didn’t say anything?” Stiles asked, standing abruptly. “You were the one who barely acknowledged me when I showed up! I was just taking my cues from you.” He snorted bitterly. “I wasn’t sure you wanted your pack to know that their alpha was involved with a puny little human. And it looks like I was right.”

“Stiles—”

“No, Derek. This is bullshit. I get that you’re not the most demonstrative person. We’ll never be Scott and Allison — Jesus, I never want to be like those two. But if you’re only okay with our relationship when it’s not in front of anyone we know, you can fuck off,” Stiles declared, folding his arms over his chest defensively. He wasn’t going to become some dirty little secret, taking whatever scraps of affection Derek was willing to give him, acting like they barely knew each other to the rest of the pack. He was better than that.

Derek took a step back, his eyes wide and hurt like Stiles had physically hit him. “What the hell?” he exclaimed, keeping his voice down — the sheriff and Hannah were just downstairs. “When have I ever given you the idea that I don’t want people to know? I met your dad as your boyfriend. Your dad, the sheriff, who has arrested me on suspicion of murder,” he pointed out.

“Only because he found out by himself. You couldn’t hide.”

Derek strode forward, grabbing Stiles roughly by the shoulders. Stiles didn’t flinch — of course they were back to Derek shoving him against walls. He should have expected as much. However, Derek just held him there, looking him dead in the eye with a desperate gaze. “How are you still not getting this? I’m sorry I didn’t say anything at the weekend, but I didn’t know what you were comfortable with, and then you didn’t say anything so I figured you were the one who didn’t want anyone to know. It was hard enough stopping myself from being close to you when you were right there, so I kept my distance. I didn’t want to push you into anything you weren’t ready for. I don’t care if the pack knows. I don’t care if the whole damn town knows!” He stepped even closer, his eyes glowing red as his voice took on a growling undertone. “Stiles, I designed a house to build with the intention
of asking you to live there with me. I am about as committed as it’s possible to get in this relationship, and I know it’s not been long, and you’re young, so I’m sorry if that freaks you out, but I don’t do these things lightly. It’s all or nothing. That’s just how I feel.”

Stiles stared incredulously at Derek, his heart in his throat. Derek had been staying away… for his sake?

He mentally replayed the events of Friday afternoon, realising he’d been just as stand-offish as his boyfriend, hurt at Derek’s apparent rejection. What was he expecting, for Derek to walk up and kiss him in the middle of the pack? That would have been a shit show! Guilt pooled in his stomach. God, he was an idiot. He’d taken his hurt at the pack’s actions and turned it all on Derek until he’d convinced himself that Derek had been stringing him along this whole time.

Derek’s grip on his shoulders loosened, and he made to step back, but Stiles grabbed him by the wrists and held him in place. “I have been absolutely gone on you since that damn swimming pool, Derek Hale,” he declared, heart racing as he decided to just throw it all out there. “The only thing that freaks me out is how much you planning for the future doesn’t freak me out. I want to live with you in the house you built. I want to cook Thanksgiving for the pack in that beautiful kitchen you’ll make. I want you, all in.” He managed a shaky smile. “Stilinskis fall hard and fast. My whole life, I’ve had a habit of getting way too intense about things, about people, and putting people off. There’s a reason it’s just been me and Scott for so long. I really, really didn’t want to scare you off, so I’ve been trying not to do that. I’ve been trying to be normal.”

Derek’s lips curved in a tentative grin. “You’ve never been normal for a second,” he pointed out. Stiles snorted, thumping Derek lightly on the chest.

“Asshole,” he muttered, letting Derek pull him into a tight hug, the werewolf’s nose pressing against his neck.

“You can be as intense as you want,” Derek murmured. “I promise it’s not going to put me off. I knew what I was getting into when I kissed you.”

Stiles wound his arms around Derek’s hips, breathing into the werewolf’s hair. “I’m sorry,” he murmured. “I fucked up.”

“We both fucked up,” Derek murmured, holding Stiles closer, like he was trying to crawl into his chest. Stiles’ gently shifted them both until the backs of his calves were against the bed, pulling Derek to lie down with him. The werewolf was still wearing shoes, but Stiles could forgive him this once.

“Was this our first couple fight?” he asked wryly, and Derek snorted.

“Over a lack of communication, what a surprise,” was his dry response. Stiles rolled his eyes, pulling back enough to look Derek in the eye.

“Are we good?” His voice was small, hesitant. Derek kissed him fiercely, blunt fingers digging into his shoulders.

“We’re good.” His next kiss was softer, then he sat up, reaching down to unzip his boots. “So, you wanna tell me what went on with you this weekend? Your scent was all wrong, and I can’t have been the only reason you shot out of there so suddenly yesterday morning.”

With a long exhale, Stiles told Derek about the weird, anxious thoughts in his head when he was around the pack. How he couldn’t stand being around them, not knowing whether they actually
wanted him there or not. It was better to just stay away — then it was his choice to not be involved, not theirs. Derek stayed silent as he spoke, hand running soothingly down Stiles’ ribs.

“So I just… left,” Stiles finished. “I drove all the way to the beach, actually. Didn’t want Dad asking why I was home so early. I think he knew something was up, though.” He’d been dodging concerned looks and questions from both his dad and his aunt all day.

“I thought I smelled the ocean in here,” Derek muttered. “Did it help?”

“Not in the slightest,” Stiles replied. “But it was pretty. I just… What do I do, Derek? I want to be friends with them, I just… I don’t want them to only be friends with me because we’re pack.”

“I’m pretty sure that’s not the case,” Derek started cautiously. “Don’t judge the rest of them by Scott’s actions, okay? Just because he’s being a moron and has his head too far up Allison Argent’s ass to realise he’s losing his best friend, doesn’t mean the others are the same. They probably just don’t know how to act around you. I didn’t exactly choose my betas for their skill in social situations.”

Stiles snorted. “You can say that again.” He tucked his head under Derek’s chin, feeling the alpha’s heartbeat against his cheek, strong and steady. “You really think that’s it?”

“The betas want you around. Trust me. They’re not the problem here,” Derek assured him. “Scott, on the other hand… he doesn’t know what he wants. He isn’t even sure he wants to be in the pack, so he doesn’t want you getting involved in the pack until he’s made his decision about us. He thinks he can walk away and you’ll come with him and it’ll just be the two of you and Allison in your own little pack. Also he’s blinded by his dick and can’t see that it’s costing him your friendship.”

“You know that would never happen, right?” Stiles said, resting a hand over Derek’s heart. “Me walking away with Scott? Even if he choses not to be part of the pack, I’m yours. You’re my Alpha.”

Derek’s chest rumbled in satisfaction, his grip on Stiles tightening. “I know. But the betas don’t. They don’t want to get too close, in case you leave.”

Derek’s words made sense. If Stiles had been home all summer, this probably would have been all hashed out long ago. Stiles wouldn’t have let Scott keep walking the line between Hale pack and not, and the betas would have realised he was fully committed to pack life. But he couldn’t do that until he was home for good; the odd weekend visit wouldn’t even begin to fix those wounds. He didn’t want to be around to influence Scott’s decision, either — his friend needed to make that choice alone. If he didn’t hurry up, it would be made for him. Derek wouldn’t take his half-assed commitment forever.

“Come back next weekend. We can tell the pack, come clean, let the pieces fall where they may,” Derek suggested, his fingers dragging at the hem of Stiles’ t-shirt. “If you want.”

Stiles sighed thoughtfully. He knew, deep down, what he wanted. What he’d wanted all along.

“When I first got here, at the beginning of summer, and I thought about being away for the whole three months, I thought… y’know in those cheesy chick-flick movies, where the dorky girl comes back after summer break and she’s suddenly become crazy hot and everyone’s in awe of her and she gets the perfect guy?” He was blushing just talking about it, refusing to look at Derek’s face. Derek hummed curiously, wondering where he was going with that. “I wanted that. I wanted to go away for the summer and start working out and not see anyone the whole time and then come home super hot and make them all realise what they were missing. It’s dumb, and cliché, I know,” he added.
“But… I don’t wanna go back to Beacon Hills until school starts. Can we just leave it? Until I’m home? Not because I’m ashamed. I just want to see their faces when I come back and I’ve been doing great without them and I’ve already got the perfect guy.”

It was the first time he’d admitted that particular desire to anyone other than himself, and it sounded so stupid saying out loud. He was waiting for Derek to laugh, when the werewolf gently cupped his chin, nudging Stiles away so he could look him in the eye. “In that case,” he said, no judgement in his tone. “Keep growing your hair out a little more.”

“Yeah?” Stiles asked. Derek’s eyes darkened, and he ran a hand through Stiles’ longer locks.

“Yeah,” he confirmed, tugging a little. “The hair, the muscles, the attitude… A lot of people are gonna regret writing you off when you go back to school.”

“Sucks for them,” Stiles replied, smugness in his tone as he placed a hand on Derek’s abs. “I’m already yours.”

The alpha’s eyes flashed red. “Mine,” he agreed breathlessly, rolling them over until he was on top of Stiles, knees either side of his thighs. “We won’t tell the pack yet. Let you have your hot girl moment.” He smirked, flashing sharp teeth, and Stiles scowled playfully.

“Shut up,” he muttered. “I just want to have you to myself a little longer. Although,” he added, eyes roaming pointedly down Derek’s form. “It was pretty rude of you to be so hot and shirtless in front of the whole pack when I couldn’t do anything about it.”

Derek’s eyebrows rose knowingly. “Maybe I wanted you to do something about it.” With one quick glance to double-check Stiles was okay with things, he sat back against Stiles’ thighs, grabbing the neck of his t-shirt and tugging it swiftly over his head. Stiles’ mouth went dry. All that muscle and smooth skin was a hundred times more tempting now that he knew he could touch as much as he wanted. His hands went instinctively to Derek’s hips, one of them drawing up over his abs and pecs, loving the way Derek arched slightly into his touch. “How about you?” Derek asked, his own fingers going to Stiles’ shirt hem. Stiles swallowed, then gave a hesitant nod, sitting up a little so Derek could ease his shirt off. He resisted the urge to hunch over and hide his chest from view. He might have a little more muscle than before, but he was still scrawny, especially compared to Derek.

The alpha didn’t seem to have a problem with it. His pupils were blown wide, his jeans tented, and as soon as the shirt was on the ground he pressed one large hand to Stiles’ sternum, sliding it down to his stomach. Stiles sucked in a breath, the sensitive flesh burning at the touch, his erection pulsing painfully. “Derek,” he whimpered, tugging the man down into a sloppy kiss, moaning when their lower halves pushed together. “Der, please.”

“Tell me what you want,” Derek growled, his fingers trailing teasingly around the edge of Stiles’ waistband.

“More,” Stiles begged. “I want you naked. I want you to touch me.” His brain was shorting out, everything just screaming at him to get more skin as soon as possible. Derek growled quietly, rocking back, and Stiles whined until he realised what was happening. Derek stood beside the bed, unzipping his jeans and yanking them down, pulling his socks off on the way. Stiles couldn’t look away. Derek was beautiful in the lamplight, tanned skin gleaming, boxer-briefs tight around his powerful thighs. There was a dark spot at the front of his impressive bulge, and Stiles reached out towards him, eager to touch.

Derek smirked wolfishly, resuming his position on top of Stiles and hooking his fingers in the waistband of his pyjama pants, dragging them slowly down over his hips. Stiles shoved a fist in his
mouth to muffle his loud groan as Derek shoved the pants at the bottom of the bed, his gaze predatory as he ran his hands back up Stiles’ leg from ankle to thigh, fingers playing with the hem of his boxers, smoothing over the sensitive join of his hip and thigh. He bucked up off the bed, begging for more touch. “Get down here,” he muttered, reaching up to grab Derek’s shoulder and pull him down, both of them breathing sharply as they touched from shoulder to knee, skin against skin except for the flimsy material of their boxers. Stiles had died and gone to heaven.

He slid his hands around to Derek’s ass, gripping tightly, pushing his hips up to grind against him. Derek’s chest was rumbling again, his mouth on Stiles’ neck, biting and sucking against the sensitive skin. Stiles nudged him down to his collarbone, just lucid enough to realise his dad would definitely be suspicious about a love-bite that hadn’t been there when he’d got in the night before.

Feeling brave, he moved his hands underneath Derek’s boxers, feeling bare skin and firm muscle. Derek groaned into his throat. “Off, please,” he muttered, and Stiles felt a stab of panic as he thought he’d overstepped, before Derek reached down and squirmed out of his boxers. His cock bobbed up against his belly, standing thick and proud and making Stiles’ brain explode. He’d only ever seen dicks in porn before, other than his own. This was so much better.

“Can I…?” Derek nodded, and Stiles wasted no time getting his hand on the hot flesh, watching Derek’s eyes close and his jaw slacken in pleasure. Stiles stroked him cautiously for a few moments, then an idea struck him. “Hang on.”

He rolled away from Derek to reach into his bedside drawer, digging out the lube he had stashed there — he was a teenage boy with needs, okay — then he wiggled his hips, pushing his own boxers down to his knees and gracelessly kicking them off somewhere to join his pants. Derek stared at him with eyes so dark they were almost black, gaze roaming over his entire exposed body. “Beautiful,” he declared hoarsely. “God, Stiles, please tell me I can touch you.”

“Gonna be pretty mad if you don’t,” Stiles replied, tossing the lube at Derek. The werewolf fumbled the catch, flicking the cap open and squeezing some into his palm.

Stiles saw stars as Derek pressed heavy against him, his hand between their bodies to wrap strong fingers around both of them at once. He wanted to reciprocate, to do something, but all he could do was lie there and succumb to the overwhelming flood of pleasure and heat and want, Derek’s cock pressed against his own, slick and velvet-smooth. Stiles’ fingers curled against Derek’s shoulders, scrambling for purchase, possibly leaving scratches that would heal within minutes. Tiny gasps burst from his lips until Derek covered them with his own, sucking Stiles’ bottom lip between his teeth. Stiles groaned quietly, overwhelmed by all the sensation. “Der, gonna,” he breathed, barely able to form words, let alone sentences. Derek kissed him again, leaning in closer, working his hand even faster and rocking his hips against Stiles’.

“Do it,” he urged, his voice deep and throaty. “Let go, Stiles. I got you.” He scraped his teeth over Stiles’ jaw, stubble brushing the hollow of the teen’s throat, and that was enough to send Stiles over the edge. His vision went pure white for a minute as a wave of pleasure took over him, his back arching as he came into Derek’s hand. The werewolf growled, fingers working furiously around his own length until he spilled all over Stiles’ chest and stomach, the faintest grunt escaping him. He slumped against Stiles, propping himself up with his clean hand so as not to crush the teen completely.

“Holy shit,” Stiles breathed once he’d regained a little composure. “That was so hot I think I died for a minute there.”

Derek snorted into Stiles’ neck. “How are you still talking,” he mumbled. Stiles grinned to himself, the endorphins in his system making his limbs loose and floppy, his chest bubbly and warm.
They didn’t move for another couple of minutes, until things started to cool down and Derek grimaced, sitting up. “Towel?” he asked, gesturing with a hand covered in lube and come, his lips kiss-swollen and spit-slick. Stiles’ dick gave a weak attempt at round two at the sight, and it took him a second to answer.

“Back of the door.”

Derek stood, careful not to get anything on the sheets as he crossed the room and grabbed the towel off the hook, wiping himself off. Stiles leaned back and watched, feeling smug and utterly awed at the sight of Derek Hale naked in his bedroom. “Enjoying the view?” Derek asked dryly, snapping Stiles out of his daze.

“Very much so,” he assured. Derek returned to the bed, gently wiping Stiles’ body down. Stiles looked down at the mess, grimacing. “It’s a good thing you’re the only werewolf around here. There’d be no hiding that.” Derek nodded, looking incredibly pleased about it. “God, that gets you hot, doesn’t it. Marking me up like that, making me smell like you?” Stiles was quickly discovering that it got him hot, too; the thought of anyone with a supernatural sense of smell knowing what he and Derek had done.

“It’s a wolf thing,” Derek muttered, looking embarrassed. Stiles reached for his wrist.

“It’s a sexy wolf thing,” he assured. “Hell, I’m already turned on by the growling and the alpha-eyes, might as well just accept that your wolf instincts really do it for me.”

“Really?” Derek looked skeptical. Stiles gave him what he hoped was a sultry look.

“Babe, if I wasn’t totally wrecked, I’d show you exactly how I feel about it. But I think we need to take it easy right now.” He didn’t want to push too far too soon, for either of their sakes.

When Derek was satisfied with his cleanup, he tossed the towel on the ground and sat back against his heels. “Do you want me to put pants back on, or…?”

“Hell no. Get down here, Sourwolf.” Stiles reached for him. “You are gonna spoon the shit out of me, mmkay?”

Derek huffed amusedly, obediently lying down and wrapping his arms around Stiles from behind, pressing his chest to Stiles’ back. “We still good?”

“I told Isaac and Peter I’d be out until late morning doing perimeter patrols. I’d say that gives me until six or so?” He nuzzled Stiles’ shoulder. “Go to sleep. I’ve set an alarm on my phone.”

Stiles gripped Derek’s hand tighter. “You can actually sleep here?” He’d fantasised about being able to fall asleep in Derek’s arms, but thought for sure it wouldn’t happen until he was back in Beacon Hills. Derek hummed in affirmation. “Awesome.” He contemplated grabbing the duvet to cover up his nakedness, but Derek was a werewolf radiator and it wasn’t like the alpha minded Stiles’ nudity.

He snuggled closer to his boyfriend, feeling Derek’s soft cock pressing against the swell of his ass, a quiet thrill going through him. He could almost understand how Scott went totally blind to everything other than Allison, if that was how good it felt to be with someone. “Will the pack smell me on you, when you get home?” The thought came to him suddenly, wondering if he’d just ruined his plan to keep things quiet.
“I’ll take a shower at the gym,” Derek assured. “They won’t notice. They don’t notice much these days.”

Stiles snorted; that was certainly true. At the reminder of the pack, his brain hazily brought up the other point that had been bothering him. “How come you’re still broody McGrump-wolf around the pack? I thought you were doing better.”

He felt Derek’s lips curl into a frown against the back of his neck. “You want to talk about that now?” he grumbled, making Stiles snort.

“Brain tangents. Promise me you’ll try letting your guard down with them? At least a little?” They’d never be a proper pack if the betas didn’t learn to love their alpha like family. That would never happen if Derek didn’t let them.

The alpha sighed. “I’ll try,” he agreed, then kissed Stiles’ shoulder. “Go to sleep, Stiles.”

“Sleep tight, Sourwolf.” Stiles was smiling as he closed his eyes, the weight on his shoulders all but disappeared. His weekend might have been a bust, but the week ahead was looking pretty damn promising.
Chapter 13

Stiles stood in his bedroom, staring at the calendar he’d tacked to the wall at the start of the summer. Only four more weeks until he was back at school. One month.

When he’d put the calendar up, it was to beg the time to move faster, counting every single day impatiently as if he had years to wait. Now, Stiles wished time would slow the fuck down.

He turned away, catching a glimpse of himself in the mirror on his wardrobe door. He definitely needed to get a haircut in those last four weeks.

Glancing back to check that his bedroom door was shut, Stiles stripped off his t-shirt and kicked off his shorts, standing in his underwear in front of the mirror. A week ago, he’d been naked in front of another human being that wasn’t related to him or a medical professional. Had touched another naked person, been touched by him, done something that a lot of people would consider sex. It had happened once more since then; a frantic hand-job against the hood of the Camaro at the start of the woodland trail they’d gone running down the first time Derek had kissed him.

He studied his body, noting the muscle that hadn’t been there at the start of the summer, the beginnings of a six-pack and the biceps that he’d noticed were starting to struggle with the sleeves of some of his older t-shirts. He was still dotted in moles, pale and gangly, but… he looked different. Stiles honestly didn’t know if it was the muscle or just his confidence. The assurance that Derek Hale found him attractive.

Not that he needed external validation to be happy with himself, but… it definitely helped.

Truly, he liked his body more. Attractiveness or not, he felt stronger. Faster, better, more able to stand his ground. If he’d been this version of himself at the end of the school year, maybe he would have given Gerard Argent more of a fight. He liked feeling like he could hold his own against anything that might threaten his pack. Along with his budding Druid magic — growing stronger day by day, in a way that was dizzying — he finally felt like he could hold his own.

He opened the wardrobe, staring contemplatively at all the oversized plaid shirts and baggy t-shirts he’d owned since he was thirteen, the jeans that were mostly the wrong size in some way. Lydia’s words flashed through his mind. “In the movies,” he thought aloud, rifling through the clothes, “the hot girl transformation always comes with a new wardrobe.” He had a nice little nest egg saved up from his library job, since he wasn’t using the money on gas to drive back and forth from Beacon Hills like he’d thought he would. And he genuinely couldn’t remember the last time he’d actually bought new clothes, other than the odd shirt or hoodie here and there. Probably before high school started, when he was determined to reinvent himself.

“Well, it wasn’t a bad idea the first time,” he mused. Probably the only flaw in his plan back then was taking Scott as his second opinion. That boy wouldn’t know fashionable if it bit him on the ass.

Luckily, Stiles had other options now.

Decision made, he grabbed a random t-shirt and a pair of his nicer jeans, heading downstairs to find his aunt. The sheriff was back at Beacon Hills, so it was just the two of them for the day. “Hey, Aunt Hannah?” he started, peering around the doorway to the living room. She glanced up from the book she was reading.

“What’s up, sweetie?”
“Do you wanna go to the mall with me?”

Her eyes widened, and her face lit up. “Leave the house? Hell yes. What are we going for?”

