Why Fresh Twilight Bullshit Is This?
Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/18650299.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating:</th>
<th>Explicit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archive Warning:</td>
<td>Graphic Depictions Of Violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category:</td>
<td>M/M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fandom:</td>
<td>Teen Wolf (TV)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship:</td>
<td>Derek Hale/Stiles Stilinski</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Tags:</td>
<td>University student Stiles, College Student Stiles Stilinski, Deputy Derek Hale, Cop Derek Hale, Officer Derek Hale, Police Officer Derek Hale, Mates, Soulmates, Werewolf Mates, Stackson Brotp, The Hale Family (Teen Wolf) Lives, Alive Hale Family, Alternate Universe - No Hale Fire (Teen Wolf), Alternate Universe - Everyone Lives/Nobody Dies, Alpha Talia Hale, Alpha Talia, Alpha Derek, Alpha Derek Hale, Slow Burn, Getting Together, Pining, Pining Derek, Pining Derek Hale, Werewolf Culture, BAME Stiles, Self-Conscious Stiles Stilinski, Insecure Stiles Stilinski, Protective Derek, Protective Derek Hale, Protective Jackson, Protective Jackson Whittemore, Scott McCall (Teen Wolf) is a Failwolf, Stiles Stilinski is a Little Shit, Kidnapping, Anxiety, Panic Attacks, Hurt Stiles, Hurt Stiles Stilinski, Derek Hale Returns to Beacon Hills Derek Hale Comes Back, Derek Hale Deserves Nice Things, Derek Hale Can Have Nice Things, Stalker Derek Hale, Stalker Derek, Stalking, Misunderstandings, Warning: Gerard Argent, Warning: Kate Argent, Warning: Deucalion, Don’t copy to another site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stats:</td>
<td>Published: 2019-04-30 Chapters: 7/7 Words: 196127</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What Fresh Twilight Bullshit Is This?
by isthatbloodonhisshirt (wasterella)

Summary

“I am not Bella!” he insisted, shaking his fist angrily at Jackson, as if he’d been the one to suggest he was. “I am not Bella! I am, like, a Jacob, at least!”

Lydia made a noise of debate from his right and he whipped around to look at her.

“What?!! What was that sound?!!”

“You’re more of a Mike,” she insisted, shrugging neatly and flipping some curls over her shoulder.

“Wha—” Stiles had never been so offended in his life! “I am not! No way! I am a solid Jacob!”

“Mike,” she argued.

“Who’s Mike?” Scott asked.
“Shut up, Scott!” Stiles insisted, pointing a finger at him but still glaring at Lydia.

Notes

This took an eternity and a half to write.

Also, please love yourself. Look at the word count. Look at the time. Is it past eleven? Maybe sleep and save this for tomorrow lD <3

Some chapters have content warnings at the end. Please watch out for them as not everything could fit comfortably in the tags. Please read responsibly.

I am sorry to anyone who likes Twilight...

See the end of the work for more notes.
When he took his father’s profession into account, and how similar he was to said father of his, the fact that it had taken him this long to notice was actually almost embarrassing. Normally, he would’ve noticed weeks ago, but the entire idea was so horribly laughable that by the time his brain caught on that maybe this was something to be concerned about, it had already been well over two months.

Stiles Stilinski was appalled at this revelation when it finally hit him, most especially because it momentarily made him lose his appetite. Which was unforgivable in the face of perfectly good mall food court food. Burger, curly fries, soft drink. Just—terrible for his appetite to have momentarily left him.

But it was a big revelation, because it was something he definitely should’ve noticed long before now, and he didn’t know how to explain to himself why it had taken him so long. Well, other than the obvious fact that it was preposterously ludicrous for the thought that flitted into his head to be real.

He and his best friend Scott McCall had left town a few hours back so they could head out to the large mall in the nearby city. They’d been planning on catching the newest Marvel movie, but had been hoping to arrive early enough to grab dinner beforehand. Succeeding in their attempts to arrive at a reasonable hour—all thanks to Stiles’ trusty Jeep not breaking down during the long drive—they’d arrived with plenty of time to buy tickets and grab some food.

Reaching the food court, Scott had disappeared towards the grilled meat place—being a Werewolf, Stiles didn’t blame him for turning his nose up at all the other places, but Stiles was perfectly human and could consume virtually anything without being picky about it. Stiles himself had opted for the creme-de-la-creme and gone for the burger joint. Burger, fries, perfection. He couldn’t eat like this at home because of his father, so when he had the opportunity to clog his arteries with fast food, he took it.

Once he had his delicious piece of heaven on a tray, he’d cheerfully wandered around looking for a seat and had plunked down into the first available one he’d found, ignoring the sticky substance all over the table. He had a tray, as long as the sticky shit didn’t touch his food, he didn’t care. So he plunked down, sipped his drink, and then proceeded to dump an obscene amount of salt onto his fries because if he was going to go out from a heart attack over his poor food choices, by God he was going to make it count!

It was when he popped a few into his mouth, chewing idly while looking around for Scott, that he noticed him.

An extremely attractive man had just taken a seat almost directly across from him at one of the bar stools, facing out into the food court. He didn’t have any food with him, but he was holding a Starbucks cup, sipping at it almost absently while looking down at something. Where he was
seated, along with the bar itself, made it difficult for Stiles to see what he was doing, but he suspected the guy was on his phone, considering that tended to be what everyone did in this day and age.

No judgement, Stiles was guilty of that, too.

Now normally, Stiles would definitely take every opportunity presented to him to ogle a hot guy, especially one as deliciously delectable as this one who made it oh so easy by sitting right there, but this, today, made an uneasy feeling settle in the pit of his stomach.

Hence the momentary loss of appetite.

Setting his burger back down onto his tray after only having taken two bites from it, he pulled his phone out of his pocket and then lowered his gaze, trying to make it seem as though he was texting someone or checking something, but he kept his entire focus on the handsome man across from him.

And he was handsome, good Lord. Dark hair, blue-green eyes, sharp features, stubbled jaw that Stiles would normally want to rub his face against, and that wasn’t even taking into account the rest of his body. While he couldn’t see much of it from behind the bar, Stiles could see that his arms were muscled and his shirt was just a little too tight, giving a nice idea of what his torso looked like.