“I was thinking about getting some new clothes. Stuff that fits me a little better, y’know. And, well, I could do with a little assistance.” Hannah was always fashionable, even with half her wardrobe inaccessible due to the casts on her legs. She would be honest about what looked good on him, without trying to push him too far out of his comfort zone like Lydia might. Stiles didn’t think he would survive clothes shopping with Lydia Martin.

“Stiles, I mean this with all the love in the world, but please God yes let’s immediately replace your entire wardrobe.” Stiles laughed at her vehemence, his hand over his heart.

“Ouch! That cuts deep, Hannah. Real deep.”

“Sorry, sweetie, but it’s true. Help me change out of these sweatpants and into something cute, and then we can go.”

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Soon enough, Stiles was helping Hannah out of the Jeep and into her chair in the mall parking lot, walking towards the large building. He hadn’t been there before, but Hannah assured him she was a pro. “Shopping for guys is so much easier,” she told him as she led the way inside. “There’s like, half the number of stores, and they’re all smaller. So where do you wanna go first?”

Stiles looked at the rows and rows of stores, his eyes wide. “I have absolutely no idea.”

Hannah laughed, tucking her hair behind her ear and turning to the closest menswear store. “Okay, we’ll start here and work our way around. Then hit the upper floor.”

Suddenly, Stiles was glad he’d been working out so much over the summer. He got a feeling he was going to need every ounce of extra stamina.

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Several hours into the trip, Stiles was surprised to find he was actually enjoying himself. Shopping with Hannah was great — she was full of suggestions about what might suit him, patient as hell while he tried on a million and one things and asked for her opinion on each one, and whenever she sensed him getting frustrated she declared they were taking a break from him and focusing on her for a while.

“This is the first time I’ve been to the mall since the accident, I’m not wasting this opportunity,” she insisted, holding up two skirts for his consideration.

There was a bundle of shopping bags hanging off the handles of Hannah’s chair, something Stiles had refused to do until Hannah rolled her eyes and started hooking the bags on there herself. “You can’t carry them and choose more clothes at the same time,” she said diplomatically. “God, I wish wheelchairs were like strollers; there is so much room to put shit in the bottom of those suckers.”

Stiles laughed, making sure all the bags were secure, then carried on to the next menswear store. “Oh, no, not that one,” Hannah said, crossing straight past the door. “You don’t wanna bother with them.” It wasn’t the first time she’d said something like that; either claiming they were out of his price range, or just not worth his time.

“How do you know so much about mens’ clothes?” Stiles asked, shaking his head and following her
lead.

“I have male friends, y’know,” Hannah retorted. “Also, I read fashion blogs. Ooh, in there, go. Last store, I promise,” she nudged him into a store that immediately grabbed Stiles’ attention; their clothes were interesting, not your average t-shirts and plain pants, but not too wild.

He already had two new pairs of jeans, a pair of dress slacks (“You might not think you need them, but you’re wrong!”), two pairs of shorts, a stack of t-shirts and long-sleeves, a few sweaters, three new button-downs, and a pair of leather boots that Stiles was already in love with. He hadn’t expected to get quite so much, but Hannah insisted it was all necessary.

Browsing the racks, Stiles frowned at some of the price tags. “Aunt Hannah, this stuff is a little expensive,” he murmured quietly; with all the stuff he’d already bought, he wasn’t sure if he could afford it.

“Oh, this one’s on me,” she insisted, patting her purse.

“No, I can’t—“

“Yes you can,” she cut him off firmly. “Stiles, I haven’t seen you in eight years. That’s eight years worth of spoiling you that I’ve missed out on. Let me buy you some nice clothes, okay? At the very least, to thank you for giving up your summer to come help me out.”

There was a stare-down, Hannah’s jaw set, and Stiles sighed in defeat. “Fine,” he relented, ducking to kiss her cheek. “Thank you.”

“No problem. Now go choose some stuff. I’m gonna pick some things out for you too, okay?” She didn’t wait for an answer, disappearing between the racks, and Stiles tried not to look at the tags as he eyed clothes, imagining how they might look on himself.

They met at the dressing room with ten items between them, and Stiles looked at some of the things Hannah had picked out. They were not the kind of thing he’d choose for himself. “Just trust me, okay? You don’t have to buy them, but at least try.” Her eyes were earnest, and Stiles took the clothes obediently, heading into the dressing room.

He tried on his own picks first — two button-down shirts that turned out a little too loud for his tastes, a pair of soft grey pants with cool stitching up the sides and pockets that earned a firm thumbs up from Hannah, and a black button-down with a cool constellation pattern he would also be keeping. Those aside, he looked at Hannah’s choices. She’d given him specific instructions about which items went together, so he went for the first outfit; a blue knit long sleeve with an interesting piping detail at the neck and shoulder, black slim fit jeans and a smart black blazer. Stiles hadn’t expected to like it as much as he did, and he told her as much, watching her grin smugly.

“Told you,” she sang. “I’m definitely into the whole look. God, my nephew is so handsome! We should take a picture, text it to that cute boyfriend of yours.” Stiles blushed, and out of the corner of his eye he saw the store assistant hide a smile behind her hand.

“Hannah!” he groaned. “We’re not sending pictures to Derek. He doesn’t even know I’m here.” He’d had a few texts from him during the day, but had been appropriately vague, just telling him he was spending time with his aunt.

“Ooh, are the new threads a surprise for him? Because I can assure you, he’s gonna love it all. You look way less like jailbait when you’re not wearing superhero t-shirts.”

Stiles blushed even brighter, and the assistant lost her battle against giggles. “You’re the worst,” he
“I said mutinously. “We’re not texting Derek.” He stalked back to the dressing room to try on the other outfit. These jeans were dark blue with faux-paint stains, and Hannah had paired them with a pale green t-shirt with a woodland design, and a dark red hoodie that made his shoulders look great. With Derek on the brain, all Stiles could think of was Red Riding Hood jokes.

“I’m not sure about the jeans,” he told her. “But I like the shirt and the hoodie.”

“Agreed. See, Stiles, you’re pretty good at this fashion thing, once you stop hiding behind all those baggy clothes and dumb slogan t-shirts. Now take off the hoodie, and try on this one last thing.”

Stiles realised she was holding something black in her lap, and his breath caught when she held it up for his inspection. It was a leather biker jacket, the zips and stitching details making it unique without standing out too much. Stiles tried it on over the t-shirt, checking it out in the mirror. The leather was butter-soft, and it fit him perfectly.

“What do you think?” he asked, not wanting to voice his opinion until he’d heard Hannah’s.

“I think we’ve got a winner. Do you like it?”

Stiles glanced to the sales assistant, who offered him a smile. “I think this boyfriend of yours is a lucky guy,” she told him with a wink.

“I love it. Aunt Hannah, are you sure?” It was a very good quality leather jacket, and while he hadn’t seen the price on the tag, it probably cost a hefty amount. Hannah took it from him before he could check.

“Positive. Let me treat you. Now go get changed so I can add the t-shirt to the pile and go ring us out.”

When Stiles was back in his own clothes and leaving the store with the extra bag in hand, he turned to his aunt. “So we’re done now, right?” He was pretty sure they’d hit every decent menswear store in the mall by now.

“One more stop,” she declared, making him groan. Her eyes glinted mischievously. “The food court. I don’t know about you, but I could murder some chilli fries right now.”

Stiles’ stomach rumbled, and he nodded enthusiastically. “I’m game.”

They followed the signs to the food court, which was emptying of the main lunch rush. Hannah went to claim a table with decent accessibility while Stiles went to get their food — including Hannah’s chilli fries. He set the trays down on the table, careful not to spill the sodas. “Now that’s what I’m talking about,” Hannah moaned appreciatively, pulling her loaded fries towards her.

“Thanks for coming with me today, Aunt Hannah,” Stiles said quietly. “Pretty sure I would have bailed in the first five minutes if I’d come by myself.” He definitely wouldn’t have been brave enough to try on some of the things he’d bought without his aunt’s encouragement.

“Thank you for trusting me to come with you,” she returned, covering his hand with her own. “I dread to think how this trip would have gone if you’d been alone. Or worse, asked your dad.” They both made faces at that, and Stiles laughed.

“He probably would have insisted I was trying to change myself to make Derek happy,” he remarked. His dad was still getting used to the relationship, and despite offering his support, was happy to grumble about ‘that Hale kid’ corrupting his son.

“That’s not why you’re doing this, is it?” Hannah asked with eyebrows raised. “Because I know I
joked about it, but that is a lot of money to drop on trying to impress a new boyfriend.”

“No, no,” Stiles assured quickly. “I mean, obviously I hope he likes them, but… ugh, it’s dumb.” He blushed, shaking his head.

“Tell me,” Hannah wheedled, pointing at him with a cheese-covered french fry.

Stiles embarrassedly told her what he’d told Derek, about it being his movie transformation summer. To his immense relief, she didn’t laugh. “Real life isn’t like the movies,” she said. “But that shouldn’t stop you trying. You don’t need to impress anyone — not Derek, not your friends, not the kids at school — but getting a little more confidence in yourself is always a good thing, and clothes are a great way to do that. I’m all for you trying new things. You’re growing up, that’s what you’re supposed to do.”

“Exactly!” he exclaimed, relieved that she understood. “I’m not doing this for them, I’m doing it for me. But I want them to notice.” He was finally ready to maybe stop hiding himself behind baggy clothes and dumb jokes and endless rambling nonsense. After everything that had happened in the last year, he was a very different person, and he wanted people to understand that.

“So are you looking forward to going back to school a little more now?” she asked, patting the pile of shopping bags pointedly. Stiles hummed, thoughtful.

“Yes. It’s gonna be interesting. I feel like I’ve changed so much this summer. And none of my friends know about Derek yet. None of them even know I like guys.”

“If I were you, I’d make it clear pretty soon, because if you show up to school looking like this and in those new clothes, you’re going to have half the girls and a fair few guys drooling over you,” Hannah told him matter-of-factly. He rolled his eyes.

“I doubt that.”

“I’m serious! You don’t realise how much you’ve grown up over this summer, do you? All that running and gym time is paying off, you’ve grown at least two inches, and once you get someone to tidy up that hair of yours, it’s going to look great. You are, what I believe the kids call, a hottie, Stiles,” she added teasingly, laughing when he blushed.

“Please never say that again.” Hannah laughed louder.

They sat and talked a little more about school and Stiles’ future plans, until both their plates were clean. “I’ve missed this,” Hannah said eventually. “Being involved in your life. It’s different than when you were little, but I’ve still missed it.”

“You should come visit, once you’re out of the chair,” Stiles suggested. “During spring break or something, or maybe for Christmas?” He shrugged, smiling. “I’ve missed this too. And I could always use extra people on Derek’s side in the face of Dad.” He wasn’t sure what would happen come Christmas, but he would love to be able to have Derek over for the holiday. He wasn’t sure if his dad would have warmed up to him enough by then.

“I would love that,” Hannah told him, patting his arm. “But your dad doesn’t hate Derek that much, I promise. He’s just scared his little boy is growing up and starting to date. He was the same way with me in high school, and college. Your mom was always the one to make him hold his tongue and play nice.” She released his arm, smiling softly. He spoke before he even knew the question was on his tongue.

“Do you think Mom would have liked Derek?”
Hannah’s lips pursed as she considered the question. “I think she would have interrogated the hell out of him about his intentions, way worse than your dad ever will,” she said, making Stiles snort. That was probably true. “But she would have loved him. He cares about you a lot, it’s written all over his face when he looks at you. Claudia would have been over the moon for you to have someone who makes you this happy.”

Stiles’ chest tightened, his eyes itching a little. He blinked fiercely. “You think so?”

“All she wanted was for you to be happy, safe and loved. I know it’s only been a little while, but… Derek seems to have all three covered pretty well.” She was getting a little tearful too, until her smile turned devilish. “Doesn’t help that he’s nice to look at. I sure as hell wouldn’t kick him out of bed.”

“Aunt Hannah!” Stiles complained loudly, blushing to the tips of his ears. “I am not hearing this.”

“Oh come on, Stiles, it was a compliment! I’m not that old that I can’t notice, even if he is my nephew’s boyfriend.” When Stiles thought about it, there were only a couple more years between Derek and Hannah than there were between Stiles and Derek — and that was a line of thought he didn’t want to pursue too hard.

“I think it’s time to go home,” he muttered, stacking their empty dishes on the trays. Hannah huffed, but let him clear up.

“Wait a second, I lied when I said we were done. There’s one more thing I need you to do for me,” she said abruptly. Stiles eyed her with trepidation.

“What?” he asked, wondering if she’d suddenly decided he needed a suit or something.

“Go into that store over there,” she started, pointing at one of the menswear stores he’d already been into, “and go buy at least six new pairs of underwear. Colours are fine, but no patterns, no superheroes — good quality, cute underwear. Can I trust you to do that by yourself, or do you need me to come with you?”

Stiles coloured, his brain flashing back to Derek’s unimpressed face when he’d nudged down Stiles’ running shorts to be faced with Batman underwear. Maybe she had a point. “No, I got it,” he assured her.

He loved his aunt, but having her come with him to buy underwear that they both knew his boyfriend was soon going to be peeling off him was a boundary he would never be ready to cross.

.-.-.-.

A couple days later, the sheriff was back in Redford and Stiles had plans to go meet Derek in the woods to go over some of his self defence training. Not that he’d said that to his dad — as far as he knew, they were going hiking.

“He’s here again? Derek must be going through hundreds of dollars on gas, driving back and forth all the time. I swear this is his second visit this week, and it’s only Friday.” It was actually the third, but one of those visits had been after midnight, so the sheriff definitely didn’t need to know about that.

“I keep offering to pay, but he won’t let me,” Stiles confirmed. “Says he has plenty of money, and he doesn’t mind spending it on me. Dork,” he added, rolling his eyes.

That was true, but he also couldn’t tell his dad that a lot of the time, Derek ran to Redford, and thus no gas money was involved. The sheriff nodded approvingly. “It’s not causing trouble with work?
“His or yours?”

“No, Dad, we’re both fine,” Stiles assured. “He doesn’t visit ’til after I’m done at the library, and his hours at the garage are pretty flexible. He’s never skipped work to come see me. Can I go now?”

“Got the first aid kit in your backpack?”

“Yes, Dad,” Stiles said, rolling his eyes. “First aid kit, water bottle, emergency blanket, flashlight. Do you want me to take a sat phone too?”

“Don’t be a smartass. Have fun, and bring Derek over for dinner when you’re done. Least we can do is feed him before he drives all the way back.”

Stiles’ eyebrows rose — was this a plot for his dad to interrogate Derek some more? “Don’t look at me like that,” the sheriff muttered, nudging his shoulder. “As much as it pains me to admit it, I actually kinda like your boyfriend. He’s a good kid.”

Stiles beamed. Derek would lose his shit when he heard that. “We’ll be home for dinner,” he promised. “Love you, Dad.”

“Love you, be safe!”

Stiles hurried out to the curb, where Derek was waiting in the Camaro. When he was buckled in, he leaned over, pressing a kiss to the alpha’s cheek. “Hey, Sourwolf. Hope you didn’t have dinner plans tonight, because you’re eating with us. Sheriff’s orders.”

“Should I be worried?” Derek asked warily, pulling out into the road.

“Nope,” Stiles assured, grinning. “He likes you. Said you’re a good kid.”

Derek blinked, his face going through several emotions at once. Stiles’ grin widened, and he covered Derek’s hand with his own on the gearshift. “Huh,” Derek said eventually. “I thought it would be at least six months before he came around.”

“Honestly, I thought a year. Once I was eighteen, maybe.”

They parked up on an unused driveway and made their way to a little clearing Derek had discovered while running through the area. Dropping his backpack, Stiles tugged at Derek’s belt loops, pulling him into a proper kiss. “Mm, missed you,” he murmured. Derek smirked.

“You saw me two days ago.”

“I know. Still missed you.” Stiles kissed him again, and Derek went with it for a minute or two, before eventually pulling away.

“Come on, work first, then play. We came out here for a reason.”

“You mean we’re not here to have sex in the woods?” Stiles asked in mock-surprised, laughing at Derek’s exasperated expression. “Fine, fine.”

Stiles started his warm-up stretches, Derek staying incredibly professional as he occasionally corrected Stiles’ form. The teen was in basketball shorts and an old tank top from a charity 5k he did years ago; Derek hadn’t seen any of his new clothes yet. He hadn’t had an occasion to wear any. Buying new workout clothes wasn’t exactly high on his priority list, especially not for werewolf-workouts.
Derek dropped into a fighting stance in front of Stiles, and the two of them began to spar, Stiles trying his hardest while Derek pulled his punches, no matter how many times Stiles told him not to. Derek refused — he didn’t want the sheriff thinking he was some kind of abusive boyfriend.

Fighting Derek was still a challenge, but Stiles was starting to see improvements; his movements were smoother, his punches cleaner and his reflexes quicker. They both knew he’d never win in a strength contest against most supernatural beings, so instead Derek was teaching him to use his speed and long limbs to get the advantage.

Combined with the routine Derek was having him follow in the gym, he was starting to be able to hold his own. “I can’t wait to see how you do against other members of the pack. Allison and Lydia, of course, but I think by the end of the summer you’d have a pretty good chance of taking down Boyd and even Scott,” Derek said, wiping sweat from his brow when they went to take a break. Stiles chugged from his water bottle.

“Not Isaac or Erica?” he asked, and Derek shook his head.

“They’re both fast, too, but they’ve got strength on their side. Boyd and Scott have more muscle mass; they’re denser, can’t move as quick. Also, Erica plays dirty. She might be nicer to you because you’re you, but she bites. She almost ripped some of Lydia’s hair out last week.”

“Holy shit.” Stiles gaped. “Was Lydia okay?”

“Eventually. There was one hell of an argument, but they figured it out. Erica just has to get rid of the last of her grudge,” Derek replied. He strode over to a nearby tree, doing pull-ups on a lower branch. Stiles rolled his eyes.

“Show off,” he muttered. “Why does Erica have a grudge?”

Derek dropped from the branch, giving Stiles the amused eyebrows. “You don’t know?” Stiles shook his head, and Derek barked out a laugh. “Stiles, Erica used to have a crush on you. Way before she was bitten. She used to hate Lydia for constantly turning you down. I guess those feelings never really go away,” he added teasingly.

Stiles gaped. “She… what?” He didn’t remember Erica ever even speaking to him before the bite. She’d just been quiet, keeping her head down and hiding in the back of every class. “How do you know this?”

“I’m the alpha,” Derek replied imperiously. Stiles levelled him with a flat look. “I overheard her telling Boyd about it. She insists she’s totally over you now, but she’s still mad that Lydia couldn’t see what she was missing.”

“What can I say, I’m a catch,” Stiles joked, yelping when Derek grabbed him around the waist, tugging him into a kiss.

“You’re okay, I guess.”

“Rude,” Stiles muttered. He went to the tree Derek had just been hanging from, attempting a couple of pull-ups of his own. To his utter astonishment, he actually managed ten before his muscles started to burn. When he dropped to the ground triumphantly, Derek was eyeing him with a hooded gaze.

“You are a catch,” he murmured, stalking closer. “I can’t believe how quickly you’re toning up.” One of his hands stroked Stiles’ shoulder, fingers wrapping around his growing bicep. “You’ll have a shot at first line this year, for sure.”
“All thanks to you,” Stiles insisted, but Derek shook his head.

“You’re the one putting in the work. Don’t underestimate yourself.” He smirked. “You’ll definitely be catching a lot of peoples’ eyes when you go back, too.”

Stiles smirked back at him, tapping him on the chest. “Then it’s a good thing I’ve already caught the eye of the one person I was trying to get, hmm?” he drawled in reply, stepping closer. His arms wound around Derek’s neck, the werewolf’s hands resting heavy on his hips. “Y’know, my original plan for this summer, once Dad told me we were coming here, was to go away, get super hot and come back and make you fall madly in love with me,” he informed him quietly, pecking him on the lips. “You kinda ruined that by following me here.”

Derek’s lips curved at the corners. “It wouldn’t have worked,” he declared.

“Oh yeah?” Stiles asked, amused. “You would have been immune to my charms and newly smokin’ bod?”

“You can’t make someone fall madly in love with you when they’re already in love with you,” Derek told him, losing a little of his cockiness as he met Stiles’ gaze. Stiles’ brain stuttered. Brown eyes widened in shock.

“You…” He leaned in, kissing Derek firmly before the man could make his excuses and run away. He rested a hand over the back of Derek’s neck, squeezing — claiming. “No one would ever believe me if I told them how much of a romantic sap you are,” he declared, smirking, before his face softened. “I love you too, you doofus. I figured you knew that when I practically agreed to move in with you and be your Alpha Mate.”

Thanks to more time spent perusing his typed-up versions of the Hale journals, Stiles now knew a lot more about pack dynamics, including that the alpha’s mate was traditionally the peacemaker of the pack; defending the pack proactively by negotiating treaties and creating strong bonds, while the Alpha was the reactive defender when a threat did arrive. The Alpha Mate wasn’t always necessarily a homemaker, but they always had a strong sense of family, and would keep the pack together and happy and sort all the little things that kept everything running smoothly — essentially the Pack Mom, which Erica always joked that Stiles was anyway. He was surprisingly fine with that role.

“I didn’t want to assume,” Derek murmured. “You really…?”

“I’m still reading through the journals. There’s a lot I don’t know about how packs should run,” Stiles replied. There was a lot of information to go through, and he hadn’t really processed it the first time around, just making sure to copy every thing up without really taking it in. Now he was actually going through what he’d written, making his own notes, he was learning so much about pack life outside of battle situations. It was fascinating. “But I want it. I want that with you. Full moon nights and holidays and meeting other packs and kids — you’re building a house for our pack to grow in, Derek, and God, I want that so bad.”