Yes, under normal circumstances, one Stiles Stilinski would be thrilled to have someone that fucking attractive in his immediate line of sight.

But not now. Not today.

Because as Stiles sat in his seat, pretending to text but actually keeping his focus on the other man, he felt his stomach drop when he noticed it. The man was staring at him. And not the usual, curious, ‘hey, that guy’s kind of cute, in a weird, gangly sort of way’ glances that Stiles was accustomed to. No, this was blatant staring with intent. Like the guy wanted to eat him alive. Like it was taking everything he had not to stalk across the food court and just pick Stiles up and positively devour him.

Which, given the life Stiles led, could be either a sexy thing or a dangerous thing. Werewolves and Vampires and Chimeras and all that other Supernatural nonsense the rest of the world somehow managed to avoid but oh no! Not Stiles! If there was anything within a twenty mile radius looking to murder a human, it always inevitably found Stiles. He was lucky that way.

So to realize this man was looking at him for extended periods of time when he thought Stiles wasn’t looking was definitely cause for concern. And he knew the guy was doing it when he wasn’t looking, because just to prove his own point to himself, Stiles glanced up and made like he was looking around for Scott, and the man immediately averted his gaze as if he’d never been looking in Stiles’ direction.

The thing about all this was, Stiles would be flattered. He would be, truly, the guy looked like he belonged in a fucking museum. But he couldn’t be flattered right this second, because there was a problem.

And the problem was: he recognized him.

Beacon Hills was a small place. Some people may even call it ‘quaint,’ and while it wasn’t the kind of place where everyone knew one another, it was small enough that people recognized each
This man was from Beacon Hills, and the reason Stiles’ food suddenly tasted like ash in his mouth was because he’d been seeing him around a lot lately.

He’d been seeing him at the store, at the bowling alley, in the diner, near the station. It felt like every time he turned around, this guy was there. Hell, he was fairly certain he’d even seen him on his school campus once, but that had to be a ridiculous coincidence, because his campus was almost two hours away from home and really, who had the time?

This, though? This was when his brain finally decided to ring the alarm and insist he pay attention to what was going on around him. Being out here, in the city, with literally hundreds of possible places to go, dozens of places to eat in the vicinity, and various theatres littering the area.

Of all the choices, the man had ended up here. In the mall food court. Across from Stiles.

This was suspicious. This had the feel of a stalker following him around, showing up wherever Stiles went.

Which was ridiculous. Him? Stalked? He was all gangly limbs and overexcited flailings, the thought of anyone being interested in him enough to stalk him was positively laughable.

And yet...

And yet, here this guy sat. Across from him. Shooting glances his way whenever Stiles pretended not to be looking.

He was so focussed on what the man was doing that Stiles jumped clear off his chair when Scott fell into the seat across from him, steaming plate of noodles, vegetables and beef wafting over from his tray. He partially blocked attractive possible-stalker man with his seat choice.

“Do you really think the ending of Captain Marvel will tie in to the ending of Avengers: Infinity War?” Scott asked, squinting slightly in thought while he stabbed a fork into his noodles and began to twirl it. “I just feel like it’s such a cop out.”

Stiles was too distracted trying to ease to the side to keep his possible-stalker in sight to fully pay attention to Scott’s words, so he just ended up offering him a hum of agreement. The stalker-man was finishing up his coffee, head tilted back and Adam’s apple bobbing while he drank. He licked his lips, set the cup down, and then tapped away on his phone.

Squinting suspiciously, Stiles debated telling Scott about his theory for all of two seconds before deciding he had to be imagining it. After all, the guy hadn’t looked back up since Scott had taken his seat.

Besides, much as he loved his best friend, Scott was anything but subtle. He would try and be inconspicuous while turning around, but in the end, one thing he and Stiles had in common was their complete and utter lack of subtlety.

It was a wonder they’d both managed to keep the Supernatural shit they did a secret from their parents for so long. How Scott’s mother hadn’t found out he was a Werewolf for as long as she had really made Stiles question how much the poor lady worked, because only an idiot couldn’t see it, and Melissa McCall was anything but an idiot. Clearly the only explanation was she was overworked. Of course, she knew now, but only because Scott had been forced to tell her. Stiles’ dad still didn’t know, and they really wanted to keep it that way.
Having him working long hours and rarely home really helped with the ‘not letting Stiles’ sheriff father find out that things went bump in the night’ plan.

It turned out he was imagining things anyway, just as he’d predicted, because no-longer-suspected-of-being-a-possible-stalker man actually got up to leave while Scott was still raving about the movie they were heading to see. He picked up his cup, tossed it out while shoving his phone into his pocket, and headed out of the food court, never to be seen again.

Well, probably likely to be seen again given he lived in Beacon Hills. A coincidence, then. Nothing more than a coincidence.

Stiles forced himself to tune back in to Scott’s chatter, shoving a huge bite of meat and bread into his mouth, and then proceeding to attempt to talk around it to rebuff some of Scott’s more ridiculous theories about the movie they were heading to see.

It was slated to be one of the best female superhero movies of all time, and Stiles had high hopes for it, okay! High hopes! He really needed there to be another Wonder Woman box office success right now, and Captain Marvel was it. If it tanked, if he didn’t like it, there would be blood.

The two of them bickered the entire remainder of their meal, and ended up going to the ice cream place by the theatre so they could grab something sweet before gorging themselves on salty popcorn.

“Hey, did you hear the Hales are back in town?” Scott asked while Stiles was standing at the machines, debating between cake batter and cookie dough. Maybe he could just get both, wasn’t like his dad was there to bitch him out.

“Are they?” Stiles asked absently.

“Yeah, came back around Christmas, according to mom. The oldest works with her.”

“Oh. I thought they sold their place.”

“Nah, apparently they all headed out east when their oldest son graduated, which is why Cora wasn’t around for the rest of high school. But they’re all back now. I think Cora’s going to the same university as us.”

“Huh.”

Stiles didn’t really know much about the Hales. He knew they were rich—old money or something—and that they had five kids. He wasn’t sure what the Hales themselves did, but Talia and Michael had always been rich, and lived in a giant mansion out in the Preserve, which they also apparently owned. Half of Beacon Hills was owned by them, if rumours were to be believed. He was fairly certain Michael was a famous author, and Talia was an animal activist businesswoman of some kind. Some wildlife protector or something.

Their eldest daughter, Laura, was five years older than them. She’d gone off to university to be a nurse, and was apparently the love of Scott’s life up until he was sixteen and he’d realized it was never going to happen given she’d moved away. If she was working with Scott’s mother, she was obviously out of school by now and well on her way to having a successful career in medicine. Stiles anticipated that crush would be coming back full force the second Scott saw her, though he hoped he remembered he was a taken man.

Their oldest son, Derek, was three years older than them. He’d been a senior while Stiles and Scott were just freshmen. Stiles didn’t know much about him and what he’d done after school. The most
vivid memory he had of Derek Hale was the time Stiles had a free period and Jackson Whittemore had caught up to him in the corridor. He’d been trying to shove Stiles into a locker—because apparently, not something that only happened on TV—and Derek Hale had been heading to the bathroom at the time. He’d seen the commotion and had proceeded to lift Jackson clear off his feet, snarling in his face that if he even looked at Stiles ever again, he wouldn’t live to regret it. Stiles hadn’t known how to react at the time, given he didn’t even know how Derek knew his name, but all in all, he seemed like a cool dude. And Jackson had left him alone all the way to the end of the year, only resurfacing to ruin his life in sophomore year when Derek Hale had graduated. Which was hilarious, since they were now actually extremely close and had been friends since halfway through said sophomore year. Ah, how growing up changed people.

Cora was their age, and while they’d had some classes together in freshmen year before she’d moved, Stiles didn’t know much about her. If she was going to their university, he supposed he’d run into her on campus every now and then, maybe try and make friendly. It must’ve been weird being uprooted at the end of freshman year only to come back in junior year of university. She probably didn’t have many friends.

The other two kids Stiles only knew were named Eric and Merrak, two years younger than them and five years younger than them respectively. They’d only briefly crossed paths in middle school with Eric, and Stiles remembered he used to get picked on a lot, but otherwise he couldn’t say he knew much about him.

The hilarity of having daughters named Laura and Cora, and sons named Derek, Eric, and Merrak was not lost on Stiles. He wondered if their parents secretly hated them, or if Michael’s writing extended into poetry and rhyme.

Still, it was weird to realize they were back in town. Not that Stiles had thought about the Hales that often, but they’d always been a little... weird. Not like, serial killer weird, but weird.

Cora had always been uncharacteristically protective of Stiles, despite the fact that they’d never really spoken. And Derek had protected him and known his name that one time when Jackson had been coming after him. And Talia and Michael always sent his dad gift baskets at work.

Stiles hated that, they always sent things his dad shouldn’t be eating. Now that he thought about it, if they were back, they might start with the gift baskets again. He’d have to speak to the other deputies to make sure they watched his dad like hawks.

He just—didn’t like it. It made him feel like they were trying to win his dad’s favour, and the kids were trying to keep Stiles happy to help their parents. His dad was the sheriff of Beacon Hills, he had a lot of influence in the town, was extremely well-liked, and voted in unopposed after every term. The idea that people might be trying to bribe his father was annoying.

The Hales didn’t seem like the kind of people to do that, and considering how much of the town they owned, it was almost redundant, but still. It was what it looked like, and it rubbed him the wrong way.

“Hey, you ever think that they might be something?” Stiles asked once they’d sat down with their desserts, spooning some fudge-covered cookie dough ice cream into his mouth.

“What do you mean?” Scott asked.

“You know, like you.” Stiles made Vampire fangs against his lips, spoon still held in one of them, and Scott rolled his eyes.
“I’m not a Vampire, Stiles.”

“You know what I mean, howling attracts attention.” Stiles shoved him. “Come on, I mean, they were weird, right? And they lived out in the woods, alone. You can’t tell me knowing what we know now about things that go bump in the night that the Hales are not prime Supernatural suspects here.”

“I guess I never really thought about it.” Scott shrugged. “We’ll find out soon enough. If shit starts to go down in town, we’ll have to confront them.”

“Ugh, please no. I’m still healing from those fairies last week. Who’d have thought fairies could be mean. I thought Tinkerbell was supposed to be nice.”

“Dude, have you even seen Peter Pan?” Scott insisted while they finished up their ice cream and tossed their garbage out, heading for the escalator that led up to the theatre. “That fairy was a jealous little bitch.”

“True.” Stiles sighed. He had bite marks in embarrassing places. Good thing he didn’t have a girlfriend. Or boyfriend. Or monster, even. Really, Stiles wasn’t picky, he’d take anything at this point.

Being twenty-one and a virgin was hurting his pride. Even Scott got laid regularly. Scott! Sure, he was magically all Mr. Tall-Dark-and-Handsome the moment he turned into a Werewolf, but still! He was Scott!

Man, the only reason Stiles wanted to be a Werewolf was so he could suddenly look tall, dark and handsome, too. With his luck he’d die, though. Best he just stick to being the token human.

Which he was in their pack. Token human.

Lydia Martin was a Banshee, Jackson Whittemore was a Kanima-Werewolf hybrid, Kira Yukimura was a Kitsune, Scott was a Werewolf and Stiles was the token human.

He still didn’t know how they’d become a pack. When he thought about it, it made no sense, but he supposed after all of them had realized the others were something not normal, it was kind of a natural progression. Besides, Lydia and Jackson used to be dating, Kira and Scott were dating, Stiles was Scott’s best friend. It worked.

He was pretty sure Jordan Parrish at his dad’s work was also something, but he hadn’t figured out what yet and Parrish was surprisingly good at dodging him, which made him think he was onto something. So, for now, they were a tiny pack of four Supes and a human. They did good work, though. No one was dead yet, at least.

Once they were through the ticket area of the theatre, they stood in line for popcorn, Stiles deciding at the last minute that he also wanted some chocolate and buying himself a huge bag of M&Ms. He bitched at Scott about his bladder since the moron had bought a giant drink and the two of them headed to the theatre to get to their seats.

Stiles’ phone went off while they walked and he pulled it out to check his messages, smirking and typing back a bunch of hearts in response to a snarky message from Jackson.

“Jackson’s pissed.”