Derek slammed him back against the tree, his mouth hot on Stiles’, hands sneaking under his tank top. “Jesus, Stiles,” he growled desperately, red bleeding into his eyes. “You can’t just say that.”

“Why not?” Stiles challenged, grinding his arousal up into Derek’s. “I want it. I want to build a pack with you, Alpha Hale.” He looked Derek straight in the eye as he spoke, and so he didn’t miss it when Derek wolfed out, his claws appearing abruptly — they didn’t break skin, but he could feel them scraping up his sides, and gasped. Derek backed off, his face returning to normal, horror in his eyes.
“Fuck,” he breathed, but Stiles dragged him back before he could start overthinking.

“I don’t mind,” he insisted. “Let it out, Der. I told you, your wolfy stuff gets me hot. It’s probably easier to kiss you with your human face, but,” he shrugged, “I’ll figure it out if not.”

Derek stared at him like he couldn’t quite believe his words. Stiles covered his still-clawed hands, drawing them back under his shirt. “I know what I’m getting into. I love you,” he repeated, feeling bubbly and giddy at even saying the words aloud. “Now kiss me, Alpha.”

Derek’s eyes flashed red, and he was quickly back pinning Stiles against the tree.

They never resumed their training session. And, when they showed up for dinner, the sheriff wouldn’t stop staring at the huge bruise growing on his son’s neck. Stiles couldn’t bring himself to be embarrassed.

His boyfriend loved him back. He was going to be riding high on that one for weeks.
Chapter 14

At last, Stiles had a chance to wear some of his new clothes out with Derek, who had come in to take him to lunch at the diner. He didn’t say anything, but Derek noticed as soon as he got in the Jeep at the stop sign. “A product of your shopping trip?” he asked, giving Stiles an appreciative once-over. It was only a t-shirt and shorts, but they were a clear improvement from his previous wardrobe. The t-shirt showed off his new muscles, and the shorts were a soft dark green material, just loose enough to be comfortable without being baggy.

“You like them?” Stiles queried, leaning in for a kiss. Derek hummed, nodding.

“They look good. Can’t wait to see what else you bought.” Stiles refused to let him root through his wardrobe, wanting Derek to see the new clothes as he wore them. The only reason he knew Stiles had even been shopping was because he’d seen the pile of shopping bags in the corner when he’d come over a couple of nights after the mall trip.

When they parked in town and hopped out, Derek walked a half-step behind Stiles on the way to the diner, and as such Stiles missed his eyes dropping down for several seconds. When he reached out to get the door, Derek leaned in. “Those shorts make your ass look amazing,” he growled under his breath, making Stiles trip over his own feet. Derek caught him by the shoulder, smirking. “Careful. I said it looked good, not that I wanted you on it.” He paused contemplatively. “Maybe later,” he added, winking.

A thrill ran down Stiles’ spine, and he let out a slow breath. The downside of better fitting shorts was the likelihood of a boner being far more noticeable.

They took their usual table, the waitress smiling as she approached them. She’d stopped staring longingly at Derek now, aware that he was very clearly taken. “Afternoon, boys. The usual?” she presumed, and they both nodded. “I’ll be back with your drinks in a second.”

Stiles reached over to steal Derek’s phone while they waited, having been promised photos of the house progress. The contractors had been in and sorted all the wiring, gas and water, so they were starting to build the walls up properly now. “Hey, it actually looks like a real house. There’s a roof and everything!” he enthused, grinning widely. The house looked beautiful already.

“Turns out, Peter’s actually pretty good at tiling,” Derek said, shrugging. He let Stiles flick through a few more pictures, showing him the completed porch as well. “As long as we don’t have any major issues, we should be able to finish it all up without any professional assistance. Isaac has been getting really into it — I think he might look at going into construction after he finishes school.”

“That’s awesome,” Stiles replied. Construction would be perfect for the werewolf; his strength would make the work easy for him, and he’d be able to work with his hands rather than being stuck in an office or classroom all day. Their drinks arrived, and Stiles handed the phone back. “God, I’m so proud of you. There’s no way the Alpha Pack can say you aren’t doing a good job.”

Derek’s ears reddened, but he frowned. “Yeah, well, they’re not gone yet,” he muttered, quickly changing the subject. He always did when Stiles brought up potential pack dangers. “Anyway, the house is going well. Mrs McCall actually came over to help a couple days ago — she’s great with laying floorboards. Said she used to help her dad do DIY all the time. She wasn’t super thrilled to be around Peter, but… Scott really appreciated having her around. Thanks for the tip.”

Stiles had suggested Derek ask Melissa to help with the build — he hadn’t known about the
floorboards thing, but he’d figured she’d be happy to pitch in, and getting her involved in pack stuff might show Scott that pack was a good thing to be part of. Scott needed to stop thinking that pack was only relevant when there was fighting happening. “Happy to help,” he replied. He let out a pleased noise when the waitress appeared with his usual mound of curly fries, making Derek smile faintly.

“Hey, so, I was thinking,” Stiles said while they ate, fidgeting with one of his fries. Derek raised an eyebrow.

“Oh boy,” he muttered in mock-trepidation. Stiles kicked him under the table.

“Jerk. But I was thinking, and… I wanna get a tattoo.” The last few words were blurted out in a rush, and Derek blinked slowly as he deciphered them.

“A tattoo?” he asked, perplexed. Stiles bit his lip and nodded, fumbling for his phone.

“Specifically, this tattoo. On my chest. Right over my heart.”

The photo he showed Derek made the werewolf freeze. It was a triskele — the exact same tattoo that Derek had on his back. The symbol of the Hale pack. “I want to make it clear that I’m Hale pack, even though I’m not a wolf,” he said quietly. “To anyone who knows what it means. I want to make it clear that I’m yours.”

Derek didn’t speak for several minutes, his food ignored, and Stiles’ knee bounced anxiously. “It’s a dumb idea, I knew it, just forget I said anything.” Stiles went to put his phone away, but Derek’s hand whipped out, grabbing him around the wrist.

“Do you want this because of me?” he asked softly, voice deadly serious. Stiles’ brows furrowed as he tried to parse the question.

“Not because we’re together, if that’s what you mean. Honestly, I’ve been thinking about it since Gerard,” he admitted. He didn’t want the bite, he knew that much. As cool as he thought werewolves were, he didn’t want to be one. But he was pack, and he didn’t want anyone to be able to dispute that, to think he might walk away from it, or that he was any less of a pack member because he was human. Or Druid. Whatever. Being with Derek changed things, of course, but not his feelings about this. “I’d want it even if we weren’t together. I want it for me — as a reminder that the pack will always have my back. You’ll always come find me, no matter what.”

“I will,” Derek promised, squeezing his hand. “We will. You don’t need a tattoo to prove that.”

“I know, but I want it. And I’ve done my research, I know a place nearby that has a good reputation. They take walk-ins on Saturdays. I want to do it today, before I wuss out at the thought of needles. Will you come with me?” Stiles looked to his boyfriend with pleading brown eyes.

“Don’t you need to be eighteen to get a tattoo?” Stiles smirked.

“Oh, Sourwolf, have a little faith. I’ve got that part covered.”

Derek’s lips twitched, and he nodded. “Okay, sure. Let’s do it.”


“Eat your curly fries, you can freak out on the way there.”
Stiles was practically bouncing as he drove them to the tattoo parlour; despite being somewhat in the middle of nowhere, it had good reviews and all the appropriate certifications. Stiles had a death grip on Derek’s hand as they walked in, the bell above the door announcing their entrance. The tattoo parlour was small but clean and well-decorated, framed photos of impressively detailed tattoos on the walls and a huge bookcase full of rows of coloured inks in bottles. The woman behind the counter looked about Derek’s age, and was covered in an impressive number of tattoos and piercings. Her hair was dyed bright pink, tied up in a messy bun. “Hi there! What can I do for you gentlemen?”

“Hi,” Stiles started, letting go of Derek and wringing his hands anxiously. “I wanted to get a tattoo. You take walk-ins, right?” The tattoo artist eyed him over.

“We do, but I’m gonna need to see some ID first. Store policy.”

“Absolutely, yeah,” Stiles agreed, fumbling for his wallet. He held his driver’s license tight in his hand before passing it over, holding his focus and channeling his magic. It wasn’t much — just enough of a glamour to change his age by one year, to make him eighteen — and he prayed the magic would hold. The artist glanced it over, then took a picture of it on her phone, checking the picture. Stiles was glad he’d tested the magic worked through pictures and photocopies, just in case.

“That is one hell of a first name,” she declared, making him grimace.

“Yeah, don’t try and pronounce it. I’m Stiles,” he introduced. She took one last look at the card, then nodded.

“Cool,” she confirmed, handing his license back to him. “So, what kinda thing you looking for? I have to warn you, if it’s gonna take more than two hours, I’ll need you to schedule an appointment and come back.”

“It’s nothing super fancy,” Stiles said, digging his phone out to show her the same photo he showed Derek. “This, about two and a half inches across, right over my heart.”

She leaned over the counter, humming as she studied the design. “I can do that now, easy,” she said. “Flat black, or did you want any kind of design or colour to it?”

Stiles glanced to Derek, who shook his head slightly. “Flat black is good,” Stiles assured. The artist looked at Derek in challenge.

“And you are…?”

“This is my boyfriend, Derek,” Stiles said. “Who is really very nice despite his unfortunate case of resting murder-face, and can stop glaring aaany time now,” he added pointedly, elbowing him in the gut. Derek blinked, scowling for a second, then sending Stiles an apologetic look.

“Okay, I have to ask, are you absolutely sure you want this, or are you getting it because he wants you to have it, because I’m not one to judge but like, this design will be a bitch to cover up, and I don’t want my clients having regrets six months down the line. You’re young, it’s a big decision to make.”

“I know what I want,” Stiles said confidently. “This design is really important to me. It’s a family thing,” he said, deciding not to mention it would match Derek’s tattoo. “Derek’s just here for moral support. I’m not a huge fan of needles. Or pain.”

“Well, I hate to tell you, but that fill is gonna hurt,” she said with a smirk, and Stiles groaned.
“Bluetooth that picture to my printer and I’ll get the stencil measured up while you fill out the paperwork. It’s gonna be about $75, give or take ten depending on how quickly I get through it. Do you have cash on you?”

“Yeah, I got some out, your website said you don’t take card,” Stiles said, patting the pocket his wallet was in. She nodded in approval.

“Perfect. I’m Jo, by the way. We have another artist, Nick, but he’s in the back working on a client. Are you cool with being done out here?” As she handed Stiles the paperwork, she gestured to the chair set up across from the desk. “Or would you prefer more privacy?”

“No, here’s fine.” Stiles’ breath was getting a little shallow now, and Derek squeezed his neck in reassurance.

“Take your time, I’ll get set up.”

It was an easy thing to get the design printed, and while Jo was busy turning it into an appropriately-sized stencil, Stiles took a seat on the couch by the window and filled out the paperwork. It was the standard stuff — name, address, age (here he made sure to put the age that matched the edit to his license), confirming that he wasn’t under the influence of any substances, controlled or otherwise, and that he didn’t have any allergies. When he’d checked it all through he signed the bottom, his hand shaking a little.

“You got this,” Derek murmured, kissing his temple. “You’ve faced worse. I got you.”

“I can do this,” Stiles agreed.

“You ready? Want a bathroom break first?” Jo asked, wiping the chair down with a bacterial wipe, putting new paper down over it. Stiles shook his head.

“Nope. Ready when you are.”

“Okay, Stiles. Shirt off, and step right this way. We’ll check the stencil and if you’re happy with it, we’ll get you in the chair.” Jo snapped some gloves on as she spoke, holding up the stencil paper.

Taking a deep breath, Stiles pulled his shirt over his head, handing it to Derek for safekeeping. Jo carefully wiped his left pec down, then nudged him in front of the mirror as she talked through the placement, eventually pressing the stencil to his skin. Stiles looked at it in the mirror, the purple mark giving a good idea of what the tattoo would look like. Looking at the triskele on his chest, Stiles felt something settle in his soul, an overwhelming feeling of rightness. He turned to Derek, holding his arms out. “What do you think, Der?”

Derek’s eyes were fixed intensely on the mark, his hands clenched in fists by his side. For a moment, Stiles was worried he’d wolf out right there in the tattoo parlour. “It’s perfect,” he confirmed in a soft voice with just an edge of growl. Stiles turned to Jo, squaring his jaw determinedly.

“Let’s do it.”

He didn’t start to really panic until he was lying in the chair and Jo was leaning over him with the tattoo gun in hand, the needles whirring. “I know it’s easier said than done, but this will be a lot more comfortable for you if you relax,” Jo told him gently. Stiles laughed sharply.

“Yeah, I’ll get there. Just go for it.”

She lowered the needle, and Derek stepped up behind Stiles’ head, gripping his neck gently with one
hand and kissing his hair. There was a sharp spike of pain, before it quickly dulled until Stiles could barely even feel it. He was confused for a second, looking down to check that Jo was indeed inking his skin. She was focused on her needle, which was definitely drawing a curve of black ink across his skin. It clicked a moment later when Stiles met Derek’s eyes, and he knew that if he could see it there would be black lines threading under his skin as he leech Stiles’ pain away. Best boyfriend ever.

“How’s that for you?” Jo asked, still tattooing.

“It’s bearable,” Stiles assured, sending a thankful look up at his boyfriend. Derek merely smirked at him, settling in for the duration.

The tattoo took about an hour in total, and Stiles honestly didn’t know how he would have coped with it without Derek there to leech the pain. He still would have done it — it absolutely would have been worth it — but he sure as hell wasn’t going to argue. He babbled almost the whole time, Derek indulgently listening and interjecting where appropriate, though Jo was plenty chatty while she worked too.

When it was done, Jo wiped it clean and let him take a look at it in the mirror before she covered it with an adhesive plastic film, running through aftercare with him and handing him a little tub of tattoo salve. Stiles paid her, tipping extra because she’d done a great job — and also because he felt guilty lying about his age.

“I love it,” he told her, beaming. “Thank you so much.”

“You’re very welcome,” she replied with a bright smile, shaking his hand. “Glad to have a happy customer. Come back if you have any issues with it, or if you decide you want to go under the needle again. We also do piercings,” she added, gesturing to a case full of various body jewellery.

“I’ll keep that in mind,” Stiles promised, though he already knew he would never be going back. The fake ID trick would probably only work once.

They got back to the Jeep, and Derek insisted on driving. “You can have the wheel when your hands stop shaking,” he said firmly, plucking the keys from Stiles’ fingers. Stiles laughed, watching the tremors.

“I don’t know why I’m so shaky. Thanks to you, I didn’t feel a thing.” He mused, his pulse still racing.

“Your body still got the adrenalin rush,” Derek pointed out. “You’re gonna crash hard in a couple hours.”

“Good. More cuddle time,” Stiles joked. “Thanks for the magic pain-drain, by the way. That wasn’t actually why I asked you to come, but it was definitely a perk.”

“It was better than watching you try and pretend not to be in pain for an hour. Wuss,” Derek teased affectionately. Stiles scoffed.

“Excuse you, we can’t all be werewolves.”

“If you were, a blowtorch would have been involved,” Derek retorted. Stiles gaped at him.

“Seriously?”

“How else do you think we get the ink to stick? A regular tattoo just heals over straight away. Waste
Stiles grimaced, imagining the pain of having to take a blowtorch to his skin on top of getting the tattoo itself. The Hale pack mark suddenly meant so much more in his eyes.

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Derek stayed for dinner, at which there was not a single mention of the word ‘tattoo’, or anything of the sort. Stiles knew his dad would find out sooner or later, but he was definitely hoping for it to be later.

Throughout the meal, Stiles could feel his chest ache and itch as the adrenaline began to wear off. As soon as he could, he made excuses for himself and Derek and hurried up to his room, pulling the door as close to shut as his dad would allow it and tugging his t-shirt over his head. He stood in front of the mirror, staring in awe at the film-covered mark. A permanent reminder that he was Hale pack, no matter what.

Derek stepped up behind him, eyes red as he put a gentle hand over the palm-sized triskele. Over Stiles’ heart. “I love you,” he declared in a quiet growl. “I’m honoured to have you in my pack.”

“Always, Alpha,” Stiles replied, equally soft. He covered Derek’s hand with his own, moving it away so he could stare at his tattoo some more. With Derek’s chest against his back, his body close against him, it was easy for Stiles to feel the hardness nudging against his backside. He smirked. “You like it, huh?” he drawled, turning in Derek’s arms. “My chest all marked up, claiming me as pack? Claiming me as yours?”

Derek was losing control of his wolf, the same way he had in the woods the other week. Stiles’ blood was electric, coursing through his body and lighting every nerve on fire at the sight of Derek’s red eyes and clawed fingers. He should probably be worried at the weird pavlovian response he was developing to Derek going all alpha on him, but he was too turned on to care. He made a mental note to check through the Hale journals to see if there was any truth to the myth of a werewolf claiming/mating bite — Derek was definitely having a pretty intense reaction to the mark. Was that just him being possessive as hell, or was it a legit wolf instinct thing? Further research was definitely required.

It could wait, though. For now, as Derek’s mouth latched onto his neck, he had other priorities.

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He managed to keep the tattoo hidden from his dad for all of a week and a half. He’d honestly forgotten about it when he walked out of the bathroom in just a towel, bumping into his dad in the hallway. The sheriff smiled at him, before his gaze zeroed in on his son’s chest and the expression dropped. “A tattoo, Stiles?” he yelped, his eyes narrowing. “Wait a second…” He sighed, rubbing the bridge of his nose. “Please tell me that’s not the same tattoo Derek has.”

“Uh. It’s smaller?” Stiles attempted weakly. The sheriff glared.

“Jesus, you’re at matching tattoos already,” he muttered under his breath. “You better not want that lasered off in a few months.”

“I won’t,” Stiles promised, wishing he could tell his dad exactly what the tattoo meant to him. He was honestly surprised there wasn’t more yelling. “Please don’t be mad, Dad. I promise I didn’t do this lightly.”

His dad looked at him in consideration, folding his arms over his chest. “No, you didn’t, did you?”
he agreed, a knowing glint in his eye. He sighed again. “At the very least, thank you for not telling me until after you had it. It’s a little too late for me to disapprove now,” he said wryly. “But… it looks good, kid. And I’m happy for you. Just… be careful, okay? I don’t want you to get your heart broken.”

Stiles stared at his father, dumbfounded. He wasn’t going to yell, or ground him, or anything? “Derek’s all in,” he said simply. “So am I.” He knew there were hundreds of seventeen year-olds who insisted they were dating their One True Love, and often broke up several months later. He wished there was a way to prove to his dad that this was different, that he didn’t need to worry. Not that Derek being a werewolf made them somehow less likely to break up, but… Stiles knew exactly what he was getting into, and he was still one hundred percent committed to it.

“I hope you’re right. Now go put a shirt on so I can forget that thing exists,” the sheriff joked, reaching out to ruffle his son’s damp hair. Stiles dunked away, heading to his room. His dad called his name before he reached the door, and Stiles turned, raising an inquiring eyebrow. “Do I wanna know how you convinced a tattoo artist to give you that underage?”

“Probably not,” Stiles replied frankly. The sheriff snorted, turning away.

“If you get hepatitis, I’m not paying your hospital bills.”

“Love you too, Dad!” Stiles called with a grin, entering his room and shutting the door.

Once he was mostly dressed — still shirtless, stroking gently over his mostly-healed tattoo — he reached for his phone, calling Derek. “I wanna tell my dad,” he said by way of greeting. There was silence.

“About the tattoo?” Derek asked, perplexed. Stiles bit his lip.

“About werewolves.”

“Don’t be so pessimistic,” Stiles insisted. “I’ll be fine. And I’ve wanted to tell Dad for a while. You know I hate lying to him. But I always hoped I could keep him out of the madness; he has enough stress in his life without having to worry about things that go bump in the night. But look at it this way; he’s gonna have to find out sooner or later. You’re stuck with me. Isn’t it better he find out now, when we can explain everything properly and tell him in a nice, controlled environment? Or would you rather it happen when I’m twenty-five and we’re living together and he’s wondering why the hell a bunch of my high-school friends have moved in with us and aren’t leaving? Or worse, when some monster has ripped me half to pieces and you need to rush me to hospital?”

“Don’t even joke,” Derek growled.

“You started it,” Stiles muttered. “I’m serious, Derek. If we tell him now, we can ease him into it,
and I’ve only been lying to him for months rather than years.”

“Fine,” Derek relented. “We’ll tell him. When?”

They decided on a day when Hannah was out with some friends, to make sure she didn’t accidentally walk in on something they weren’t ready for her to see. Stiles mentioned to his dad that Derek was coming over, and when the alpha appeared on the doorstep, Stiles was buzzing with nerves. “You still wanna do this?” Derek asked quietly, nuzzling Stiles’ temple. Stiles nodded.

“Rip it off like a band-aid,” he said, more to himself than Derek.

He got a drink of water first, trying to steel his resolve, and then he led the way into the living room where his dad was watching an action movie. “Hey, boys,” he greeted companionably. “Big plans for the day?”

“Actually, Dad,” Stiles started, sitting down on the couch closest to the sheriff, pulling Derek down beside him. “Derek and I need to talk to you about something.”

“Did you two get engaged?” The sheriff asked warily. Stiles spluttered.

“What? No!” he exclaimed. “I’m seventeen!”