“When isn’t he?” Scott asked, pulling Stiles aside so he didn’t walk into a ‘wet floor’ sign.
“He wanted me to wait for him to see this, but it’s been out for like, a week. His fault for being too important to spend time with me.” He shoved his phone back into his pocket, then stuck a piece of popcorn into his mouth.

Once seated, Stiles organized himself for optimum popcorn and M&M eating efficiency, and then hunkered down to get ready for the movie. He’d just shoved a huge bite into his mouth when the attractive man from the food court walked in and Stiles almost choked.

He convinced himself that the only reason the guy looked at him was because he’d just started choking, Scott pounding on his back, but it was still unnerving having the man walk up the stairs and disappear somewhere behind where he and Scott were seated.

Coincidence. Totally a coincidence. It was a Marvel movie, after all. Popular, still new, many people were here, it made sense. And really, he and Scott had been forced to drive all the way out there to watch it, so it wasn’t unusual someone else from Beacon Hills had driven all the way out there, too!

“Are you okay?” Scott asked, frowning at him. “You smell nervous.”

“I’m fine, shut up, Scott.” Stiles shoved another handful of popcorn into his mouth, staring at the screen.

It was a coincidence. Just a coincidence.

“It’s not a coincidence,” Stiles whispered, hunkering down in his Jeep and squinting at the dark shape lurking about outside.

“What?” Scott asked, just as quietly. “Stiles, if you’re going to have a mental breakdown, can you have it when we’re not staking out a dangerous, murderous creature?”

Stiles flapped a hand at him impatiently, trying to see in the darkness with his pathetic human vision. He hadn’t even been looking for him, but when Stiles had tried to catch sight of Jackson’s Porsche where he and Lydia were supposed to be keeping an eye on things at the other end of the street, he’d spotted him.

It was attractive-possibly-still-a-stalker man. He was strolling casually along, hands in the pockets of his leather jacket, not a care in the world. It wouldn’t have been so weird if not for the fact that it was almost one in the morning, and he was looking over at Stiles’ Jeep.

Everyone knew about Stiles’ Jeep! Whenever anyone in town saw it, they always went, “Oh look, it’s the sheriff’s kid!” because everyone knew it was his Jeep! He was the only one in town with a Jeep like this!

“Who’s that guy?” Stiles demanded, eyes still on the man across the street, hunched down enough that he was positive he couldn’t be seen. He was flapping one hand at Scott, trying to get his attention. “Scott. Scott. Who is he?”

“I don’t know, some new guy, I guess? Who cares, Stiles, can we focus? If we get killed out here because you got distracted by some hot guy, my mom’s gonna be pissed.”

“I never said he was hot!” Stiles hissed, turning to glare at Scott. Rude. Super rude. “It’s just...” He winced, not wanting to say it aloud.

It just sounded so fake. Someone stalking him. How ridiculous.
When he turned back to look at the guy, he frowned when he lost sight of him. Sitting up a bit more, he craned his neck around, trying to find him again, but he was gone. He’d just... vanished.

Great. If he did have a stalker, and he could vanish into thin air, maybe he was Supernatural. Just what Stiles needed right now. A Supernatural stalker.

Why was this his life? Why couldn’t the most exciting thing to happen to him be winning the lottery? Why did his best friend have to become a Werewolf? Why did his first love have to be a Banshee? Why couldn’t he have one normal day?

The silence in the car made it very easy for Stiles to hear Jackson’s irritated snarling and he frowned, looking around. He didn’t sound close, but it was weird he could hear him until he glanced at Scott.

His friend stared at him, then pointedly looked down. Stiles followed his gaze before lifting his hips and pulling his phone out of his pocket. It was connected to a call with Jackson.

Oops.

He put it to his ear.

“Why hello gorgeous, come here often?”

“Finally,” Jackson barked. “You need a new phone, Stiles. I’m getting tired of your butt-dials!”

“Well, technically it’s not a butt-dial since my phone is in my front pocket. It’s more of a crotch-dial.” He grinned.

“Cute,” Jackson said sarcastically. “Get a new phone before I delete my number from yours.”

“You love me too much to deprive yourself of my beautiful voice.”

“Careful or I’ll rip out your voicebox.” Jackson hung up and Stiles smirked, making sure the call ended and locking his phone before putting it away.

“Your phone still does that, huh?” Scott asked while Stiles arched his back again, trying to shove the phone back where it belonged.

“Yeah, every now and then.” It was a problem he hadn’t yet figured out how to resolve. It always dialled out unexpectedly, and while it tended to vary on who it called, nine times out of ten it was Jackson.

Stiles figured it was because they texted the most often.

He and Scott both jumped when they heard a loud bang in the woods to their left. Sharing a look, both of them threw open their doors and hurried out of the Jeep. Jackson and Lydia were hurrying towards them from the other end of the street, evidently having heard the same thing.

Hoisting his trusty bat over one shoulder, Stiles followed his three Supernatural packmates into the forest, keeping his eyes peeled for anything unusual and hoping he wasn’t about to get murdered by whatever the hell it was they’d been staking out.

Kira was the one who’d insisted something weird was happening in the area, but she was out of town with her family and had left it to them to investigate. While loud banging likely wasn’t at all related to whatever this newest monster was, it didn’t hurt to be careful.
“The hell?” Jackson muttered when he pushed past one last tree. Stiles had to inch around Scott to see past the group and he frowned.

“Huh.”

Apparently the loud bang was their Supernatural beast. Stiles had no idea what it was, other than very, very dead. It had quite literally exploded. There was black gunk everywhere, bubbling and steaming like some kind of weird acidic blood.

Scott bent down with a frown, inhaling deeply and touching a spot beside where the beast had likely last been standing before it had decided to make like a bomb and explode everywhere.

“Someone else was here recently.” He inhaled again. “I can’t... make out the scent. It’s weird.”

“Yeah, and it’s getting harder to keep track of by the second,” Jackson agreed. “Like it’s dissipating.”

A branch snapped to their left and all of them whipped in that direction. Stiles raised his bat, feeling his heart lodge itself in his throat. Whatever had taken this thing down was something to be feared, but the longer they remained motionless, the longer the silence stretched. Whatever had been over there was gone now. Or, at least, not heading in their direction.

Stiles idly wondered if it was that guy. Maybe he wasn’t following Stiles, maybe he was following Scott. Maybe he was some kind of Hunter, like the Argents.

Chris Argent and his family had moved to town in Stiles’ sophomore year, and the daughter of the family, Allison, had immediately made friendly with him and Scott. And then proceeded to date Scott, because why would anyone date human Stiles, he was so boring.

It came out when she found out that Scott was a Werewolf that she and her family were part of an old Hunter family. It just made Stiles laugh because he pictured Sam and Dean Winchester types, but her family was way more hardcore. Her grandfather ended up going crazy and tried to kill Scott and Jackson, sacrifice Lydia to some ancient Gods, and kidnap Stiles to brainwash him with the help of his daughter, Kate.

Thankfully, Chris and Victoria had smartened up before anything irreparable had happened, Gerard and Kate had been sent to prison for attempting to murder minors, and the remaining Argents had changed their ways in who and what they hunted.

Allison had ended up leaving Beacon Hills, going abroad for school in their senior year, though her family was still in town. Chris was actually surprisingly helpful to the pack—Stiles assumed he still felt bad for all of them almost dying. The only one who’d escaped unscathed that day was Kira but, to be fair, she wasn’t around until senior year so it hardly counted.

But! The point was, maybe this mysterious guy was another Hunter in town. Maybe he’d just moved there, and didn’t yet understand that Scott was a good Werewolf. He only mauled people once in a while, and usually only Stiles. And usually it wasn’t so much mauling as it was accidental injury because, yes, Scott, humans were still fragile.

“Well, this was fun, but I have shit to do.” Jackson turned on his heel, waving over his shoulder. “See you losers later.”

“You need to give me a ride home,” Lydia snapped after him, moving quickly to catch up and somehow managing not to trip in her heels on the uneven terrain. “Jackson!”
Stiles just looked back at the monster, frowning. He had no idea what it was and he bent down to touch at the blood before recoiling with a curse.

“What?” Scott was beside him instantly, Stiles’ fingers bloody.

“Okay. Apparently it was acid blood. Neat. That’s a thing.” Great, Stiles wasn’t going to be able to type up his homework for tomorrow, now. “Note to self: don’t touch monster blood. If it’s dead, just let it be dead.”

Scott shook his head and wrapped an arm around Stiles’ shoulders, turning him to lead him back towards the Jeep. Stiles allowed himself to be led, but cocked an eyebrow at Scott when he stiffened and turned quickly to look behind them.

Lacking in the superhearing department, Stiles turned as well, but he saw nothing. He didn’t know if Scott’s enhanced vision was offering better results, but the tense set of his shoulders suggested he couldn’t see anything.

“Should we be running?” Stiles asked quietly.

“Not sure.” Scott pulled away from him, heading back the way they’d come. Stiles gripped his bat in both hands, his burned fingers aching but he didn’t loosen his grip.

He followed his friend back into the blood-covered area, looking around alertly before getting distracted staring at the ooze. It was weird it had burned Stiles, but didn’t seem to be doing anything to the foliage it had landed on. He kind of wanted to test that, experiment with it a little bit. Maybe bring some back home and see what he could figure out.

Turning back to Scott when he stalked around a little bit, his friend shook his head and headed back in his direction.

“Not sure what happened, but I think it’s safe.”

“You think?” Stiles asked dryly. “Real comforting, Scotty. Remind me to write your next pep talk.” He let his bat rest over his shoulder, staring down at his two bloodied fingers and sighing, turning to head back for the Jeep. “What did you hear, anyway?”

“Growling.”

“Growling?” Stiles cocked an eyebrow. “Like, ‘I’m hungry and my stomach is growling,’ or ‘I’m gonna eat you for dinner cause I’m a monster growling’?”

Scott shrugged, which was supremely helpful. Stiles didn’t dwell on it; as long as nothing was coming to eat him right now, he didn’t care. Another case solved, or whatever.

He was starting to feel like he lived in a *Scooby-Doo* show. Except the monsters were real.

Climbing back into the Jeep when they reached it, Stiles headed back towards Scott’s place while he texted Kira, telling her about how the monster had exploded itself. Stopping in the driveway, Stiles debated whether or not to tell Scott about the guy, but his friend told him he’d see him in the morning for class then hopped out of the car. Losing his chance, Stiles just turned around and went home. He winced at how loud the Jeep was, and just kept hoping his dad would assume Stiles was out doing regular dumbass young adult things as opposed to putting his life in jeopardy on a daily basis.

Parking in the driveway, he turned off the engine, feeling like it was suddenly entirely too quiet.
No way his dad didn’t wake up when he showed back up. Dammit.

Sighing to himself, he climbed out of the Jeep, leaving the bat where it was, and headed for the front door. It was a struggle getting his keys out with his new injury, but he finally managed to unlock the door and head into the house.

Climbing the stairs as silently as possible, he at least felt a little better about the fact that his dad didn’t storm out of his bedroom to demand to know where he’d been. He just ducked into the bathroom to tend to his fingers and get ready for bed.

Even though he wouldn’t be going to bed yet, since he still had a paper to write.

The wounds were painful and difficult to bandage because of where they were, but he finally managed it with an overabundance of bandaids and sighed at how stupid they looked.

“I’m a good person,” he insisted to his injured fingers. “I’ve never done anything to anyone. Okay, maybe I did run over Mrs. Hernandez’s mailbox and drive away, but that was an accident and I’d just gotten my license, so it doesn’t count.”

Sighing when his fingers didn’t offer him any explanation for why his life had become a never-ending episode of *Supernatural*, he just brushed his teeth and splashed water on his face.

Emerging from the bathroom, he went to his room and silently shut the door behind him, falling into his desk chair and wincing at the time while he pulled his books out.

He knew he should’ve worked on this earlier, but he’d insisted he had time. He had *so much* time. But then, of course, big bad came to town, fire and brimstone and screaming and all that. Okay, maybe not so much any of that, but it was implied. And then as soon as they’d gotten rid of that monster, Kira was all over them about some weird gooey thing in the woods. Which ended up just exploding on its own.

Or possibly with help, Stiles had no idea.

Rubbing at his face while trying to get his brain to work, Stiles turned to glance at his window when he heard something. Frowning, he stood to head over to it, glancing out into the darkness, but he saw nothing.