“Well after the tattoo, I didn’t think it was too far a leap!” the sheriff retorted. That made a blush rise on Stiles' cheeks, but he ploughed on.

“We’re not engaged,” he promised. He took a deep breath. “It’s actually about some of the stuff that’s been happening in the last year. And earlier than that, to be honest. The Hale fire. Laura’s death.” He reached for Derek’s hand. “I’ve been lying to you about a lot of things, for your own safety. But those things are part of my life now, and they will be forever, and at this point I think you’re more likely to get hurt if you don’t know. Plus,” he added, looking his dad in the eye. “I really, really hate lying to you. Like, so much. And I need you to forgive me. And trust me, because a lot of what I say is gonna sound completely insane.”

The sheriff had gone deadly serious at Stiles’ tone, turning off the TV and sitting forward with his elbows on his knees. “Are you in danger?” he asked. “Either of you?”


“Just say it, Stiles. Like a band-aid,” he murmured. Stiles nodded, looking back at his dad.

“Werewolves are real. Derek is a werewolf.”

It all came spilling out; him and Scott looking for Laura’s body in the woods; Scott getting bitten; Derek, Peter, Kate, the Argents, Jackson; everything supernatural-related that Stiles could think of. Once he started talking he just couldn’t stop, staring at the floor as he relayed the horrors of the last year. Only a few things were left out — his magic, the relationship between Derek and Kate, the Alpha Pack. Things his dad didn’t need to know yet.

He kept a death grip on Derek’s hand the entire time, and only looked up to see his dad’s reaction when he was completely finished talking. The sheriff was pale and stone-faced, leaning back in his armchair.

“So… that’s what’s been happening. We’re a wolf pack. That’s why I got the tattoo. I mean, sure, I’m dating Derek, and I love him, but I didn’t get it because it matches his. I got it because it means
I’m Hale pack, for good. Not that it’s necessary to be part of the pack,” he added quickly, not wanting his dad to think that Derek was forcing teenagers to get tattoos. “I wanted it, for me. After… after Gerard took me, I needed the reminder that I wouldn’t be alone.”

Derek leaned against his shoulder, offering silent support. The sheriff was quiet for a long time.

“I’ll assume you have some kind of proof for all this,” he said eventually. “Before I start thinking you’re on some serious drugs.”

“Yeah,” Stiles confirmed. He let go of Derek’s hand, nudging his boyfriend. “Go for it, Sourwolf.”

Derek calmly shifted into his beta-form, holding up clawed hands and flashing his red eyes at the sheriff. To his credit, the man didn’t even jump.

“Well, that explains the nickname,” he muttered to himself. Derek shifted back.

“Sir, I just want you to know that I’m sorry Stiles got involved in all this, and I wish he never had, but it’s his choice to stick with the pack — stick with me. I love your son, and I will do my best to protect him with my life, no matter what we may face in the future. Both as his partner, and his alpha,” he said, his quiet voice impassioned in a way Stiles had never really heard from him before. It knocked the breath out of him a little bit, his heart swelling with love.

“I appreciate that, Derek,” the sheriff replied sincerely. “I believe you, boys. That detail… everything is way too involved to be some kind of elaborate joke or drug trip. But I hope you understand when I say this has seriously knocked my world-view on its ass, and it’s going to take me a little bit to get my head around it.”

“Of course, yeah,” Stiles agreed quickly. “Just… I’m really sorry, Dad. For all the lying, and the sneaking around, and everything. I just wanted to keep you safe.”

“I understand, son. I don’t like it, but I understand why you did it. You’re my son — it’s my job to keep you safe, not the other way around.” The sheriff rubbed at his temples. “I need a beer,” he muttered with a shake of his head. “You boys go upstairs, I need to sit and think about this. We’ll have a proper talk about it later, when I’ve sorted it all out in my head.”

“But you’re not mad?”

“I’m mad about you and Scott going into the woods looking for a damn dead body,” the sheriff said sharply. Stiles winced. “And I will be having words with both of you about that, later. But… everything else after that, I don’t think it’s really my right to be mad at you for it. You didn’t exactly seek it out. Your whole family were werewolves, you said?” he added, looking to Derek. “You were born that way?”

“Yes, sir,” Derek confirmed. “We had some humans in the pack, but they were mostly kids or spouses of werewolves — a couple of my cousins, one of my aunts. My parents were both werewolves. The Hale line goes back centuries.”

“That explains so much about Talia Hale,” the sheriff muttered under his breath. “Well, I appreciate your honesty, even if it is a few months too late.”

Stiles winced, getting to his feet and striding over to stand in front of his dad. “I’m so sorry, Dad,” he murmured, tears shining in his eyes. “I just didn’t want you to get hurt. I couldn’t lose you too.”

The sheriff pulled Stiles into his lap, cradling him like he was a lot younger than his seventeen years. “You won’t lose me, kiddo,” he assured. “It’s not up to you to worry about that. You’re a kid, you’re
supposed to be worrying about grades, and prom, and your boyfriend,” he teased, dropping a kiss on Stiles’ forehead. “We’ll talk later about what all this means, but no matter what, I love you, okay? We can figure everything else out from there. You’re my boy, and I love you so much.”

“I love you too, Dad,” Stiles whispered, losing his battle against tears. The sheriff held him tightly for a minute, then nudged him to his feet.

“Go on, go cuddle with your boyfriend, let an old man think for a while.”

Stiles nodded, slipping under Derek’s arm, and when they were both at the doorway the sheriff called out. “Derek?” The werewolf turned. “Kate Argent. She’s definitely dead?” Derek’s face shuttered.

“Yes, sir,” he confirmed. The sheriff’s face was hard.

“Good,” he muttered. “Hell is too good for a woman like her, but it’ll do.”

He looked back at his hands in clear dismissal, and Stiles didn’t speak until they were up in his room, lying on his bed. He had his arms around Derek, the alpha’s head resting on his chest. “So. That went… about as well as can be expected.”

“I honestly expected more shouting,” Derek agreed.

“Do you think he’ll be okay?” Stiles asked, worried about what might be going through the man’s brain downstairs. Derek shrugged, hand resting on Stiles’ stomach.

“You know him better than I do,” he pointed out. “I think he will. He hasn’t threatened to shoot me, or call a psychiatrist. That’s always a win.”

Stiles snickered, running a hand through Derek’s hair. “Good point.”

They lay in silence, Stiles stuck in his thoughts from having to relive all the worst points of the last year. He wished Derek could stay the night. He would definitely be having nightmares later. Derek probably would, too, after talking about Kate.

“Thanks, Derek,” he murmured, fingers still playing with Derek’s hair. “For agreeing to tell him. I know it’s not easy to trust people with that.”

“He’s your dad,” Derek said, as if that explained everything. “I saw how much it was killing you to keep him in the dark. I’d be a shitty boyfriend if I kept making you do that.”

Stiles wrapped an arm around him, brushing fond fingers over his forehead. “Best boyfriend,” he declared, smiling.

They’d deal with his dad’s reaction as it came, but at least everything was out in the open now. No more secrets.
Chapter 15

The sheriff adjusted remarkably quickly to the knowledge that werewolves existed.

After taking the evening to think things over — and flawlessly pretending that everything was fine when Hannah got home — he took Stiles for a drive the next morning, quizzing him on every instance of supernatural influence he’d managed to miss. He agreed with Stiles’ determination to prepare himself, promising to book more range time for both of them as soon as he could, and look the other way if Stiles wanted to procure some wolfsbane bullets that would fit the sheriff’s personal firearm. He also took some time to have a long phone call with Melissa, once Stiles told him that she was in on the secret — making him promise not to say anything about the relationship between Stiles and Derek, as that was something no one in Beacon Hills knew yet. He didn’t tell the pack that his dad knew. He’d do that when he got home, whenever it came up.

The sheriff also had a long, private conversation with Derek the next time he visited, the contents of which both he and Derek refused to disclose to Stiles in any way. It was driving the teen crazy, but no amount of pestering (his dad) or sexual favours (Derek) would break their silence. Derek hadn’t fled to Mexico, so Stiles figured it couldn’t be too bad.

And so, life moved on. Stiles’ dad was now aware that his son’s boyfriend was a supernatural creature capable of running from Beacon Hills to Redford in a little over three hours. He was not aware that said boyfriend regularly did so late at night to climb in through his window. Stiles figured it was okay to have harmless little secrets like that.

Before Stiles could blink, there was only a week left of summer break, and his aunt was talking about her doctor’s appointment to get her casts off. He felt like the last precious minutes of freedom were slipping through his fingers — he spent every spare minute training either his mind, his magic or his body, reading the Argent books and the Hale journals like every word was water and he was dying of thirst. His typed-up version of the Hale journals had become his new favourite bedtime reading, learning about the past Hales and their packs, immersing himself in the feel of family and home. He was learning so much about the mundane parts of the supernatural world, from the proper way to contact other packs to the best ways to ease a new wolf into pack life. There were so many things they had bulldozed right over in the heat of the moment, and Stiles was looking forward to being able to slow things down a little and re-establish the Hale pack properly, as it should be. Talia was right to keep these books in the safe above all others; they weren’t about fighting strategy or weaponry or other creatures, though there were certainly mentions of past scuffles. These books were a reminder that werewolves were a people with a culture as deep and old as the earth, and if they lost that they would lose themselves. A pack ground down to their fighting and bloodshed and survival instinct was not a true pack at all. No wonder Derek had been struggling.

They could do better. Stiles would make sure of it, once he got home.

That was, if another catastrophe didn’t take over before he had the chance. Derek had been tense lately, changing the subject whenever Stiles asked how things were going back home. Stiles was pretty sure the Alpha Pack was making their move. They had better not do anything until he could join the fight.

The biggest surprise in his eyes was that he was actually really looking forward to going home. Sure, his stomach became a knot of anxiety at the thought of all the things he’d have to deal with when he got there, but it was okay. He was in a better place to deal with them now. He wanted to get back
and hang out with his friends, was ready to get back to school and start the countdown to the
glorious freedom of graduation.

And, most importantly of all, he was looking forward to being in the same town as his boyfriend —
and his boyfriend’s apartment. Even if Isaac did technically live there too, he spent half his time over
at Scott’s. It was impossible to get any real privacy in a house with his dad and his aunt; even when
Derek visited secretly at night, they had to keep the noise down, constantly listening out for any sign
the sheriff might have woken up.

The universe aligned in his favour a few days before he was due to return to Beacon Hills.

“Your aunt and I are going out to celebrate,” the sheriff declared one evening, appearing in the
doorway of Stiles’ room. He was wearing a nice shirt and smart slacks, and his wording made it very
clear that Stiles was not included in this celebration. “Not sure how long we’ll be out, so we’ll lock
up on our way out. God knows you’ll just spend the whole time in your room; someone could rob
the whole house and you’d never know unless they came upstairs.”

“I leave sometimes!” Stiles argued. “Y’know. When I need food. Or if I have to pee.” The sheriff
snorted, striding across the room to drop a kiss to his son’s hair.

“See you later, kiddo. Don’t forget to eat — chips don’t count as real food.”

“Pretty sure they do,” Stiles returned, smirking. “You two have fun now. Call me when you need a
ride home.” Hannah was officially out of the chair and on crutches now; the muscles were weak, but
she had regular physical therapy booked to work on that, and she was over the moon to be able to do
little things like wear jeans and go up stairs. She’d come up to visit Stiles in his room ‘just because’
about six times in the two days since she’d regained her mobility. She was also off her painkillers for
good, so had nothing stopping her from getting drunk. Stiles hoped the two of them had a good
night. They could use some proper sibling bonding time.

“I’m not gonna drink,” the sheriff assured. Stiles merely smiled to himself.

“That’s what you think,” he said in a quiet sing-song tone once his dad was out the door. Hannah
had been talking about getting her brother wasted all summer. He had every expectation of getting a
call at around midnight asking to be picked up from Redford’s one bar.

Being at home by himself didn’t really change much in Stiles’ evening plans, except he could leave
his bedroom door open while he practiced magic. It was quickly becoming one of Stiles’ favourite
things to do. Druid magic wasn’t like he’d thought magic would be — it wasn’t spells and
incantations and precise movements, like in Harry Potter. It was all about emotion and intent; if you
felt what you wanted to do with the power, you could do it. The book Deaton gave him said there
were no books of spells to learn or rules to memorise. Instead the whole thing was about increasing
your connection to the earth and your land. Stiles couldn’t wait to get home and start practicing
properly — something in his gut was holding him back from making that connection here. He
needed to be in Beacon Hills to commune with the earth. He didn’t know how he knew, but he did.
He had to be on Hale land.

There was plenty he could do in the mean time, though. Stiles was getting pretty good at summoning
fire, freezing water, and making things move with his mind. All feats that would never stop being
ridiculously cool to him.

He thought about messaging the pack, seeing if anyone was free to Skype. That was a new thing, too
— Skyping people that weren’t Scott. It was weird, but he liked it.
All thoughts of texting his packmates flew from his mind when the window slid open, a dark head of hair emerging. “I wasn’t expecting you tonight,” Stiles greeted, grinning as his boyfriend shut the window behind him.

“I didn’t think I could, but Peter bailed on me. So I thought I’d come here. If that’s okay?” Derek always looked wary when he showed up without giving a warning text, like he was expecting Stiles to turn him away. It would be cute if it didn’t tug painfully on Stiles’ heartstrings.

“Always okay,” he confirmed, drawing Derek in to stand between his knees, hooking his fingers through the alpha’s belt loops. “I was just thinking about texting you. Well, the pack. Turns out, I’m all by myself tonight. Dad and Hannah went to a bar to celebrate. I told you she’s got her casts off, right?” Derek nodded. “Yeah, so they just left a little while ago. Poor Stiles, home alone. Whatever shall I do?” he dropped his voice an octave, giving Derek a look he hoped was coy. Whatever it was, it seemed to be working, hazel eyes growing dark.

“I have a couple ideas,” Derek growled, reaching down to slide both hands firmly under Stiles’ ass, picking him up as if he weighed no more than a puppy, pressing their lips together before he turned and tossed Stiles down on the bed. Stiles smirked, sprawling with his knees bent, looking up at his boyfriend. Derek was reaching down to unzip his boots, his eyes still fixed on Stiles.

“Slow down, Sourwolf,” Stiles said, wiggling his eyebrows playfully as Derek’s shirt went flying off. “I have it on pretty good authority that they’ll be out late, and will probably need me to come pick them up. We’ve got all night, no unexpected interruptions.” He trailed his hand down his own chest, slowly unzipping the fly of his jeans to ease the rapidly building pressure. Derek stood at the end of the bed, barefoot and shirtless, eyes roving Stiles’ rumpled form.

“Slow, huh?” he murmured, his body betraying his apex predator status in ways that were doing things to Stiles’ hormones. His muscles flexed as he stalked forward, kneeling on the bed between Stiles’ splayed thighs. “I can do slow. So slow you’ll be begging me to go faster.” He inched closer, hands bracing Stiles’ hips, working their way up at a tantalisingly glacial pace, pulling Stiles’ shirt off as they went. Stiles propped up on his elbows, nipping at Derek’s neck and smirking at the growl it elicited. He grabbed the alpha, flipping them until he was the one on top, straddling Derek’s waist and pinning him at the shoulders. They both knew that Derek could throw him off in a heartbeat if he wanted to; the fact that he stayed pliant never failed to give Stiles a rush.

There was no hurry to get naked, their hands and lips exploring flesh that was becoming more and more familiar, Derek’s fingers often returning to the jet black triskele on Stiles’ chest, touching it reverently. Stiles let him, his heart fluttering each time.

For the first time, they didn’t have to worry about muffling their noises. And Stiles could be loud. It was no surprise, really; he babbled constantly at every other moment of his life, why would sex be any different? A constant litany of groans and gasps spilled from his lips, interspersed with cries of Derek’s name and pleas for more. Derek was quieter, but Stiles treasured every sound he could draw from the werewolf like it was gold.

Derek slid down Stiles’ body, his intentions clear. As his mouth closed around Stiles’ hot length, Stiles keened, then reached down to tug Derek’s hair, shaking his head. “No,” he panted. “Der. I want—I need—I want to come with you inside me.”

Derek turned still as a statue. So far, Stiles’ hands-on sexual education had been pretty comprehensive, but that was a step they had yet to take. “Are… are you sure?” He held back, hands curled in the bedsheets. “Just because you’re home alone, doesn’t mean… we have plenty of time, Stiles.”
“I know,” Stiles assured. “But think about it. When we get back, the pack will be around all the time. Even when we have time to ourselves, chances are they’ll be able to smell it on us before we can shower properly. Or hear us,” he added with a shudder. “At my house, we’ll always be worried about Dad coming home. At yours we’ll have the betas to contend with. Even though you insist the new house is fully soundproofed.” He reached out, resting a hand on Derek’s shoulder. “Eventually we’ll stop caring about all that stuff. The embarrassment will fade. But for the first time? I want to have you all to myself, no interruptions, no awkward morning-afters with your betas or my dad. We’re not gonna get a better opportunity than this.” He smiled, his voice completely steady. He was sure about this. “I’m ready if you are, Derek.” He ducked his head, running a hand through his hair. “I mean, if you want to wait, that’s totally cool. Enthusiastic consent is definitely required here. But I’m down to clown if you want it.”

Derek stared at him for a heartbeat that felt like it lasted an hour. “As long as you never say the words ‘down to clown’ while we’re naked, ever again.”

Stiles laughed, muffling the sound against Derek’s lips. “You love it,” he murmured smugly. “You chose this. You knew what you were getting into.”

“I can leave,” Derek threatened, and Stiles just laughed louder.

“No you can’t,” he retorted knowingly. He ran a finger down Derek’s stubbled jaw. “So what do you say, Sourwolf? Wanna pop my cherry?” Teasingly, he drew that finger over Derek’s lips, grinning delightedly when the Alpha mock-bit at it.

“Virginity is an outdated social construct,” Derek said breathlessly, before catching Stiles’ wayward finger between his lips and sucking on it, eyes flashing red. “Wasn’t it you who told me that?”

“Don’t get sassy on me now, Derek Hale,” Stiles groaned, unable to tear his eyes away from Derek’s lips. “Not if you want me to last long enough for you to fuck me.”

That was enough to snap Derek’s restraint, and he pinned Stiles to the mattress with care, refusing to leave a single hand-shaped bruise on his human partner’s skin — while Stiles left all kinds of marks on the alpha’s, all of which would be gone by morning. The lube was already sitting out on the pillow next to Stiles’ head, and Derek reached for it, holding himself over Stiles’ body with one arm. God, that would never not be hot. “Condom?” he asked, and Stiles scoffed.

“You’re a werewolf and I’m a virgin. No STIs here. And unless you’ve got something to tell me about werewolf sperm, there’s no chance of me getting pregnant,” he added, making Derek’s face screw up at the mental image.

“Not gonna happen.”

“Then while your dedication to safe sex is very cute, it’s not exactly necessary.” Stiles grinned, tilting his head back and exposing his neck, knowing exactly what it did to his alpha boyfriend. Derek’s back stiffened. “Get down here, Sourwolf. Let’s do this.”

It wasn’t movie-perfect. It was awkward and fumbling and there were elbows everywhere and Stiles made dumb jokes to cover his nervousness, and Derek fretted about hurting him with his werewolf strength even when Stiles insisted it was going to hurt a little regardless, being the first time. It wasn’t the porn-worthy orgasm-fest Stiles had imagined in his fantasies about screwing Derek Hale.

It was so much better.

Derek’s hands were careful like Stiles was the most precious thing in the world to him, his eyes
going wide in awe and arousal when he found Stiles’ prostate for the first time and Stiles about flew off the bed in pleasure. When he slid inch by inch into Stiles, their eyes locked, Stiles was pretty sure his brain was going to short out. He wrapped his legs around Derek’s back, the werewolf reaching out for Stiles’ hand, threading their fingers together as he moved faster and faster, his eyes red but his face utterly human and beautiful, looking down at Stiles like he couldn’t believe they were there. Stiles’ heart ached, and he squeezed Derek’s hand. He just couldn’t believe they hadn’t got there sooner — it felt like everything in his life had been leading him to this point, drawing him to the incredible being that was Derek Hale. They had crashed together like asteroids, catching in the same orbit and drawing closer ever since, finally reaching the inevitable collision.

Derek thrust into him with a powerful flex of his hips, sending Stiles tipping over that glorious edge with a desperate gasp, his fingers digging into Derek’s shoulders and his mouth dropping open. Derek’s chest rumbled and Stiles felt him come too, the sensation strange but not unwelcome. Derek buried his face in Stiles’ neck, his teeth scraping against the sensitive skin and sending shockwaves through Stiles’ already overstimulated body, riding out the aftershocks together until they could breathe normally again, Derek slumped on top of Stiles, a comforting weight. At least until he started impacting Stiles’ ability to breathe. “Der, crushing me,” Stiles groaned, nudging halfheartedly at the werewolf’s shoulder. His limbs felt like they were lagging a couple seconds behind his brain, floppy and aching pleasantly. Derek grumbled, but obligingly shifted, pulling out of Stiles and rolling to the side a little, his mouth still on Stiles’ throat.

Stiles grimaced at the new feeling, sticky and empty and rapidly cooling. Sex was kinda gross. But awesome.

So, so awesome.

He expected to feel different afterwards. Older somehow, like he’d taken a step closer to adulthood. But mostly he felt blissed-out and sore and kind of in need of a shower.

He glanced down at Derek, who looked like he had no intention of moving any time soon. His hand rested on the werewolf’s back, his lips twitching as he watched the red marks left by his fingernails slowly fade away. Sometimes he wished he could mark Derek the same way the alpha obviously loved marking him, but mostly he was glad he couldn’t; Derek would have a little trouble being shirtless around the pack.

“Not bad, huh, babe?”

Derek lifted his head, raising one dark eyebrow at Stiles. “Not bad.” His voice was flat. Stiles smirked wickedly.

“Well, there’s always room for improvement. That’s what practice is for, right?” He tweaked Derek’s earlobe playfully. “Real talk, though? You just rocked my literal world, hot stuff. A+, ten out of ten, would bang again.”

Derek groaned, squeezing his eyes shut. “So many regrets,” he mock-sighed, making Stiles laugh loudly.

“Liar.” He sobered abruptly, anxiety clawing its way back into his sex-muddled brain. “Was it… okay for you?”

Derek’s arm wrapped around Stiles’ waist, pulling him in as if they weren’t already pressed together at every possible contact point. “You’re going to be smug and annoying if I answer that truthfully,” he mumbled, only Stiles’ long exposure to the Derek Hale brand of humour letting him hear the fond undertones. Stiles relaxed with relief, then grinned. Hell yeah.
The gross sticky sensation started to get unbearable, and Stiles tried to wiggle out of Derek’s embrace to go get a towel, but Derek’s grip was unyielding. “Der,” he whined, nudging at the werewolf’s arm. “Come on, I’m all sticky.”

“Not yet,” Derek said, slinging a leg over Stiles’ hips. That was easy for him to say; most of the mess had ended up on Stiles. “Comfy.”

“The pack would never believe me if I told them you’re secretly a cuddlebug.” Derek growled. Stiles grinned to himself. It was something about Derek that should have surprised him, but didn’t — the werewolf had always been tactile, even if it was shoving Stiles into walls or grabbing him by the shoulders. He was probably just touch-starved as hell. Stiles was determined to fix that; he was all about having Derek’s stupidly hot — metaphorically and physically — body all up in his personal space, as often as possible.

Except now. Because sticky was becoming crusty and crusty was disgusting.

“Let me go get a towel, then we can cuddle all you want, promise.” Derek made a sound of displeasure, but reluctantly lifted his arm and shuffled to the side, letting Stiles roll out of bed. An ache shot up his spine, and he knew it would probably hurt a lot more in the morning. Totally worth it.

He hurried to the bathroom to clean himself up, bringing the towel back to Derek, then let the possessive alpha werewolf drag him back into bed, covering Stiles’ body with his own. Stiles snuggled into the warmth, unable to stop the huge smile from creeping over his face. He’d just had sex with Derek Hale.

“Love you, Sourwolf.” He dropped a kiss on Derek’s shoulder, the only part of him he could actually reach to kiss. Derek had him cocooned pretty effectively. He was not going to be moving for a while.

Derek gave a rumble that Stiles interpreted as ‘I love you, too’, his teeth gently scraping Stiles’ collarbone.

“I’m gonna have a hell of a time covering that up,” Stiles said to himself, amused. His dad was probably going to notice the new love bites; Derek mauled his neck on the regular, but he hadn’t been over in a couple days, so the last marks were on their way to fading.

“Sorry,” Derek muttered abashedly. Stiles squeezed his hip affectionately.

“Believe me, I don’t mind,” he assured. “I just think it’s pushing Dad’s plausible deniability.” The sheriff never said anything about the marks, but they always made his face turn an interesting shade of purple. Stiles shifted, then winced, and Derek’s brows immediately furrowed.

“Are you okay? Did I hurt you?”

“I’m fine,” Stiles insisted. “I mean, yeah, a little sore, but in a good way. You were an absolute gentleman.” He smiled softly. “Thank you.”

“I just wanted it to be good for you.” This came out as a shy mumble, like Derek couldn’t believe he was admitting something so cliche. Stiles’ heart melted a little bit.

“Like I said, top marks.” He patted Derek’s hip, reaching down to squeeze his ass cheek with a grin.

Stiles didn’t do stillness easily. His brain was constantly running at a hundred miles an hour, his body always moving in some way; a bouncing leg, a drumming finger, constant restless motion. He could
feel that beginning to return, the urge to get up, to move. But he pushed it away, breathing in Derek’s scent and relishing the skin-to-skin contact. He didn’t want to be anywhere else in the world right now.

They’d have to move eventually. Stiles had high hopes for a shared shower, before he had to go pick up his drunk relatives and Derek had to head back to Beacon Hills. But that could all wait.

“I’ll be home in three days.” His voice broke the silence that could have lasted minutes or hours for all he knew, the time he’d spent inside his own head while Derek’s heavy body grounded him from straying too far into thought. “The day before school starts back.” The sheriff had offered to leave earlier, asking Stiles if he wanted a few days to goof off with his friends, but Stiles was good staying in Redford until they absolutely had to go. So much had happened in Redford, he was a little scared to break the bubble by leaving it.

“It’s about damn time,” Derek said. Jackson would be back in a couple of days, too. Allison’s flight landed in the morning — Stiles had already mentally said his goodbyes to Scott for the foreseeable future.

“You ready for the pack to stick their giant noses in our business?”

Derek hummed. “Has to happen eventually,” he remarked with a halfhearted shrug.

Stiles wasn’t sure if Derek would have the chance to visit again before he left, and he held the werewolf tighter, closing his eyes and basking in the moment. He wouldn’t get many more like them; just him and Derek, no pressing worries, like they were the only ones in the universe. Real life would kick in again soon, and they’d have to learn to navigate their relationship with the pack and school and potential threats — and then college, and living together, and fights and sex and morning cuddles and maybe marriage and kids and oooh boy Stiles was getting ahead of himself now. Time to roll that back.

He kissed Derek’s shoulder again, turning his face to the werewolf’s hair. A boy could dream, though.

Their final full day in Redford was mostly spent packing — Stiles and the sheriff were both amazed at how their stuff had managed to spread throughout the house. Stiles had already said his goodbyes to the town of Redford; one last lunch at the diner, ice cream for the last time, saying goodbye to his new friends from the library and promising to keep in touch. Now he just had to prepare himself for leaving Hannah.

It was so nice, having a woman around the house again. Hannah was so different from his mom, but there were still little things that just didn’t happen when it was only him and his dad. Plus, someone else to talk to about things; especially Derek-related things.

“You know you’re welcome to come stay whenever you want,” she told him for the sixth time that day, sat at his desk chair and watching him pack. She’d refused to sit on the bed, giving him a knowing look that made him blush. “You and Derek both. Any time you need to get away, or just miss me, drop me a text and come on over. This room is your room. Well, it’s my guest room. But it’s your room, whenever you want it.”

“I’ll keep that in mind. We have a guest room too, y’know,” he reminded, folding his new shirts carefully before packing them away.
“I know. Your dad and I already have some plans in the works, don’t worry.”

She left him to it, claiming she had to go pester her brother some more, and Stiles hurriedly packed up all the books and things under his bed that definitely would have gotten some odd looks.

The three of them cooked dinner together, and the kitchen was full of laughter and smiles as they ate, Hannah at one point getting a little teary-eyed over them leaving and blaming it on the bottle of wine she’d cracked open during the cooking process. She hugged Stiles tight when he went to go to bed, and he squeezed her back just as hard.

Just as he was getting ready to go to sleep, there was a knock on the door. The sheriff stuck his head in. “You got a minute, kid?”

“What’s up?” Stiles asked, for a second flashing back to the beginning of summer, where this whole thing had began.

“Just wanted to talk for a second,” the sheriff said, slipping into the room and shutting the door behind him. “I’ve let you have a lot of independence this summer. Especially after Derek started coming around. You’re getting older, it comes with the territory, and so far you’ve been pretty responsible. Secret werewolf boyfriends and questionable tattoos aside,” he added with a pointed look, making Stiles blush. “I’m still trying to figure out this whole pack thing. I can’t promise I won’t freak out about it sometimes, but I’ll try and give you your space, as long as you swear you’ll keep me in the loop on things. Even if you don’t want me to do anything about it; I just want to know where you’re at, Stiles. I can’t live worrying if my next call-out is going to be for you.”


“You can’t promise that. But you can promise to let me help you, where I can. You said this pack thing is like a family, right?” Stiles nodded. “Then if you’re Hale pack, so am I. Where you go, I go. That’s how this whole fatherhood thing works. Your family is mine. So if your family is Derek Hale and this ragtag bunch of misfits he collected, well, I guess I have a few more kids than just you and Scott McCall, now.”

Stiles swallowed the lump in his throat. “Dad…”

“It’s a big change,” the sheriff continued, as if Stiles hadn’t spoken. He clearly had a lot to say, and didn’t want to be derailed. “But the basics are the same. No more secrets, Stiles. I’ll let you have the same kind of freedom you’ve had this summer, as long as there’s no secrets, no lies. And your grades don’t drop, but I have a feeling I don’t need to worry about that.”

If getting chased by monsters trying to kill him and trying to deal with a newly-turned werewolf hadn’t dented his 4.0 GPA, Stiles doubted a new boyfriend would either. “I won’t let you down, Dad,” he vowed, making the sheriff smile.

“I know, kiddo. And, one more thing,” he added, his expression a little pained. “I would very much like to have my deputies ever have to bring you and Derek in for parking up, or public indecency. I don’t care what the two of you do in your free time, but for the love of God, please don’t make me or anyone I work with have to write you up for it. Especially not while you’re underage.”

Stiles couldn’t stop the snort that escaped him, imagining himself and Derek in the Camaro at Lovers’ Lookout, or any of the popular hook-up spots. Stiles knew which areas were patrolled regularly; he’d never be so stupid as to go there. And Derek, with his wolf senses, would never let them get caught if they did decide to park up somewhere.
“I don’t want that happening any more than you do, Dad, believe me,” he assured vehemently. Some
of those deputies had known him as a toddler, were practically family. No one involved needed that
kind of mental scarring.

“Good.”

“Thanks for being so cool about all this, Dad,” Stiles said, running a hand through his newly-cut
hair. “Not just the werewolf stuff. Everything.” He wasn’t sure how many dads would learn that
their kid had been secretly meeting and dating someone six years their senior and just roll with it so
easily. Especially not when they’d previously arrested that person.

“I’m just glad you’re finally being honest with me,” the sheriff replied with a shrug. Stiles winced.
“Besides, I’ve gotten to know Derek a little better recently. It’s a little tough to break through that
shell of his, but he’s a good kid, and it’s obvious he’s crazy about you. Even with the age difference,
and the werewolf situation — I can’t really think of a better person to date my son. I’ll worry a little
less, whenever you’re out fighting evil or whatever, knowing he’s out there with you. He’ll protect
you when I can’t.”

“I’ll protect him, too,” Stiles pointed out, needing the sheriff to know that while Derek would give
his life for Stiles in a heartbeat, Stiles would do the same without question.

“Then maybe between the two of you, you might both come out of things alive,” the sheriff retorted,
smirking. “One last thing. When you’re settled back at school, we’re having Scott and Melissa over
for dinner sometime. Derek, too.”

Brow furrowed, Stiles gave his dad a questioning look. “Why? Did you need to talk more about
werewolf stuff?”

The sheriff’s smirk widened. “No, I just wanna see Scott’s face when he realises how sappy and
gross you two are when you’re in private. Give him a taste of his own medicine.”

Stiles laughed, shaking his head at his dad’s vindictive expression. If anyone ever asked Stiles why
he was the way he was, he just had to point to his dad.

The apple sure as hell didn’t fall far from the tree.
Chapter 16

It was a very different Stiles Stilinski than the one who arrived in Redford three months ago who shut the trunk of his Jeep, officially declaring himself ready to leave. Different in so many ways — all of them, in his opinion, long overdue.

“Let’s make it happen, Captain,” he announced, offering a salute to his dad. Hannah let out a loud sigh, leaning on her crutches and watching them forlornly.

“I guess it’s time,” she agreed, demanding one last round of hugs.

It was harder than he’d expected, to leave Redford. But there was a bubble of excitement brewing in his chest that grew bigger and bigger the closer he got back to Beacon Hills. Once again, he wished he had company during the drive. He couldn’t even call Derek — he was busy supervising the delivery and installation of all the kitchen counters and cabinets at the house.

To his surprise, when he was about an hour away from home, his phone rang. It was Scott. “Hey, buddy, what’s up?” Stiles greeted, turning on his bluetooth.

“Hi, Stiles. So, here’s the thing.” And immediately, Stiles knew what was coming. He wasn’t even surprised. “I accidentally left all my homework to the last minute — there was summer school stuff, and then Allison got home, and I just totally forgot, and I know we were gonna hang out tonight but I think my mom might actually murder me if I don’t get this stuff done.”

“It’s all good, Scotty,” Stiles assured, not even mad about it. Leaving his homework to the last minute — regardless of the reason — was such a typical Scott McCall move. “I’ll see you at school tomorrow?”

“Sure thing, bro. It’s good to have you back.” Scott hung up, and Stiles turned his music back up, grinning to himself.

In many ways, this was a better way for things to go. Now he wouldn’t see anyone until he showed up at school — he could get the full impact of their reactions all together. He smirked. Oh, he had a plan.

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Dropping his bags on the floor beside his bed, Stiles looked around his room with a satisfied smile. It was good to be back, now that he knew it was for good and not just a weekend. His room at Hannah’s had been great, but there was nothing quite like being in your own bedroom after some time away.

His eyes caught on a book lying on the desk — it wasn’t one he recognised, looked like one of Derek’s historical fiction novels. His brow furrowed, and he studied the room closer. He hadn’t left it spotless after his weekend visit, but he knew he hadn’t left the pillows piled up against the headboard like that, and he was pretty sure he’d closed his wardrobe door. He started putting the clues together, rolling his eyes at the conclusion.

Apparently, he hadn’t locked his window properly when he left.

‘Were you hanging out in my room while I was gone? Creepewolf ;’ he text his boyfriend, chuckling to himself as he unzipped his suitcase. If he didn’t unpack everything now, he’d get caught up in school stuff and be living out of a suitcase for approximately the next month and a half.
‘So that’s where I left my book’ was Derek’s response, making Stiles laugh. Shameless, shameless creeperwolf. God, he loved him.

As he unpacked, he went through his wardrobe critically, piling up some of his old clothes to take out to donate at the weekend. Some of those t-shirts were long overdue their final sendoff, and he grimaced at the realisation of how many items of clothing he still owned from middle school. How did they even fit still?

He hid his mini-library of supernatural texts in the bottom of the wardrobe where they usually lived, eagerly waiting the day the Hale house had an actual library he could store them in once more. He’d mostly typed up and organised all the data he could get out of them; they were just taking up space, now.

Finally, he was all settled in like he’d never left, and as he was putting the suitcase back in the hall closet his dad jogged up the stairs. “Hey, kid, I’m gonna head in to the station for a minute, catch up on everything.”

“How about I come with?” Stiles asked, mostly out of boredom. The sheriff blinked, but nodded with a shrug.

“Sure, why not. You don’t have anywhere else to be?”

“Scott’s finishing his summer homework,” Stiles explained. The sheriff sighed.

“That boy,” he muttered exasperatedly.

Stiles hopped into the passenger seat of his dad’s cruiser, phone in hand as he scrolled absently through Facebook. Most of the posts were about going back to school, whether it was bemoaning the end of summer or gushing excitedly about seeing all their friends again. Stiles had both emotions warring inside him, but the latter was starting to win out. He was so ready for senior year.

His phone began to buzz in his hand, ‘Sourwolf’ flashing up on his screen with a photo of Derek scowling, half-asleep. Stiles’ grin widened. “Hey, you,” he greeted, unable to keep the warmth out of his tone. “Kitchen all done?”

“You just got to tile and paint,” Derek confirmed. “It’s really coming together.”

“Can’t wait for you to give me the tour on Saturday.” The pack were all heading over for a weekend of painting and decorating, and Stiles couldn’t wait. Pictures definitely didn’t do the place justice.

“What are you up to? All settled in okay?” Derek asked.

“Riding with dad to the station. I’m all unpacked and everything, be very impressed.” Stiles almost mentioned something about the book Derek left behind, but decided against it; his dad wasn’t yet aware that Derek was a pro at climbing through Stiles’ window. He’d prefer to keep it that way.

“I am,” Derek confirmed fondly. “I thought for sure that suitcase would be sitting in your room for me to trip over for the next couple weeks.”

“Oh, ye of little faith,” Stiles teased. “Where are you at? Still at the house, or the loft?” There wasn’t any pack stuff going on tonight, Derek wanting everyone well-rested for the first day of school.

“At the house, setting up paint cans. I figured I can get all the edges cut in while you’re all at school the next few days, put up the swatches for the colours we’re still not sure about. With any luck, we can get the whole house painted over the weekend if Peter and I do all the detail work now.”
“Just make sure you save some work for the rest of us,” Stiles teased. They turned the corner towards the station, the familiar building drawing closer. “I’ll let you get to it, then. Go be a perfectionist with your paint corners before we come in and mess everything up.”

“I’m not a perfectionist!” Derek argued, making Stiles laugh. “I’ll talk to you later.”

“Sure thing, Sourwolf. I love you.”

“Love you, too.”

Stiles hung up, still smiling, and he caught his dad’s eye. “What?” he asked warily, eyeing the weird look the older man had on his face. It couldn’t be the sign-off; his dad had definitely heard him say ‘I love you’ to Derek before. The sheriff pulled in to his parking spot.

“Nothing, just…” He shook his head. “You just really reminded me of your mom, right then.” Stiles’ breath caught in his throat.

“Yeah?”

“It’s the little things.” The sheriff cut the engine and rested his hands on the wheel, making no move to get out of the car. “Even without hearing Derek’s side of that call, it sounded just like a conversation she and I would’ve had. You should have heard her when we moved into our house — she just wanted to get as much colour on the walls as soon as possible. I had to cut-in after she’d already gone to bed, or she wouldn’t wait for me to do it and we’d end up with ragged edges.”

Stiles snickered; that sounded like something his mom would do. And, honestly, also something he would do.

“You and Derek sound like you’ve been together a lot longer than you have, you know that? Feels like it should scare me, but it doesn’t.” Stiles hummed in agreement at his dad’s remark. He definitely felt like he’d been with Derek for longer than a couple of months. He just took is as a compliment on how awesome and inevitable their relationship was.

“Yeah, it was kind of a long time coming,” he mused. “Now come on, the deputies will start thinking you’ve changed your mind about coming home if we sit out here much longer.”

The sheriff laughed, popping his door open. “They wish.”

Stiles’ entrance to the station was accompanied by teasing wolf-whistles, making him blush as several of his dad’s colleagues complimented his new look. “He’s definitely your son, sheriff,” Deputy Graeme remarked, and the sheriff levelled her with a look.

“Flattery will not get you out of night shifts at the lookout, Tara,” he retorted. She cursed.

“It was worth a shot. Hey, Stiles, you never know — this might be the year you finally join the ranks out there. I promise not to tell your dad if I catch you,” she said with a wink. Stiles laughed, flashing back to the conversation he and his dad had about exactly that, watching his dad’s face turn red.

“I heard that,” he growled at his deputy, who flushed.

“No one’s gonna catch me out there, Daddio,” Stiles assured. One of the other deputies patted him on the shoulder.

“Don’t be so down on yourself, Stiles. Any girl would be lucky to have you,” he insisted supportively.
Stiles wondered how long it would take for news of him and Derek Hale to filter round to the station. There were some reactions he really wished he could see.

They didn’t stay long, Stiles hanging out at the reception desk while his dad went into his office to discuss work. He made smalltalk with those who weren’t busy, chatting a little about his summer and catching up on all the station gossip he’d missed over the last few months. Forget the soccer moms, or the nosy old ladies — if you wanted to know what was going on in a town, talk with the local law enforcement. They knew everything about everything, and mentioned more in Stiles’ earshot than he thought they even noticed he was listening to. His lips pursed at a mention of weird howling noises coming from the woods lately, making a mental note to talk to Derek. He was home now, there was no excuse to keep him in the dark.

Speak of the devil, Stiles was utterly unsurprised to find Derek lounging on his bed when he returned home, a tiny smear of pale grey paint on his jaw. Stiles smirked, running a finger over the mark and leaning in for a kiss. “Hey there, creeperwolf,” he teased, falling down onto the mattress beside him with a groan of satisfaction. “God, I’ve missed my own bed. Even better with you in it,” he added, resting his head on Derek’s bicep. The werewolf cuddled close, getting comfortable curled around Stiles.

“Welcome home,” he murmured, lips curving into a smile against Stiles’ hair.

“It’s good to be home. Now,” he said, tapping Derek on the nose scoldingly. “Tell me everything. You’ve been keeping secrets, mister. What’s the Alpha Pack up to?”

Derek sighed, turning to look Stiles in the eye. “They’ve made a couple moves to fight us, but nothing we haven’t been able to handle. There’s at least three of them, probably close to five or six.” He told Stiles about the three scuffles the pack had gotten into so far, running a hand soothingly down Stiles’ arm as he described Isaac getting his thigh split open, Erica freezing up mid-fight at the sight of the alpha who had tortured her and Boyd. Stiles’ heart was in his throat, guilt pooling — none of them had said anything to him, allowing him to live in his little bubble of happiness. Why hadn’t they said anything?

“There was nothing you could have done,” Derek finished, catching the look on Stiles’ face. “We didn’t want to worry you.”

“Yeah, that’s not how this works,” Stiles retorted. “I’ve been looking into this Alpha Pack, finding other packs who have dealt with them in the past. It… usually doesn’t go well.” Every account he’d seen online, buried deep in obscure forums and blog posts, said that the Alpha Pack never decided that an alpha was worthy of his pack, and always left bloodshed in their wake. They were toying with the Hale pack right now. “Keep me in the loop, Derek. This won’t work if you keep shutting me out to keep me safe.”