“Probably just my imagination,” he muttered, pulling the blinds closed before heading back to his desk.

Curse his new life making him jumpy. Nothing was following him. Nothing was after him. Attractive mall man was *not* stalking him.

He had to focus on his paper. Nothing else.

He was completely *fine*.

Except his fingers, which were decidedly not fine. Stupid acid blood.

Stiles hated acid blood.

Stiles felt like he would get to class faster if he just crawled to it. Clearly, this whole walking thing wasn’t working out for him. Which was to be expected, considering he’d been getting maybe two or three hours of sleep a night this entire week.
A part of him couldn’t wait to just graduate and only have to worry about work, but the problem with work was that it happened on a daily basis. At least his classes were spread out so he had Tuesdays and Thursdays off, but somehow things always inevitably went to shit the night before he had his eight am class.

School was almost two hours out, which meant he had to leave the house no later than quarter after six to avoid traffic. Which meant he had to wake up no later than five-fifty. Which meant when he stayed up all night working on papers that he got basically no sleep. Driving home was going to be precarious, he could feel it.

He’d just entered the building his class was in when someone bashed into him and almost sent him flat on his back. Thankfully, whoever it was was extremely strong, because they grabbed the front of his shirt and wrenched him back upright so that Stiles fell into them instead.

“Sorry, sorry.” Stiles backed up a step, rubbing at his face. “Sleepwalking, my bad.”

“No, no, it was all me. I bashed into you.” The girl waved her hand, then frowned at him, pointing a finger of the same hand at him. “Don’t I know you?”

“Doubt it.”

“No, you look familiar. I swear I know you.”

“Maybe you’ve seen me around campus.” Stiles inched to the side to get out of the doorway, since he was blocking it and other angry people were trying to squeeze past him.

“Wait, you’re Stiles! Stiles Stilinski, right? Sheriff’s kid?”

Stiles tried to focus properly on the girl in front of him, utterly confused as to how she could possibly know him. She had long dark hair, which seemed entirely too shiny, what the hell, was she a shampoo commercial model? Her eyes were just light enough to pass for hazel, her skin was flawless, and she was almost the same height as him. She was wearing tight jeans, a graphic tee and a stylish jacket overtop, holding a stack of books in one arm.

“Do I know you?” he asked, a little hesitantly.

“Cora Hale.” She beamed at him. Her smile almost blinded him. “We used to go to school together when I lived in Beacon Hills.”

“Oh.” Stiles remembered Cora from class, of course he did, she was a Hale. But she looked... different. Really different. She’d always been cute before, but she’d gotten stunning with age. She looked like a completely new person, it was kind of scary. “Hey. I heard your family was back in town and that you went here. Didn’t figure I’d run into you on this massive campus.”

“No kidding.” She laughed. “Wow. Look at you. All grown up, huh?” She winked.

Stiles felt very weird all of a sudden. He didn’t know why she was speaking to him, and she seemed to be entirely too friendly. He wasn’t sure what was going on.

Then again, maybe she was lonely. He’d been thinking about it a few days back at the mall with Scott, about how her life had been uprooted constantly, so maybe she was just happy to see a familiar face.

“You too. You look great.”
“Thanks.” She smiled. “You heading to class?”

“Yeah, I’ve got a day full of them.” He sighed. “Here until five.”

“Oh, me too.” She grinned. “Hey, we should grab lunch. Catch up. You free at noon?”

He shook his head. “I have a class. I’m good between one and two though.”

“Awesome. Here, let me grab your number, I’ll text you.” She pulled her phone from her pocket and tapped away on it, evidently opening a new contact for him.

He obediently recited his number and she smiled at him once it was saved, reaffirming that she’d text him later before waving and rushing out of the building, presumably to her own class.

It only occurred to Stiles once he was sitting down that it made no sense for her to have been rushing out of the building. The first classes of the day were all at eight in the morning, so he didn’t understand why she’d been in this building at all.

“Whatever, maybe she was walking someone to class,” he muttered to himself. Her brother Eric would be a freshman by now, so maybe she was just making sure he wasn’t skipping class or something.

Stiles rested his head in his arms and snoozed while he waited for class to start, startling awake when the door shut loudly behind another student. He grumbled to himself, turning his head so he was facing the window and started to settle once more when his eyes snapped back open and his head shot up.

His heart was lodged in his throat, because there, right there, outside his classroom window, sitting on a bench, was the guy. Stalker dude.

And he wasn’t even pretending not to be staring this time, he was just full-on staring right at him! With murder eyes! Literally just sitting on the bench across the open area in front of his building, wearing jeans and the same leather jacket from the mall. His hands were in his pockets and he was staring at him with actual intent. Like he wanted to eat him!

“There’s no way,” Stiles insisted. “He’s not—he can’t be looking at me, he’s too far.”

“What?” his neighbour asked sleepily.

Stiles turned to them and motioned out the window. “Is that guy staring at me?”

His neighbour stood to move a bit closer, looking over Stiles’ head out the window with a frown. “What guy?”

Stiles whipped back around, eyes finding the bench again, but it was empty. There was nobody sitting there, not even another student. It was just resting innocently exactly where it always was, devoid of any humans seated on it, stalkers or otherwise.

“Man, I need more sleep,” Stiles whispered to himself.

Seriously, he had to be going crazy. There was no fucking way some dude was stalking him, he was insane!

“You smell weird,” Scott informed him when they met up between classes to grab a bite. Not lunch, because it wasn’t even eleven yet, but just some food so they both didn’t starve to death
waiting for lunch to arrive. Not that Scott would starve since he finished class at noon and thus could eat, but he was also a Werewolf who required a lot more sustenance.

“Thanks, Scott,” he said dryly, moving to stand in the lineup to the little coffeeshop on the edge of the quad. “Real nice. You know I have to sacrifice some parts of my life to help you out, right? Sleep being the biggest one. If my hygiene is lacking, how about you keep that to yourself?”

“No, you don’t smell bad, you smell weird.” Scott leaned forward and began sniffing at him, which earned them a weird look from the guy behind the till.

Stiles shoved his hand into Scott’s face to push him back, laughed nervously at the cashier, and asked for two chocolate chip muffins and the biggest coffee they had with two shots of espresso. It was going to royally fuck with his ADHD but it was that or he slept in class, and his dad was paying a lot of money to get him through school so he refused to sleep in class.