“There was nothing you could have done,” Derek finished, catching the look on Stiles’ face. “We didn’t want to worry you.”

“You’re home now,” Derek replied, as if that settled the matter. Stiles huffed. “Speaking of home, are you excited for your big movie entrance tomorrow?” his voice was teasing, his eyes alight. Stiles refused to let his embarrassment show, though Derek could probably smell it.

“Yes, actually,” he replied haughtily. “I’ve already picked out my outfit.”

Derek snorted, but didn’t comment on that. “How are you feeling about seeing the pack?” His tone softened, concern sneaking in. Stiles let out a long breath.

“I think it’ll be okay.” He’d done a lot of thinking since his visit home, and spent a lot more time talking to the pack without letting his brain convince him that they were just humouring him. “I just… I like them. All of them. Even Isaac.” Because when the beta wasn’t warily eyeing Stiles like
he was about to steal Scott away forever, he was a sassy little shit whose sense of humour was right up Stiles’ alley. “Hell, even Jackson isn’t so bad these days. I just… I want them to like me, without it feeling like it’s just because their alpha told them to.”

“They do like you,” Derek insisted. “Trust me, you’d know if they didn’t. They’re just dumb teenagers.”

“You’re dating one of those dumb teenagers, don’t forget,” Stiles pointed out, laughing when Derek gave him a look that said he was questioning that particular life choice. “I know it’ll be fine, once we all get used to hanging out and fight a few more monsters together, and everyone’s egos can chill the fuck out. But right now… they’re the cool kids who already have this super tight bond, and I’m just dumb, dorky Stiles Stilinski hanging on the sidelines and waiting for them to notice me.”

“Stiles,” Derek sighed, propping himself up on his elbow and looking down at his boyfriend. “I mean this in the nicest way possible, but you’ve spent so long thinking people see you a certain way that you don’t let them look at you as anything else.” Stiles’ brow furrowed, and Derek continued. “The only person in this pack who sees you as dumb, dorky Stiles Stilinski is you. Give yourself a chance to be more than what you think you are.”

Stiles stared up at Derek, an unexpected wave of emotion cutting off any words he might have tried to use to defend himself. Eventually, he coughed awkwardly. “Damn,” he muttered, his eyes stinging. “Derek Hale coming in with the emotional sucker-punch, there. I can’t believe I ever thought you didn’t have emotions that weren’t rage and angst.” Derek rolled his eyes, looking embarrassed now too, and Stiles leaned up to kiss him.

“Everyone has already noticed you,” Derek murmured. “And those who haven’t sure as hell will after tomorrow. Get used to it.”

Not wanting to dwell on the absolute truth-bomb Derek had just rocked his entire world-view with, Stiles stole another kiss, sliding a hand around Derek’s jaw and opening his mouth to the werewolf. Derek went with it, equally done with discussing emotions so plainly. His fingers tugged at the hem of Stiles’ shirt, sliding over his abs, one powerful thigh sneaking between Stiles’.

They didn’t let it get too far, knowing the sheriff was just downstairs. But Stiles was surprised at Derek’s teasing nips and tickling fingers, at the smirk on his face when he pressed a line of kisses down Stiles’ chest, playfully wrestling him until Stiles was on top, straddling Derek’s hips. “Someone’s in a good mood,” Stiles drawled, stroking Derek’s cheek fondly. Derek’s returning smile was far more unrestrained than usual.

“My pack are all home,” he replied simply. “I don’t have to drive three hours just to see you. My wolf is settled.”

Stiles kinda got what he was saying. Ever since he’d crossed back into Beacon Hills, the hollow feeling he associated with his stretch pack bonds was gone, replaced instead with a feeling of warmth and security. If it was like that for him as a human, he could hardly imagine what Derek, the pack’s alpha, was feeling now.

“I’m sorry I was so far away,” he said, even though Jackson had been on another freaking continent. “However, let me point out that no one said you had to drive any distance to see me. You chose to do that three times a week.” His voice was teasing, and he yelped when Derek pinched him gently on the side.

“Next summer,” the alpha declared petulantly, sliding a hand up Stiles’ chest. “None of you are allowed to go anywhere.”
Stiles laughed, letting himself be drawn into a deep, toe-curling kiss. Yeah, he could make that promise.
Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

Sorry it's a little late, I had work stuff going on. But I hope the content makes up for it~

Stiles looked himself over in the mirror, butterflies filling his belly. He was wearing his favourite outfit of his new clothes — black jeans, the green woodland-design t-shirt, and his new black leather jacket. He looked good.

Shouldering his backpack, he went downstairs and met his dad in the kitchen, trying desperately not to blush as the man eyed him over. The sheriff smirked. “Knock ‘em dead, kid.” He grabbed his keys, straightening the collar of his uniform. “I’ll see you later.”

Stiles wolfed down a quick breakfast and double checked his backpack for all the necessary papers and files and essays, determined to be organised on the first day for once in his life. His phone bleeped, a text from Derek wishing him luck that made him smile, responding with only the heart emoji. Mostly because he knew Derek was baffled and annoyed by emojis.

It should have occurred to him before he pulled into the school parking lot that with Isaac now living at the loft, Derek would be the one driving him to school. He was surprised to see the Camaro still sat in the parking lot, a leather jacket clad form that could only be Derek Hale stood with his back to the stream of cars filing in. The rest of the pack and Allison were with him, though Scott was still missing. Stiles pulled the Jeep into an empty spot, taking a steadying breath as the butterflies doubled, a new plan growing in his mind. Go big or go home, right?

Before he could step out of the Jeep, there was a loud sputtering engine noise that cut over the chatter and hum of hundreds of students returning to school, and Scott McCall sped into the school parking lot on a beat-up dirt bike. Of course he wasn’t wearing a helmet — he really wanted to test that werewolf healing when his brains were splattered all over the road?

Dozens of pairs of eyes locked on the teen, and Stiles laughed to himself quietly as he saw the smug grin on his friend’s face. Scott had told Stiles about the dirt bike the day he’d bought it — followed by a phone call from Melissa begging Stiles to make her son see reason, half-yelling at Scott who made indignant noises in the back of the call.

Allison’s eyes were definitely drawn to him, making Stiles wonder how long it would take for her to give up on her self-imposed ‘just friends’ declaration. Scott greeted her before the rest of the pack, oblivious to the light dimming in Isaac’s gaze when Scott turned back to Allison, probably asking her what she thought of the bike if his eager puppy-dog face was anything to go by. That whole situation was a powder keg, but Stiles was somewhat relieved to have one thing in his life that was just normal teenage drama.

He was running out of time. “I got this,” he muttered to himself, refusing to chicken out now. It was his big movie moment, the pinnacle of his summer transformation, his ‘hot girl moment’ as Derek kept teasing him with. Time to go turn some heads.

Screwing up his confidence, he grabbed his backpack and got out of the Jeep, striding towards the pack, who didn’t seem to have noticed him yet. That wasn’t to say that no one had noticed him. His
step gained a bit of bounce as he heard the whispers start up, the ‘oh my God, is that Stilinski?’ the appreciative once-overs and muttered ‘when the hell did he get hot?’ following him. The werewolves were all useless, oblivious to his approach. Stiles could see by the slight twitch of Derek’s shoulders the exact moment the alpha noticed him — when Stiles was at least thirty feet away, clear across the parking lot. His heart fluttered; his boyfriend always insisted he’d know Stiles’ scent and heartbeat in a crowd of thousands.

He prayed Derek wouldn’t turn around, would let him enact his hastily concocted plan. To his relief, the alpha didn’t move, arms folded over his chest as he spoke to Isaac about something. He was getting looks, too; clearly out of place in the crowd of high-schoolers. Stiles heard a couple of freshman girls wondering if he was perhaps a new teacher, which almost made him burst out laughing there and then.

Stiles kept going, his heart beating furiously against his ribs, amazing him that none of the betas had heard it yet. If he was actually in danger, he’d be pretty pissed at them right now for not noticing a thing.

Lydia was the first to see him, and his internal fourteen year-old Stiles practically fainted at the way her eyes widened at the sight of him, her gaze trailing over his body, an approving smirk sliding across her perfectly painted lips. Years ago, he would have given entire limbs to have Lydia Martin look at him like that. Now it was just a brief spark of joy, barely making a dent in his buzzing mess of excitement and anticipation and nerves. Lydia didn’t call out to him, whether she recognised he was a man on a mission or just didn’t see the need Stiles wasn’t sure, but he was eternally grateful for her silence as he closed the distance between himself and the pack, sneaking up behind Derek — as if Derek didn’t already know he was there, seriously — sliding his arms around the man’s waist and propping his chin on the leather-clad shoulder. “Hey, Sourwolf,” he greeted, the breathless quality to his tone the only outward sign of how much he was freaking the fuck out.

The betas were gaping incredulously. Scott looked like he was expecting Derek to wolf out right there and eviscerate Stiles in front of the entire student body. Derek didn’t bat an eyelash, turning his head to kiss Stiles’ temple and briefly bury his nose in the teen’s hairline, inhaling his scent in an obviously wolf-like move of possession that couldn’t escape even his dumb betas. “Good morning,” he replied quietly, gaze softening for the briefest moment.

There was a stunned silence. Stiles held his ground, his heart thumping hard against Derek’s back, and the werewolf’s hand covered his at his stomach, squeezing gently. Eventually, Lydia huffed. “Jackson, pay up,” she said flatly, holding out a hand to her boyfriend. He cursed. “Why the hell couldn’t you have kept pining ’til graduation, Stilinski?” he muttered, digging his wallet out of his back pocket.

“Me? Derek was the one who caved,” Stiles argued, moving to lean against Derek’s side with the werewolf’s arm draped comfortably over his shoulders. He could have kissed Lydia and Jackson both right then, breaking the tension so smoothly. He wasn’t surprised they’d already guessed about his feelings for Derek; Lydia had spent so long being the recipient of his feelings, she probably knew the second that had changed. “I would have been perfectly happy implementing my brand new five year plan.”

“You had a five year plan?” Derek asked, amused. Stiles poked him in the side.

“It was a great plan. Maybe I’ll tell you about it some time.” It was three years of solid pining and hiding his feelings, followed by a year of somehow becoming super hot/rich/famous/really great at saving the world, and then a year of flaunting that in front of Derek while continuing to hide his feelings until the werewolf realised he was crazy about Stiles. Practically foolproof.
Okay, maybe Derek’s method had been a little more successful.

“What. This is. What??” Scott spluttered, staring in horrified shock at the pair of them. “You’ve been gone all summer! When did you have time to do… that.” He waved a hand in Derek’s direction, and Stiles snorted. Wrong wording there, buddy.

“Unlike the rest of you assholes, Derek came to visit me,” he said teasingly, his smile assuring he wasn’t really mad about it. He honestly didn’t know what he’d have done if the pack had come to see him in Redford.

“This explains so much,” Isaac murmured, realisation dawning. “I’d been wondering why Derek was so chill this summer.”

The bell rang, warning the students they only had ten minutes to get to class. Stiles suddenly became painfully aware of the number of people who were staring at him by now — dorky Stiles Stilinski, suddenly muscled and well-dressed, wrapped around the glorious specimen of manhood that was gracing their high-school lives. He resisted the urge to bury his face in Derek’s shoulder.

“We have to get to class,” Lydia announced, linking her arm through Jackson’s. “Say goodbye to your boo, Stiles.”

Derek growled at the term of endearment, making Stiles laugh. He turned to face the werewolf, raising an eyebrow questioningly. He didn’t want to overstep any boundaries, but there was one final part to his ultimate movie moment. Derek got the gist, rolling his eyes in exasperation, but the next thing Stiles knew there were hands fisting in the lapels of his leather jacket, and Derek’s lips were on his. It was not a chaste, school-safe kiss. It was bruising, claiming, letting all the busybodies staring know that Stiles Stilinski was not available. Stiles cupped Derek’s jaw, leaning into the embrace easily, his eyes fluttering open when they parted.

“Have a good day at school,” Derek murmured fondly, smoothing the front of Stiles’ jacket down. “I’ll see you later.”

Stiles suddenly realised he would have to walk away with the start of a boner that would probably be obvious in his new jeans, and that explained the smug, satisfied grin on Derek’s lips. He huffed, patting his boyfriend’s cheek gently. “Bye, Sourwolf. Don’t chew up all the carpets while I’m out.” He yelped at the pinch to the side that earned him, laughing and reluctantly drawing away.

“Behave yourselves,” Derek said to his pack, eyes meeting with each of them in turn, before he squeezed the back of Stiles’ neck in another wolf-driven gesture, and turned back to his car. Stiles fell into step between Erica and Isaac, several paces in front of the still-gobsmacked Scott.

Erica knocked her shoulder gently against his, her ruby red lips curled in a wicked smirk. “Nice, Stilinski,” she declared, offering a fist. Stiles obligingly bumped it with his own. “Very nice.”

“He is pretty, isn’t he?” Stiles agreed. “Speaking of which, you’re looking lovely this morning.”

“You’re not the only one with breaking hearts on their to-do list today, Batman.” Erica was in her own leather jacket, a low-cut tank top framing her impressive cleavage, her skinny jeans practically painted on and her black leather boots with a truly staggering heel. It could have looked too try-hard, but instead Erica looked like she’d walked out of the coolest biker bar around. It was at odds with her almost childlike expression of glee as she linked arms with Boyd, leaning into her boyfriend.

Stiles smirked, hearing his name follow him in a round of whispers as he walked towards his locker, several people glancing away hurriedly when he caught their eye. He didn’t deny Erica’s accusation,
gathering his books ready for Biology class and skilfully hiding his surprise when the three pack members he shared the class with appeared at his locker, ready to walk with him. Lydia was one of them, and her Queen-Bee expression softened a little when she looked at him. “It’s been far too quiet without you around, Stiles,” she told him, kissing Jackson goodbye as he headed to his own class with Boyd. There was a tension to both Erica and Boyd’s shoulders as the pair of them separated, but before Stiles could move Isaac was right at the blonde’s side, whining playfully about how much the Biology homework had sucked. He saw Jackson sling an arm across Boyd’s shoulders as the two of them walked away, and his heart warmed.

Just like that, they were a pack.

Stiles had hoped to make an impact, but he was truly staggered at the amount of appreciative glances he got all day, especially when he took his leather jacket off on his way to English. Erica shamelessly squeezed his bicep, wolf-whistling loudly.

“Careful there, or his boyfriend’ll beat you up,” Danny joked, appearing at their sides. He’d cut his hair since Stiles had last seen him. It looked good. He winked at Stiles. “Cousin Miguel, huh? I sure as hell don’t kiss my cousin like that.”

Stiles flushed bright red, remembering that whole encounter, and Danny burst out laughing. “Relax, Stilinski. I knew he wasn’t your cousin. There was way too much UST in that room for you two to be related.” He smiled earnestly. “I’m happy for you. And jealous. Your boyfriend is fine.”

“Thanks, Danny. And hands off, he’s mine,” he teased, making the Hawaiian teen grin.

“You can have him. Little too much stubble for my tastes. Besides, I’ve got my eyes on the new kids.”

“New kids?” Stiles asked, perplexed. He hadn’t seen any new kids in class yet. Maybe there were some cute Juniors Danny was eyeing up.

“The two hot as hell twins? You haven’t seen them yet? Believe me, you’d know if you’d seen them,” Danny insisted, claiming the chair behind Stiles as they all took their seats in the classroom. Stiles had Erica on one side and Allison on the other, the dark-haired archer offering a hesitant smile, clearly unsure how to act around him with her new standing with Scott — and Scott’s less-than-positive reaction to Stiles’ new boyfriend. Stiles grinned at her, refusing to let her draw away because his best friend was a dumbass. She could be pack, if she wanted to be, and Stiles would happily welcome her with open arms.

“I’ll keep an eye out,” Stiles confirmed, glancing back to Danny. “This school isn’t that big.”

“There’s two of them, so I figured I’ve got a fair chance of at least one of them swinging my way,” Danny replied, smirking.

“As if anyone could say no to you.” Danny’s bark of laughter was cut off prematurely as the teacher entered the classroom, silence quickly falling. Stiles took his seat and directed his attention to the front, his thoughts still stuck on the new kids. The last transfer in to Beacon Hills had been Allison, and look how that had turned out. What sort of trouble would these twins bring?

Scott didn’t speak to Stiles all morning, though they saw each other several times and even shared a couple of classes. Every time he even considered it, Scott would stare at him with an expression that
was a mix of confused and betrayed, and Stiles abandoned the thought, turning back to whoever else he was with. He had at least one other pack member in every class, and they seemed determined to make sure he was welcomed back into the fold, scenting him with a hand on his shoulder or a nudge to the side, like they were making up for lost time. He wasn’t sure if it was because they’d missed him, or because he smelled so strongly of their alpha — he suspected the latter, knowing from the Hale journals that the pack would be subconsciously drawn towards the Alpha Mate, especially in the early stages. Even Lydia was getting involved, looking amused as she fixed Stiles’ hair with skilled fingers at lunch.

“Incoming,” she said quietly, nodding her head over Stiles’ shoulder. He turned, dread rising when he saw Scott walking his way with a look of intent.

“Can we talk? Privately?” Scott asked, giving a pointed glance to the rest of the pack, who were unashamedly watching him, glaring. Stiles rolled his eyes. Overprotective puppies.

“Sure.” He got to his feet, leading Scott out of the cafeteria and far enough away until he was pretty sure the other betas wouldn’t be able to eavesdrop. “Look, Scott,” he said, wanting to get his piece out first. “I’m sorry I didn’t say anything sooner. But… we were still figuring things out, and I wanted to have it to myself for a little while. I didn’t want to have to defend my relationship when I wasn’t even in the county.”

“What the hell happened over the summer that Derek Hale suddenly became a person you wanted to date? Who wanted to date you?” Scott burst out. He’d obviously been sitting on that thought for a while, and Stiles almost laughed.

“Believe me, Scott, the summer wasn’t the catalyst for that,” he muttered dryly. “I wanted to date Derek way before then. I don’t know when he started wanting me, but… there wasn’t some kind of magical personality transplant, on either of our parts. I’m the same person I’ve always been, and Derek’s the same person he’s always been. He’s a little more open, but he’s still Sourwolf. The two of us…” He ran a hand through his hair. “It’s complicated. But I don’t have to explain it all to you. I just need you to accept my choice.”

“How the fuck can I do that, Stiles?” Scott burst out plaintively. “It’s Derek! Have you forgotten all the shit he put us through?”

“Have you forgotten that none of that shit was his fault?” Stiles retorted. “He was the one trying to get us out of that shit. He was only ever trying to help; you were always the one antagonising him.”

“He threatened to rip your throat out! With his teeth!”

“Yeah, well, communication isn’t his strong point,” Stiles dismissed. “He’s a good guy, Scott. And a good alpha. You’d see that if you put an ounce of effort into caring about the pack.”

“Oh, so suddenly now you’re fucking him you’re all about being Hale pack?” Scott retorted sharply. Stiles took a deep breath, resisting the urge to punch his friend.

“I have always been about being Hale pack. I have always been about doing anything that might keep me and the people I care about safe. Long before Derek and I got together.” He didn’t know what to say to make Scott take off the Allison-tinted glasses he’d been wearing all year and make him realise how many times Derek Hale had saved both their asses, Stiles’ especially. How many times Scott had dropped the ball and Derek had picked it up without complaint.

“You’ve changed, man,” Scott declared, frowning as he looked at his friend. Stiles folded his arms over his chest.
“So have you,” he returned. “Not all change is a bad thing.” On his own part, it was long overdue. “Look, Scotty. I missed you this summer, dude, and you’re still my best friend. But if you’re going to stand here and badmouth Derek you can back the fuck off. He’s done nothing to you and I won’t hear it.”

Scott stared at him for a long moment, unsure what to make of this new, confident Stiles who would stand up to him for the sake of Derek Hale. Eventually, he sighed. “We’re missing lunch,” he declared, stalking back towards the cafeteria.

Apparently, that was that. For now. Stiles followed him, heading over to his spot with the rest of the pack. Allison was sat there, chatting happily with Lydia, so Scott had no choice but to come along. The pack looked up warily at their return, and to Stiles’ surprise it was Jackson who raised an eyebrow at him with a very clear ‘do you want me to punch him?’ expression on his face. Stiles shook his head, taking his seat. What had the universe come to, when Jackson Whittemore was offering to hit Scott on Stiles’ behalf — and Stiles was actually considering letting him.

“That must be the new eye-candy Danny was talking about,” Erica cut in, before the tension could get any worse. She pointed across the room, where two muscled, attractive brown-haired boys, completely identical, were walking across the cafeteria. The pack weren’t the only ones staring.

Stiles eyed them critically, his spidey-senses tingling. There was something off about them. The way they walked in absolute unison, the way their eyes scanned the crowd, lingering on the pack’s table for a second before moving on. It would have been totally innocuous — just two new kids looking for their place in the social hierarchy of the lunch room — if not for the way both their noses twitched. Stiles’ jaw tightened.

Werewolves.

He looked back to the pack; surely one of the betas could smell the presence of unfamiliar wolves. But none of them seemed to have come to the same conclusion. Only Lydia, who was looking at Stiles intently, nodded a fraction at the look in his eyes. She too glanced around their gathered werewolf friends, rolling her eyes. ‘Idiots’ she mouthed at Stiles. He stifled a snort.