He was still trying to figure out if he’d hallucinated the whole dude watching him from the bench thing. After all, it seemed crazy. Maybe Stiles was imagining it, because he kept seeing him around and then having him disappear without a trace moments later. Stiles didn’t know about any Supernatural beings that could do that. Turn invisible, disappear, teleport, whatever.

But maybe they existed? Maybe the goal of this Supernatural being was for him to go crazy? Maybe that was its food source. Other people’s insanity.

“You okay?”

“What?” Stiles turned to Scott. “Yes, why?”

“You gonna take your food then and move?”

Stiles turned back to the cashier, who was holding out his coffee and a bag of muffins. He muttered a thanks while hastily handing over some cash and grabbing the offered items, moving aside so Scott could order his own food.

They were still waiting for it when Scott turned to him. “Jackson’s cursing at you.”

“What?” Stiles turned to look behind himself, confused, but then realized what Scott meant and dug his phone out of his pocket. Sure enough, it was connected to Jackson. “Hey beautiful, how’s your day going?”

“Fuck you, Stilinski. Fix your phone.”

“You could just, you know, hang up when you realize it’s a crotch-dial.”

“And miss out on the boring shit you and McCall talk about?”

“Aww, do you feel left out? I can call you more often if you want, precious.”

“Fix your damn phone.” Jackson hung up and Stiles grinned, shoving it back into his pocket once he was sure it was locked, not that it would do much good.

He waited on Scott to get his order before they both went to find a seat since they still had time before their next class. Stiles peeled the wax paper off the bottom of one of the muffins and took a huge bite out of it, washing it down with coffee. He was hopeful the coffee would keep him awake for his next slew of classes. Maybe he’d take a nap in the Jeep after lunch, try and get at least a little bit of his brain back.
Thinking of lunch reminded him of the fact that he’d bumped into Cora, and when Scott finally settled across from him with a ham and Swiss croissant and a latte, Stiles shoved the food in his mouth into one cheek.

“Hey, I bumped into Cora Hale this morning.”

“Really?” Scott asked, surprised. “That’s cool. How’d that happen?”

“She was coming out of one of my buildings. Literally bashed into me. She recognized me almost right away, which was weird. She looks totally different.”

“You look basically the same,” Scott informed him. “Just with longer hair.”

“Thanks Scott,” Stiles said sarcastically. “You’re the best.”

Scott just shrugged and the two of them chatted about his encounter with one of the famous Hales until they were done their food, Scott trying to steal half of Stiles’ second muffin.

They headed out shortly after, going back to Stiles’ Jeep so he could trade out his books. He didn’t carry them all around all day, that would be stupid when he had a perfectly good vehicle for storing items.

Once they reached the lot, Stiles used his uninjured hand to pull open the passenger-side door so he could trade out his books, and jumped when Scott let out a snarl from behind him and wrenched him back so hard his shoulder burned. Scott’s grip was tight around his upper arm, almost cutting off circulation, and his shoulder ached from the rough treatment.

“What the hell?” Stiles demanded.

Then he got a look at Scott’s face.

He’d almost wolfed out, managing to stop himself, but only just. His eyes were gold, his teeth had lengthened into fangs, and he was still snarling like something dangerous was threatening Stiles.

“What?” Stiles demanded, looking into his Jeep from behind Scott. He didn’t see anything. The front was empty, and while he couldn’t see the entire back, he was pretty sure nothing could fit back there with the mess he had going on in the back seat.

“What was in your Jeep.”

Stiles’ stomach dropped. “What? What was it?”

“I don’t know,” Scott insisted, moving a step closer and scenting the air. “I can’t—it’s a weird scent. Like in the forest yesterday.”

Stiles felt like he was going to be sick. “The thing that killed the monster?”

“Yeah.” Scott finally let him go, but kept a hand on his arm to ensure he stayed back, inching closer to the Jeep and looking into the front, like he expected to find something dangerous in there. “I can’t... it’s just weird. Like I should be able to smell what this thing is, but I can’t. It’s like it can block my senses somehow. I can smell that it was here, but I can’t tell what it is, or even who it is.”

Stiles thought back to the stalker. Or the thing he was now positive was a stalker. “I have to tell you something,” he blurted out.

Scott turned to him, frowning in confusion, his eyes slowly returning to normal. “What?”
“Okay,” Stiles said, letting out an awkward laugh. “So lately, I’ve noticed there’s this uh, guy? This like, really hot but also murderous looking dude kind of always around? Like, I noticed him every now and then around town, but then I started seeing him... not around town. Like when we went to see Captain Marvel, and last night by the forest, and... a few hours ago... here on campus.”

“What?” Scott asked, straightening instantly and looking concerned. “Are you—Is someone following you?”

“I mean, maybe?” Stiles threw his hands up, almost upending the remainder of his coffee on his head. “I don’t really know! I just... he’s been around and I’m... I don’t know. Maybe I’m hallucinating.”

Scott turned back to the Jeep, looking unhappy. He moved further into it, sniffing quite obviously. Stiles looked around to make sure no one was looking, because Scott was being super weird and he didn’t need people to wonder what the fuck he was doing.

“I don’t smell anything that’s cause for concern, Jeep-wise,” Scott said, moving back. “I don’t think whoever this was did anything. It smells like they just... sat in the Jeep. In your seat.”

“That’s cause for concern,” Stiles insisted dryly.

“You know what I mean,” Scott insisted, scowling at him. “Did you tell your dad?”

“What am I supposed to say?” Stiles asked, feeling more tired than he had five minutes ago. He moved past Scott to pull his books from the passenger seat, switching them out with the books currently in his messenger bag, coffee still held tightly in one hand, making his injured fingers ache. “‘Hey dad, so this creepy guy’s been following me around, but he might be some Supernatural creature so I don’t know that you’d ever catch up to him. Can you maybe put out an APB?’”

“Well when you say it like that, it sounds stupid,” Scott muttered.

“Exactly.” Stiles slammed the door, making sure the Jeep was locked up tight—not that it seemed to help the first time. He was hopeful his Jeep wouldn’t have any other uninvited guests in it, but he honestly wasn’t sure.