Pulling out his phone, he dropped a quick text to Derek, asking if he’d noticed any unfamiliar wolves around recently. The twins had to come from somewhere, and not introducing yourself to the alpha of the territory before moving in was incredibly poor form.

“Great,” Scott grumbled, seeing the way Allison’s gaze lingered appreciatively on the twins. “As if this school needed more unfairly attractive guys.”

“It’s a burden some of us bear, McCall,” Jackson declared mock-humbly.

Scott glanced at Stiles, evidently expecting some kind of snarky response, but Stiles’ eyes were on his phone. Derek was as surprised as him about the new werewolves in town. “Oh, hey!” Scott said suddenly, reaching over to nudge Stiles’ shoulder. “I forgot, you weren’t home yet when I showed the rest of the pack.”

Stiles’ brow furrowed in confusion, but Lydia, Jackson and Erica all groaned in unison when Scott started taking off his jacket. “Put it away, McCall!” Lydia sighed.

“Derek probably already told you,” Scott added belatedly, and it took Stiles a second to realise what his friend was referring to. The wide bands of black ink wrapping around his bicep, just below the sleeve of his t-shirt.
“He did not,” Stiles confirmed, staring at the tattoo. He remembered what Derek had said about how werewolves got tattoos, and winced. Scott put himself under a blowtorch for that? What did the two bands even mean? There was no design, no writing; just two plain bold lines. “Why would he know?” It clicked immediately. “You got Derek to do it?” He’d taken a blowtorch to Stiles’ best friend and not said a word about it? Oh, he was so dead.

“We can’t get them done the regular way,” Scott said, dropping his voice furtively. “Y’know. The healing thing.”

“I know that,” Stiles replied. “But you don’t trust Derek to keep us safe, yet you trust him with a blowtorch to your arm?”

Scott blinked. His thoughts clearly weren’t that comprehensive. Stiles bit back a frustrated sigh, letting it drop. “It looks great, Scotty. Very cool.” He was lying, and the smirks of the other werewolves confirmed that they hadn’t missed that, but Scott preened, leaving his jacket off, much to Lydia’s annoyance.

For a minute, Stiles thought about revealing his own tattoo. It would probably get a better reaction than Scott’s — he was all for making personal choices without needing to explain them, but he was utterly baffled by any kind of reasoning Scott might have for his tattoo other than ‘because I could’. It was so… plain. He wasn’t into it. But Scott was happy, so he’d keep his mouth shut and his shirt on. They’d find out about his triskele eventually. He didn’t want to steal his friend’s thunder; Scott was pissed at him for enough things as it was.

-.-.-

Despite the tension sitting thick between Scott and Stiles, and the presence of two new werewolves that none of the betas seemed to notice, school was fairly uneventful for the rest of the day. Stiles was hopeful that Derek might come by to pick up Isaac, but he was riding with Erica and Boyd. However, the trio cornered him at his Jeep, and Stiles braced himself for some variation of ‘you hurt our alpha, we rip you to pieces’.


“What?”

“We figured Derek had some kind of help getting his shit together over the summer,” Isaac said bluntly. “At first we thought maybe Peter, or even Mrs McCall. But it being you makes way more sense.”


“The loft? The house? Taking Isaac shopping for new stuff, going to the movies with Erica?” he listed off. “Tell me with a straight face you didn’t have a hand in that.”

“The loft and the house were all Derek,” Stiles insisted quickly.

Erica smirked. “Only because he was trying to impress you. Build a home for you,” she cooed, making him roll his eyes, his cheeks reddening. “We’re not saying he didn’t mean it. But you were totally giving him advice, don’t even try and pretend you weren’t. So, y’know, thanks for looking out for the pack. For us.”

“Also, if you break our alpha’s heart, we’ll break your legs,” Isaac added cheerfully, making Stiles bark out a laugh. There it was.
“No heart breaking planned, I promise,” he assured, not needing to tell them how totally gone he was on their alpha. It was probably written all over his face. “Derek cares about you guys. He just has a little trouble… expressing things, sometimes.” He didn’t want them to think he was railroading Derek into taking care of his pack. He would do that all by himself, he just needed a little direction.

“And, well, you guys are my pack. Of course I’m looking out for you.”

This time it was Isaac who hugged him, and Stiles hugged back, surprised.

“See you tomorrow, Stiles,” Boyd said, squeezing his shoulder and wrapping an arm around Erica’s shoulders, beckoning her towards his car. Stiles was left alone at his Jeep, and his lips were stuck in a contemplative frown as he started his journey home.

Maybe Derek had been right about the pack accepting him. Stiles just had to let them in.

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Derek wasn’t waiting at the house when Stiles got home, but he’d barely been home for half an hour when there was a knock on the door. He went to answer it with a smirk on his face. “Look at you, using the door like a normal human,” he praised. Derek had used the front door at Hannah’s house when he came during the day, but this was his first visit to the Stilinski household that didn’t involve him climbing through the window. Stiles weirdly wanted to celebrate the milestone.

Derek leaned in to kiss him, dropping his nose to Stiles’ throat and letting out a low rumbling growl. “Yeah, your puppies were all over me today,” Stiles said, figuring Derek could smell all their scent marking.

“Our puppies,” Derek corrected. He looked incredibly pleased with it all. “You smell good. Like pack, not just me.” They stood there for a while, Derek breathing into Stiles’ neck, Stiles’ arms loosely around his boyfriend’s hips, until the closeness started doing things to Stiles that they probably didn’t have time for. He gently extricated Derek’s face from his throat, kissing him once more.

“You smell like paint,” he said to the werewolf, who grimaced. They started up the stairs to Stiles’ room, Derek still crowding close behind Stiles.

“Necessary evil. The sooner we get everything painted, the sooner the house can start smelling like pack. Decorating… it’s the worst. I only want to have to do this once.”

“Yeah, I can imagine.” Fresh-paint smell tickled Stiles’ nose and he was just a puny human. He couldn’t imagine having to deal with it with super-smell. “Hopefully we can knock it all out this weekend.”

His room was already set up for him watching Netflix, the laptop on the bed and the pillows gathered appropriately, and Derek’s shoulders relaxed as he got comfortable in the half-cocoon of Stiles’ scent. “How’d your big day go?” he asked, manhandling Stiles into his preferred cuddling position. Stiles grinned.

“Actually pretty awesome, thanks. Scott’s kinda butthurt — also, you helped him get a tattoo and didn’t tell me? Dude. Communication — but the rest of the pack took everything really well, and everyone else… I had a lot of jealous people ask me about my hot new boyfriend. Seems you standing there for a while before I arrived gave some people time to fantasise,” he teased. Derek huffed.

“Ever considered maybe it’s me they’re jealous of?” he pointed out with a smirk. “They’re probably
kicking themselves for not taking their chance while you were still single.”

Stiles blushed; as if any of the people who had talked to him today had even known his name before this morning. “Whatever, Sourwolf.” He paused, leaning into Derek’s embrace. “Thanks for, y’know, making out with me in front of the pack and the entire school. I know you’re not super huge on PDA.” That kiss had definitely been for Stiles’ benefit.

“I don’t mind so much when it’s you,” Derek admitted, the words making Stiles’ heart do a happy little dance. “Besides,” the alpha added with a smirk, “I enjoyed shocking the pack just as much as you did.”

Stiles laughed. “So you’ll make out with me in public whenever I want?” he teased, drawing a finger up Derek’s chest.

“Try it and find out,” was Derek’s playful response. Stiles smirked at him, kissing the man’s cheek. Challenge accepted.

“Pretty sure you can’t say no to me, Sourwolf,” he teased. Derek growled, but didn’t deny it.

“New werewolves in town?” Derek asked, his expression sliding from Derek-the-boyfriend to Derek-the-alpha. Stiles grew serious, pausing the show they were mostly ignoring.

“Twins. Aiden and Ethan. Mostly kept to themselves — not sure if it’s because they’re sketchy or just shy. Didn’t see any eyes flash, and they didn’t approach the pack, but they definitely know who we are. You need to talk to your betas about identifying other werewolves, by the way, not a single one of them sniffed the twins out.”

Derek frowned. “Then how did you recognise them?”

“Oh, please,” Stiles said with a roll of his eyes. “Lydia and I aren’t dumb, and you wolves aren’t as subtle as you think you are. Just trust me.”

“I’ll add it to the training schedule,” Derek promised. “And I’ll do some snooping. You keep an eye on them, see if you can get talking to them, but be careful. I don’t like not knowing who they are.”

“You should text Lydia about it,” Stiles suggested. “She’s probably got a better chance of talking to them. For one, she doesn’t reek of alpha like I do. But also one of the twins was definitely into her.” The way one of them — Stiles didn’t know which was which — kept looking back to her was definitely not the look of someone scoping out an unknown pack. Lydia could easily use her charm and feminine wiles to get some more information.

“I’ll talk to her tomorrow,” Derek agreed.

Stiles resumed the show, leaning his head against Derek’s chest and focusing on his laptop screen, pushing all thoughts of strange werewolves from his mind. If they were about to face another clusterfuck situation, he wanted to bask in the quiet times as much as possible beforehand.

He heard the front door open and close downstairs, the familiar sounds of his dad setting his keys down and taking off his shoes. Derek tensed beneath him, like he’d forgotten the sheriff already approved of him. “Stiles, Derek!” the sheriff called up the stairs. “What do you want for dinner?”

Derek looked bewildered, and Stiles smirked, his chest aching with love for both his dad and the man in front of him. This was a normal he could get used to.

“Looks like you’re staying for dinner, Sourwolf. Come on, let’s go say hi before he decides to just
order take-out.”

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Stiles had worried, when he left Redford, that without Hannah around to diffuse tense moments, spending time with his dad and his boyfriend together would be a disaster. That worry turned out to be entirely unfounded — while Stiles wasn’t necessarily sure how he felt about the two of them bonding by the sheriff listing unsolved recent cases and asking if there was anything supernatural about them, it was a start.

After dinner, Stiles and Derek cleared the table, and the sheriff asked how they were spending their evening.

“Stiles has homework,” Derek volunteered. Stiles whipped around.

“How do you even know that?”

“Isaac has homework. You share that class with Isaac. You must also have homework,” Derek reasoned, looking smug. Stiles groaned. “I should go so you can get it done.”

“Who the hell even sets homework on the first day?” Stiles grumbled, reaching for Derek’s wrist. “It can wait, Der, it’s the first day back.”

“Or you can do it now so you don’t have to worry about it over the weekend.” There was a pointed look in Derek’s eyes, reminding Stiles how great his weekends could be now he could spend them entirely with Derek and the pack. Stiles sighed.

“Ugh, fine. But you’re not going anywhere, mister. It’s History homework.” He turned to Derek, dropping his hands to the man’s hips and looking at him with pleading eyes. “Help me with it? It’ll get done faster with you around, I promise.”

“As if you have ever needed help with your homework,” Derek retorted, unswayed. Stiles grinned at the backhanded compliment.

“I need help not getting side-tracked and researching ten different subjects that are entirely unrelated to the work I’m supposed to be doing,” he pointed out. “’Mon, don’t leave yet. If you leave I’ll just spend the evening dicking around on the internet and playing video games with Scott.”

That earned a sigh, and Derek glanced at the sheriff with a long-suffering look. “Fine,” he relented. “Just to make sure you actually do it.”

“Y’know,” the sheriff cut in with amusement dancing in his eyes, “I never thought I’d see the day that Derek Hale was a good influence on my son.”

Stiles snickered, patting Derek’s side gently. “Dad, one thing you need to learn about Derek is that underneath all the scowly-growly werewolf stuff, he’s just a big ol’ nerd.” He winked at Derek. “Come on, brain-boy, let’s go knock this homework out of the park.”

If he finished early, maybe he could convince Derek to give him some kind of reward.
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

Here we are, the final chapter. Thank you all so much for the love and comments and kudos throughout this fic, I hope the ending meets expectations!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When the weekend finally rolled around, Stiles was up earlier than he had any right to be the first Saturday after school went back, his body buzzing with excitement. It was time for him to see the Hale house, at last. Texting Derek to check the man was awake and at the house — which, considering Derek was a criminally early riser, he was — Stiles bid his dad goodbye and got in the Jeep, taking the familiar route to the preserve and heading down the long driveway to the Hale house. The closer he drove, the more his magic began to hum under his skin, practically crying out to the nature surrounding him; the pack territory, begging him to connect his magic with the land. He’d have to take some time in the woods later, if he could do so without raising suspicion.

When the building came into view behind the trees, it took Stiles’ breath away.

From the outside, it looked finished. A beautiful ranch-style three-story house, exposed brick and clean white wood and the porch now around the entirety of the house, framing the huge dark wood door. Stiles parked next to the Camaro, stepping out with a look of awe on his face. He noticed Derek stand from where he was perched on the porch steps, approaching Stiles with a shy grin. “What do you think?” he asked.

“Holy shit, Derek, this is amazing. You designed this. This house was in your brain and you drew it and built it and oh my God I’m so in love with you right now.” Stiles strode forward, yanking Derek into a kiss that lasted longer than he’d intended. “I’m so proud of you. This is incredible.”

“You haven’t even looked inside yet,” Derek pointed out, his ears going red. Stiles beamed at him.

“If it’s anything like the outside, I’ll love it. Seriously, Der, this looks like something out of a magazine. You totally need to finish your degree so you can get paid to make more beautiful buildings like this.” He couldn’t stop staring at the house, unable to reconcile it with the skeletal framework he’d last seen. Before, it had been a construction site. Now it was a building; a home.

Derek tugged on his hand, leading him onto the porch. Stiles could already imagine a grill, maybe a porch swing, the whole pack gathering on sunny days. It already felt like they belonged there.

The door opened into a spacious hallway with a neat staircase up one side, the railing half-painted. Pretty much every inch of floor was covered in dust sheets to protect from all the paint, but Stiles was still awestruck. “I was thinking we’d get a table by the door, a coat rack up on that wall,” Derek said, pointing out his vision to Stiles.

Stiles could see the kitchen through the doorway opposite the front door, and he rushed forward, smile splitting his face as he stepped into what was essentially his dream kitchen. He hadn’t even had that much input, wanting Derek to design his pack house how he wanted it, not what he thought
Stiles would like. But it was perfect. Still missing tile work and a little paint, but perfect. “This room is probably the closest to what it used to be,” Derek revealed, standing at Stiles’ shoulder. “New appliances, all the modern updates. Dad would have loved those. But layout, and style… it’s just like I remember.”

“Your father would have bought that twenty thousand dollar oven you passed up,” a familiar voice declared. Stiles whipped around to see Peter Hale descend the stairs, his eyes roaming over the pair of them.

“There’s a reason Dad wasn’t in charge of the pack’s financial choices.” Derek edged closer to Stiles, his hand resting possessively on the teen’s hip. Peter’s eyes flicked to it.

“Very true, dear nephew. Stiles,” he greeted, inclining his head. “Congratulations are in order. Derek has been far less horrendous to deal with since he started seeing you.”

“Thank you? I think?” Stiles replied, sticking close to Derek. Peter may be pack, may be the only biological family Derek had left, but that didn’t mean Stiles trusted him. “What are you doing here?”

“With any luck, finally finishing the backsplash,” Peter replied, gesturing to the half-finished tiles on the kitchen wall. “Derek isn’t the only one eager to move in.”

Honestly Stiles regularly forgot that Peter existed, and hadn’t really thought about where the man was living since he was technically legally dead.

“I’m going to show Stiles around,” Derek said. “The others should be here soon.”

“Oh, joy,” Peter deadpanned, making Stiles snort.

They left Peter to his work in the kitchen, Derek showing Stiles into a living room that was far more enormous than it had any right to be. The edges of the walls had been cut in with a pleasant shade of blue, and through the gaps in the dust sheets Stiles could see hardwood floors. “This will be the main project for today,” Derek told him. “Downstairs in general, but if we can get the living room done and start moving furniture in, we’ll at least have a better place to start hosting pack meetings.”

Stiles was desperately ready to see the back of that damn train depot, and told Derek as much. He gave a vehement nod of agreement.

Also downstairs was a bathroom, another living room, and a mudroom/laundry room combo that had a door out onto the back porch. “Mom tried for ages to get Dad to put screen doors in the living room. He refused; said if we did that, shifters and kids would be tracking mud all through the living room and we’d be cleaning it up forever. I kept that in mind,” Derek explained, making Stiles smile.

“Upstairs or downstairs first?” Stiles asked when they were back in the hallway, looking at the staircase. Derek directed him upstairs.

“The basement we’re saving until last, it’s for official pack stuff. Library, meeting room, safe room,” the alpha explained. “Besides, before we get painting, I want your opinion on something.” He led the way halfway down the hall, and when he stopped in front of a door, the mental map of the floor-plan clicked together in Stiles’ mind. His heart stuttered. “I have a couple colour options, I didn’t want to make the decision without you.” Derek gave a hesitant smile, nudging the door open. “Stiles, this is our room.”

It was bigger than Stiles expected, empty and covered in dust sheets like the rest of the house, with a huge window on one wall. There were three colour samples already up, squares painted directly in the sunlight and in the shade. Stiles crossed the room to look out the window, at the preserve
sprawling into the horizon. “Derek,” he breathed, turning back to his boyfriend. The werewolf’s face was guarded, waiting for Stiles’ judgement. “Babe, it’s perfect.” His brain was filling in the gaps — not only adding paint and furniture and such, but adding piles of clothes strewn around that he knew Derek would grumble at him for, a nightstand with a history book sitting on it, little feet racing in to jump on the bed at too-damn-early in the morning. His eyes went wide at the last one; he needed to stop getting ahead of himself.

Taking a steadying breath, he turned to the paint samples, eyeing them critically. They were all shades of green, earthy and calming, and Stiles’ gaze kept coming back to number three — a little less brown than the other two, paler without feeling too spring-like. “Which one’s your favourite?” he asked, reaching for Derek’s hand.

“I prefer the first and the third,” Derek told him. “But I like all of them.”

“I like the third best, I think,” Stiles said, moving to run his fingers over the paint square. He couldn’t say why, it just felt right.

“Third one it is, then,” Derek declared. “I’ll pick up a couple cans later.”

“We’re really doing this, huh?” Stiles murmured, looking around the room with glee in his eyes. “Our room.”

“I figured you’ll still live at home while you’re at school.” The sheriff would murder them both if Stiles tried to move out before then. “And then college. So it’ll be a little while until we actually both live here, together. But you’re the only person who will be sharing this room with me, so it makes sense for you to have some input.”

It was years away, but Stiles already couldn’t wait for it. “You’ve got the furniture picked out though, right?” Derek had been sending him links to things for weeks.

“Most of it. I’ve got a bed on hold at the furniture store. As soon as this room is painted I’ll get the bed in, get Isaac’s bed in, then I can stop renting the loft. Everything else can be done while I’m in here.”

Stiles hadn’t even seen the loft yet, and Derek was already preparing to move out of it. He would have to correct that soon.

Derek cocked his head when they both caught the faint sound of footsteps and the door opening. “Lydia, Jackson and Allison are here,” he declared.

The tour of the rest of the house took much less time, as all the rooms were fairly much the same and in equal states of unpainted and unfurnished. They were in the playroom at the top of the house when the noise level ramped up a notch, and Derek declared the rest of the pack had arrived.

Everyone was dressed in paint-friendly clothes, Lydia and Jackson still far more fashionable than the rest of them. There were smiles directed at Stiles and Derek as they joined their pack, though Scott was eyeing them suspiciously. “Did you stay the night here?” he asked, sounding a little strangled. Stiles laughed.

“Dude, with all the paint smells? Even Derek won’t stay the night here. Nah, I just got here early.”

“You really think the sheriff wouldn’t notice Stiles being gone for the night?” Jackson pointed out, making Stiles realise that at no point in his explanation of his relationship with Derek had he revealed that his dad was totally cool with it, or that his dad was now aware of werewolves. One step at a time.
With everyone there, they hurried to get to work, deciding to get the bigger living room and hallway done while Peter tiled the kitchen and Derek worked on the small bathroom. Lydia took point, handing out brushes and rollers and assigning sections of wall to each person, carefully assigning Scott and Allison to different rooms. Not that it mattered much as they were all still talking through the open doorway, but it was a start.

Stiles hadn’t done any kind of decorating since Melissa had let Scott redecorate his room when he started high school, and he was actually quite enjoying the work. It was definitely one hell of a shoulder workout.

“Lacrosse tryouts on Monday,” Isaac declared, reaching over Stiles’ head to get to a higher section of wall while Stiles got more paint on his roller. “You going for it, Stiles?”

“It’s worth a shot,” he replied, shrugging. “You never know, coach might let me on first line this year.”

“If he lets Greenberg back, you’re a shoe-in,” Boyd pointed out with a snort.

“I think I might do track this year,” Erica said from the hallway. “Now that I can do competitive sports.”

“There’s always cheerleading,” Lydia suggested. “Werewolf strength would come in very handy for some of the lifts.”

“I don’t know, I feel like I might grip too hard and break someone’s wrist.” Erica sounded unconvinced. “At least track is non-contact. Mostly.”

Stiles remembered a track meet last year that had ended in a straight up brawl, and snickered.

With five werewolves and three humans on the case, the first coat of paint in all the downstairs rooms got done in short order. Peter finished the tiling in the kitchen, and immediately disappeared upstairs to go tile one of the bathrooms, claiming he was bored of teenage gossip. That backfired on him when everyone moved upstairs to paint the hallways and guest rooms up there.

“I’m headed to the hardware store,” Derek announced, standing at the foot of the stairs. “Last call for paint choices — if you don’t decide on your room right now, I’m picking for you. I want all the paint on the walls by Monday night if it kills us. You have five minutes.”

Considering even with every available window wide open, the werewolves were all still wearing breathing masks to try and dampen the paint-smell, Stiles didn’t blame him for his impatience. Immediately, everyone downed tools and hurried to the rooms they’d claimed, arguing over paint choices and eventually returning with swatches that they shoved in Derek’s outstretched hands. Scott awkwardly invited Allison into his room for a ‘second opinion’, as if he wasn’t practically wiggling like a puppy desperate to please their master.

Stiles raised an eyebrow at the alpha. “Any other choices you need me to make?” he asked, and Derek shrugged.

“Did any of the colours offend you in any way?”

Despite his all-black wardrobe, Derek had surprisingly great taste when it came to interior design, and Stiles couldn’t think of any questionable choices he’d seen on the tour. “Nah, I think we’re good.”

“We’ll need more paint trays,” Lydia requested. “We’ve got way too many colours going at once.”
Derek nodded.

“Erica, you’re with me. I can’t carry it all by myself.”

Erica beamed; she got far more joy out of trips to the hardware store than the rest of the pack, mostly because she loved shocking some sexist douchebag who worked there by showing off how many paint cans she could carry in her delicate, female arms.

“Have fun,” Stiles said with a grin, dropping a kiss on Derek’s lips. “Bring me back a present.”

Derek merely rolled his eyes, grabbing his jacket and heading out with Erica in tow.

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Derek didn’t bring him a present, but he did bring back lunch for everyone, and after a short break to inhale some food they were quickly back to work, splitting up to paint their own bedrooms now they had the requisite paint. Stiles was going much slower than he had in the living room — partly due to tiredness, mostly due to getting distracted by watching the shift of Derek’s shoulder muscles beneath his tight t-shirt. Derek kept turning every time he noticed Stiles’ eyes on him, his ears reddening.

“Everything is coming together so quickly,” Stiles mused as he painted. “It’s amazing how different it all looks when it’s colours other than white.”

“We’re making good time,” Derek agreed, carefully edging around the taped-up doorframe with his brush. Once again, he didn’t trust Stiles to do the detail work. Stiles was honestly surprised he was letting the rest of the pack do their own cutting in. “If we can get just as much done tomorrow, Peter and I can finish up on Monday no problem. I’m sure everyone would like to have their weekends free, now school is back.”

“Let’s be honest, we’d all be here anyway. Lydia and Jackson are the only ones with a social life outside the pack.”

“I guess.”

Stiles finished the wall he was working on, moving to paint around the door Derek had finished at. It was the last part of the room left to get a first coat down, and he turned to survey their progress. “Definitely the right colour choice.”

Derek briefly slung an arm around Stiles’ shoulders, removing his dust mask and kissing Stiles’ temple. “Agreed.” His lips curved briefly. “Which is more than can be said for some of the others.”

“Scott?” Stiles presumed, grimacing at the thought of what colour his best friend might have chosen when left to his own devices, even with Allison’s input.

“And Isaac,” Derek confirmed, safe in the soundproofing of their room. “They’re not terrible, but… at least we can repaint down the line, if needed. I wanted it to be clear that they get to make these choices.”

“Even when they’re questionable ones,” Stiles finished for him. “Sappywolf.” His voice was fond, and it made Derek smile despite himself.

“This is their home, whether they live here right now or in a few years. Or never. When Mom was alpha, she wanted everyone in the pack to know that they always had a place in the pack house waiting for them.”
“You’re doing a great job, babe.” Stiles leaned in for a kiss, ignoring the brief coldness as he accidentally got a drop of paint on the shoulder of his t-shirt. “Best alpha.” Derek’s eyes flashed red with pleasure, and he pulled his mask back up, getting to work.

 Eventually they all ended up back in the living room, putting up the second coat while it was still warm enough out to have the windows open. “How late do we have to stay here?” Scott asked, rolling his shoulders and wincing as they cracked.

 “You don’t have to stay at all,” Derek retorted. “I’m not forcing any of you to be here.”

 Scott snorted, his muttered “could’ve fooled me,” loud enough for even the humans to hear.

 “I’m sorry, Scott, did you get bored after you were done painting your own room? Y’know, the room in his house that Derek is offering to you because you’re pack?” Stiles snapped, long past sick of Scott’s shit when it came to Derek. He was fine with just about every other member of the pack, but still took issue with the alpha. If anything it was worse now that he knew Stiles and Derek were together. If Stiles didn’t know any better, he’d say Scott was jealous.

 “Oh and that’s so generous in a house with this many rooms? He didn’t offer one to Allison.”

 “I’m not pack, Scott,” Allison piped up, looking embarrassed at being brought into the argument. “I’d like to be, but I’m not. Not yet.” She glanced over at Derek, who inclined his head to her. She’d get there eventually; she was certainly trying. But it would take more than just a few coats of paint for an Argent to make it into the Hale pack.

 “So what, because you’re human you get to make choices but I just get stuck with this?”

 “No one ever said you were stuck here, Scott. You can walk away any time,” Stiles burst out. Derek wasn’t going to defend himself; he was trying so hard not to push Scott, and Stiles loved him for it, but it was time his best friend got a reality check. “But if you face the facts, your best option is the Hale pack. You’re not an alpha, no matter how much you try and form your own pack, and you wouldn’t survive as an omega. Wolves need pack. You’re a wolf now, and you didn’t get to make that choice because of someone,” he sent a glare at the ceiling, where Peter was no doubt eavesdropping in the bathroom, “and that sucks and I’m sorry. But how can you expect to be happy when you’re walking around like you’re just waiting for something better to come along? How the hell are we supposed to welcome you in when you’ve always got one foot out the door?”

 Scott drew back as if slapped. “You’re supposed to be on my side, Stiles.”

 Stiles ran a hand over his face, dumbfounded by just how much Scott still didn’t get it. “This isn’t about sides, Scott, for fuck’s sake. This is about safety. Life and death. Have you got anything against Derek other than the fact that you don’t wanna be a werewolf, because I hate to tell you this, buddy, but there’s jack shit Derek or Peter or anyone else can do about that now.” He folded his arms over his chest, refusing to flinch even when Scott’s eyes started glowing gold at him. “If you want a new pack, we can get you a new pack. There’s a pack down in Sacramento that used to have good ties with the Hale pack.”

 “I don’t wanna move to Sacramento!”

 “Then suck it up, McCall,” Stiles roared. If he was a wolf, he would definitely be in beta shift right now. “We are all you’ve got. You think any of us thought this was where our lives would be come senior year? You think Derek thought he’d be dealing with a pack full of dumb teenagers in his early
twenties? We’re making the best we’ve got, and everyone else is trying, but if you don’t get your shit together and start trying with us, then we will lose our patience and move on without you and you’ll have to fucking deal with that. Okay?”

Scott stared at him, dead silent. Stiles began to realise that everyone was staring at him, and Erica leaned over to Isaac.

“Mom is pissed,” she whispered, making him snort. Stiles wasn’t even mad — hell yeah he was Pack Mom, and he was going to get this pack to shape the fuck up.

“I don’t know if I like the person Derek’s turned you into,” Scott said hollowly, and Stiles scoffed.

“If you think this is Derek’s doing, then you really haven’t been paying attention.” He turned away, done with the conversation, and Scott automatically reached out for him. Unfortunately, he reached with the hand holding a paint roller, smearing paint all over the front of Stiles’ shirt.

“Shit, sorry,” he blurted, and Stiles grimaced at the wet feeling of paint soaking through the fabric. He was already pretty paint-splattered, but nothing as big as that.

“Great. Fucking fantastic.” He looked up at his best friend, though after this conversation he wasn’t sure that was still a word he could use. “What do you want, Scott? For real.”

“I don’t know!” Scott blurted. “I don’t know what I want, and so many things happened before I could even decide if I was okay with them, so excuse me if I need a little time to figure it out!”

“How much fucking time do you need, Scott? You’ve been a werewolf for almost a year now.”

Derek appeared at Stiles’ elbow, silent as he handed over a clean shirt. Stiles recognised it as one of Derek’s own. “Thanks, babe,” he murmured, pulling his paint-wet shirt off and reaching for the new one. Lydia wolf-whistled.

“Oh my God,” Erica exclaimed, pointing at his chest. “When did you get that?”

Stiles looked down, belatedly remembering the pack didn’t know about his tattoo. He blushed, shrugging. “Couple weeks ago.”

“It looks awesome,” Isaac complimented, giving a thumbs up.

Lydia moved across the room so she could see it, having been staring at his back before. “I like it,” she agreed. “Could be starting a trend, Stiles. I always wanted a cute hip tattoo.”

“You seriously got matching tattoos?” Scott piped up, staring at Stiles like he didn’t recognise him. “After all those times you gave me shit for getting in too deep too early with Allison?”

“It’s the Hale pack mark, you moron,” Jackson said. Stiles looked at him, surprised, and he blushed. “I was curious. Derek told me.”

“Like that’s any better,” Scott muttered. “It’s still getting marked as Derek’s.”

“Derek and I could break up tomorrow and I’d still be Hale pack,” Stiles said firmly.

“Quit whining just because Stiles’ tattoo is cooler than yours, Scott,” Erica cut in sharply. Scott scowled, storming out of the living room. Allison quickly set her paintbrush down.

“I’ll go talk to him,” she murmured. “I’m sorry, Stiles, Derek.” She hurried out after her not-boyfriend.
Stiles let out a long breath, the fight draining out of him. Derek’s hands rested on his still-bare shoulders, squeezing comfortingly. “You need a minute?” he asked softly, and Stiles shook his head.

“No, I’m good. I just… God, he drives me crazy sometimes.” He glanced up at his boyfriend. “Sorry for fighting your battles for you. I know you can handle yourself.”

“That battle was as much yours as mine,” Derek returned. There was a hint of a blush dusted over his cheeks, and he kept looking away at the other wolves. When Stiles looked to them, they all had identical knowing smirks on their faces. Understanding dawned, and Stiles grinned wickedly.

“You like me defending my man, huh?” he teased, stepping closer. Derek’s eyes darkened.

“Defending your pack,” he corrected, his voice carrying the hint of a growl.

“Okay, we’re all still here, guys,” Isaac cut in with panic in his tone. “Either get a room or put a shirt on, Stiles.”

Stiles laughed, even as his cheeks reddened. Pulling the shirt on over his head, he caught Derek’s scent on the collar.

“I don’t think him putting the shirt on will help much.” Boyd remarked knowingly. Derek leaned in closer to Stiles, discreetly taking a deep breath in, his chest rumbling. Stiles mentally filed that away for future reference — him wearing Derek’s clothes got his boyfriend hot. Very good to know.

He raised an eyebrow at Derek, asking if he needed to step out and cool off, but Derek shook his head minutely, the look in his eye very clearly stating _later._

Stiles swallowed thickly, stepping away from his boyfriend. Maybe he did need a minute after all.

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The pack got back to painting as if nothing had happened, and eventually Scott and Allison returned, Scott still scowling and occasionally giving Stiles a perplexed look. Stiles resolutely ignored him; if Scott wanted to have an identity crisis, that was his deal, but Stiles was tired of him only using the pack when it benefitted him.

Stiles was startled when his phone rang, reaching into his pocket. “Hey, Pops, what’s up?” he greeted, setting his paintbrush down.

“Hey, kiddo. How’s the work going?”

“So far so good.” All the wolves were shamelessly listening in, and Stiles wondered when it would click that he wasn’t lying to his dad about where he was. “You home yet?” It was a lot later than he’d thought it was. When had that happened?

“Just on my way,” the sheriff replied. “Wanted to know how many I’m making dinner for.”

Stiles opened his mouth to answer, only to yelp when his phone was swiped from his hand. “Hey, sheriff,” Derek greeted, sticking close to Stiles. The rest of the pack were gaping. Stiles hid his grin in Derek’s shoulder. “I was actually going to take Stiles out for dinner tonight, if that’s okay with you?”

“Oh, were you, now?” Stiles heard his dad reply, sounding amused. “Sure thing, son. Has he managed to spill paint over anything important yet?”
“Only himself,” Derek replied, making the sheriff laugh. “You’ll have to come over sometime, see how it’s all shaping up.”

“I’d love to. I’ll let you get some furniture in first, though — I remember when Claudia and I first moved in here, my mother insisted on visiting before we even had a coffee table. I won’t put that kind of stress on you, kid.” Derek snorted, leaning into Stiles’ shoulder.

“Dinner as soon as we’ve got a dining table,” he suggested. “I know Stiles is dying to take over the kitchen.”

“Sounds like a plan. I’ll let you get back to painting. Let Stiles know to text me if he’s not coming home tonight?”

“Will do. Bye, sheriff.” Derek hung up, passing the phone back to Stiles, who smirked.

“You’re taking me out tonight?” he asked, surprised. Derek shrugged, looking very aware that the pack were all staring at them in complete bewilderment.

“Nothing fancy,” he insisted. “Just burgers. We haven’t had the chance to go out yet since you got home.”

“And here I thought the romance would die once you didn’t have to try so hard to come see me,” Stiles teased, kissing him chastely. “Wait, Der, I’m covered in paint, I can’t go out.”

“I grabbed some clothes for you the other day, don’t worry.” Stiles looked at Derek, wondering how long he’d been planning this for.

“Okay, okay, back up here. Scott, Allison, I’m sorry, but we have a brand new winner for ‘grossest couple of the pack’ award,” Erica announced, making both Scott and Allison blush furiously.

“Yeah, duh, we all saw that coming,” Lydia said dryly.

“Your dad knows, Stiles?” Scott asked, looking even more confused by now.

“Do you really think I’d have kissed him in front of the entire school if I was still trying to hide it from Dad?” Stiles retorted. “He’s known since like two weeks after we got together. Apparently I suck at hiding when I’m happy.”

“Also, duh,” Isaac muttered under his breath. “Scott, can I stay at your place tonight? Pretty sure I don’t wanna be in the loft.” He grimaced. Stiles abruptly remembered his dad’s words about texting if he wasn’t coming home. He’d been given permission not to come home — permission to spend the night with Derek. God, his dad was the best.

The phone call seemed to be all it took to remind the others that they had homes to get back to, and soon they were all making their excuses, promising to be back in the morning to continue the job. Before long it was just Stiles and Derek — and Peter, lurking upstairs somewhere.

They kept going until the living room was finished, then Stiles wrapped his arms around Derek’s waist. “Are we good for the day?”

“Yeah, this is a good stopping point,” Derek agreed. “I’ll go get your clothes.”

Stiles grinned, putting all the paint away while Derek left, happy bubbles growing in his belly even though he’d been out to eat with Derek dozens of times. This was different — this was in Beacon Hills, where everyone knew who he was. The high-schoolers were mostly unaware who Derek was,
other than just ‘Stiles’ hot older boyfriend’. The rest of the town, the adults, had been around long enough to know him as ‘that poor Hale boy’ and would definitely recognise him at the diner with Stiles. This was the boldest way of going public short of announcing it in the local paper.

He couldn’t wait.

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Despite the fact that Stiles and Derek spent half their meal being stared at by everyone over the age of thirty, they had a good time at dinner. They were able to talk relatively freely, and Derek even held his hand over the table for a little while. Stiles wondered how many of those people would go gossiping to the sheriff about who they’d seen his boy out with — and how much his dad would laugh when they expected him to be outraged by it.

Afterwards, they got in the Camaro and headed back to the loft, Stiles leaning his head against the window with a contented smile on his face. “Hey, I’m sorry about Scott, earlier,” he said quietly, now they could speak about the pack without worrying about eavesdroppers.

“You’re not responsible for him,” Derek insisted. “And someone needed to say it. You’re probably the only one of us he’ll actually listen to.”

“Maybe this time he finally will.” Stiles ran a hand through his hair. “I’m just sick of him being such an idiot about it all. It’s fine now, when we’ve got nothing after us, but I refuse to be put in another situation where my life is in Scott’s hands and he fucking bails.”

“That won’t happen,” Derek said firmly. “The pack won’t let it. And honestly, after you ripped him a new one like that, I don’t think Scott will either.”

Stiles smirked. “Someone had to do it.” He remembered Derek’s hooded gaze and pink cheeks when Stiles had yelled at Scott. “Did it get you going? Me standing up for our pack?” His voice was a teasing drawl, and Derek’s throat bobbed.

“People always think that the alpha is the one to watch in a pack. The one you don’t want to mess with. But what they don’t know is that making the Alpha Mate mad is so much worse,” he said slowly. “Mom yelled all the time. She had a short fuse, and she’d flash her eyes and growl all the damn time. But Dad… if Dad yelled, you knew you were screwed. You… you just fit into the role without even trying, and I can’t— I don’t— Stiles.” Derek looked wrecked, and it was a good thing they pulled into his parking spot outside the loft because if he gripped the steering wheel any tighter Stiles was worried he might break it.

Stiles leaned over, hand on Derek’s thigh. “Let’s go upstairs, big guy,” he murmured, kissing Derek’s jaw. “You can show me the loft, get me in that nice big bed of yours, make your sheets smell like me. Show me exactly how it makes you feel when I go all Pack Mom.”

Derek’s eyes turned red, a growl rumbling in his throat. Stiles popped the door of the Camaro, grinning with anticipation.

He would have to get the tour of the loft later; Derek straight up carried him across the small living room and into his bedroom, his mouth on Stiles’ neck. Stiles groaned, letting Derek toss him down onto the bed, the alpha struggling with the buttons on Stiles’ shirt. Stiles just pulled Derek’s henley off him, already reaching down for his waistband. “Please tell me you have lube here,” he gasped, and Derek nodded, finally getting Stiles’ shirt open and shoving it off his shoulders.

“Drawer,” he bit out, wriggling out of his jeans, pulling Stiles’ off when the teen rolled to reach for
the drawer.

They had plenty of time to go slow, but after everything that had happened they couldn’t hold back, Derek thrusting into Stiles as soon as he was prepared, biting at his neck and pulling him closer, moaning softly. Stiles bucked up into his touch, needing release just as desperately — they had all night. They could do slow later.

It was fast and messy and Derek’s claws almost punctured the mattress, and when it was over they lay breathless and panting, sweat cooling on their skin. “I need to yell at Scott and wear your clothes more often,” Stiles muttered with a laugh, chest heaving. Derek twined their fingers together, bringing Stiles’ knuckles to his lips.

Now that the immediate desire had been sated, Stiles took the chance to look around at Derek’s room. It was clearly temporary — stuff mostly in boxes, nothing on the walls — but it still felt like Derek. The only personal touches were on the nightstand; a trio of historical fiction novels, and the little cactus Stiles had gifted him months ago, still in its black and green pot. It made him grin, his heart warming to see Derek had kept the present.

He stretched his back with a sated sigh and snuggled closer to Derek. The sheets were dark green and silky-soft, and Stiles was hit by the urge to roll around in them until Derek wouldn’t be able to get rid of the smell of him, of them.

He was spending way too much time with wolves.

“The loft seems nice,” he said conversationally, and Derek’s responding laugh was quiet. He tugged Stiles closer, kissing his bare shoulder. A comfortable silence fell between them, before Derek nosed Stiles’ neck.

“The Alpha Pack are moving in,” he said softly. “The last week, they’ve been leaving signs. They’re taunting me. They’re coming for the pack.” He gripped Stiles’ hand tighter.

Stiles’ heart skipped a beat — he should have known the peace was too good to last.

“We’ll fight them,” he declared. “When the time comes, we can take them.”

“Stiles, there’s at least five of them, alphas against our pack of betas who can’t even identify a werewolf stood ten feet away,” Derek retorted. “Dumb luck won’t get us through this.”

Stiles took a deep breath, raising the hand that wasn’t caught in Derek’s. A blink, and that hand was wreathed in raw magic power, bright green sparks flaring. “I’ve maybe been working on some stuff,” he admitted, feeling Derek stiffen beside him. He offered his boyfriend a sheepish smile. “I’m a Druid. Deaton gave me a book to help figure it out.”

“What… how?” Derek was awed, reaching out towards the magic before drawing his hand back. Stiles let it die, rolling onto his side.

“I don’t really know. But you’re the first person I’ve told. So I might not be like, Gandalf levels, but I’ve got a few tricks up my sleeve.” He smirked confidently. “The Alpha Pack are underestimating us, and that’ll be their downfall.”

After a beat, Derek surged forward, pinning Stiles in a bruising kiss. He cupped the teen’s jaw reverently. “I could spend the next fifty years with you and still be surprised at the end of it,” he breathed, wide-eyed.

His words settled into Stiles’ chest with a bone-deep yearning — God, he wanted that so badly. The
next fifty years with Derek. Not a single part of his soul doubted that that was exactly where he had
to be.

“My dad’ll be pleased,” he whispered, smiling. “He was worried I’d want to get my tattoo removed.”

Derek snorted, kissing him again, their arousal picking up once more. Stiles wrapped his legs around
Derek’s waist, arching up into him with a drawn-out moan.

They’d face the Alpha Pack, and anything else that came their way. Stiles had finally found his pack,
his home, right here at Derek’s side, and he sure as hell wasn’t going to let anyone take it away from
him without a fight.

Chapter End Notes

I know a lot of people were hoping I’d go more into the alpha pack, Stiles’ magic, etc, and I'm sorry I didn't do that. I never intended to have serious plot with this fic - I just wanted something fluffy and fun and full of Sterek being cute and Stiles realising his own awesomeness. Like I said at the start, I've been out of the fanfic game for a few years, and this was just a nice little stress-relief writing project, nothing too intense. I've enjoyed writing and posting and being an active part of the AO3 community again, so I got what I wanted out of this. I hope, despite what I did or didn't write in this fic, you got something good out of it too. Thanks for reading, folks <3

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