“Well, for now, at least it looks like he isn’t interested in hurting you,” Scott said while they both headed back towards their next class, rubbing the back of his head. “I know it’s not exactly comforting, given he’s still following you around, but at least you’re not in any immediate danger of your spleen getting eaten or anything.”

“Thanks, Scott,” Stiles said dryly. “Real comforting.”

“Stiles,” Scott forced him to stop, giving him an intense look. Scott was good at intense looks when he thought Stiles wasn’t taking him seriously. “I mean it. This isn’t good, and we’re definitely going to keep a close eye on you until we figure out who, and more importantly, what this guy is, but to me, I’m at least a little comforted knowing that someone isn’t out to get my best friend in a malicious way.”

“We don’t know that,” Stiles insisted.

Scott gave him a look. “Stiles, if this guy is Supernatural, and he wanted to hurt you, I’m pretty sure he would have already.”

A fair point, but not something Stiles was happy to admit, so he just grumbled under his breath and
they started walking again. When they reached the point in their walk where they had to split up, Scott ended up tagging along with Stiles, walking him all the way to his class while looking around alertly and scenting the air.

It was sweet, but also kind of embarrassing. Stiles was a big boy, wore big boy pants and everything. Sure, he was freaked out, but he still didn’t even know if the car break-in and the dude watching him were the same person.

What if the dude watching him was a Hunter, like Stiles had already suspected, and maybe something else was after Stiles. What if the thing that had broken into his car wasn’t hot angry dude, but hot angry dude knew what the thing was and was keeping an eye on Stiles to get to the thing that was actually after him? There were so many variables! This could mean anything!

Stiles could be hallucinating, too! That was also a possibility! He was extremely sleep-deprived, it was entirely possible this whole day was nothing more than one giant hallucination. Maybe he was actually still sitting at his desk, paper open on his computer and fingers hovering frozen over the keyboard. Who knew? Not Stiles!

Scott left him at the door of his next class with instructions to text him repeatedly throughout the day. At least his friend seemed to believe him, and while he didn’t seem overly concerned in his words, his actions suggested he was extremely worried. After all, it would figure that if anything evil and Supernatural was coming for the pack, it’d come for the human.

Yay team human!

Stiles fell into a seat near the back of the class closest to the door, not wanting to grab any more window seats. He picked at the bandages on his fingers for a majority of class, the content they were going over right then stuff he already knew fairly well.

He had to text Scott every time he went from one class to another, which he didn’t mind, because it was at least keeping him awake.

Halfway through his noon class, his phone buzzed and he snuck it out of his pocket, only doing so since he was in a large lecture hall as opposed to a smaller classroom. It was from an unknown number, but the words suggested it was Cora, so he added her contact into his phone before replying.

[Cora]
hey stiles!
[Cora]
it was awesome seeing you this morning!
[Cora]
its been soooooo long
[Cora]
we still good for lunch? i can grab us a table somewhere if you wanna meet me

[Stiles]
Hey Cora! Sure, I’m still down :)
[Stiles]
Just let me know where you’re at and I’ll meet you there.

She said she’d look around to see what wasn’t overly packed and that she’d text him when she found a place. Stiles took the opportunity to text Scott to let him know he was grabbing lunch with
Cora.

His friend told him to be careful—bless him—and that he’d see if Jackson could come by later since Scott had work and he couldn’t wait on him. Stiles told him it was fine, and that he’d just keep in touch to make sure Scott knew he was okay.

The guy had been following him around for at least a few weeks by now, so if he hadn’t done anything yet, he probably wouldn’t happen to come at him today.

Scott wasn’t happy about it, but it sounded like he only accepted it because Jackson was busy with something for his dad and couldn’t come out. Lydia likely wouldn’t be much good—no offense, but screaming loudly and predicting death wasn’t useful in a battle of fists—and Kira was still out of town with her parents.

Stiles was sure he’d be fine. He was on a busy campus, as long as he didn’t end up somewhere secluded, he would be okay.

When he left class, Cora had sent him a text message with her location and Stiles went to meet her. They ended up in a small Indian fast-food joint Stiles had never had time to check out before. He grinned and waved at Cora when he entered, thrilled about the new place to eat, and fell down across from her.

“Hey. You been waiting long?”

“About twenty minutes, but it’s all good.” She motioned the board. “I already know what I want, so you can go up and figure out your order first.”

“What do you want, I’ll get it for you.”

“No, it’s fine,” she insisted, waving one hand.

“No, really. It’s on me. What do you want?”

She smiled at him and asked for a paneer tikka dish. Stiles nodded and went to the front, perusing the menu while he waited in line. There was a fucking butter chicken wrap, and the second his eyes found that, he knew that was what he was going to get.

Reaching the front, he put in their orders, getting two waters in the process, and was handed a piece of paper with a number printed on it. He went back to the table with it, leaving it between himself and Cora so that one of them would hopefully hear it, and set their waters down in front of each of them.

“It’s so weird seeing you,” Cora admitted with a small laugh. “It’s been such a long time.”

“Yeah.” Stiles raked a hand through his hair. “Freshman year of high school. Seems like forever ago.” He let out a laugh.

“Yeah. I mean, Laura and Derek have both long since graduated university, Eric’s in his first year, and Merrak’s halfway through sophomore year of high school.” She shook her head. “Last time I saw you, you were still getting shoved into lockers by Jackson Whittemore.”

Stiles let out a loud laugh at that, shaking his head. “The crazy thing about that is that Jackson and I are actually really good friends now.”

Her eyebrows shot up. “Really?”
“Yeah. It’s kind of a long story, but we bonded in high school. Once I got over Lydia and he found out he was into dudes, things kind of mellowed out between us. We hang out a lot, actually. He’s not a bad guy.” Stiles shrugged.

“What about your other friend? The one you were attached to at the hip. What was his name? Steve?”

“Scott?” Stiles found it interesting she remembered his name but not Scott’s. Then again, Stiles was the sheriff’s son, so that might’ve been why. “Yeah, we’re still bros. He goes here too, actually. I saw him a few hours ago. We should grab lunch with him sometime, I’m sure he’d be interested in getting to know you.”

“Sure.” She smiled at him, but Stiles felt like she wasn’t really into that. He wondered if he’d misread this outing and this was meant to be a date. Which would be weird, considering they hadn’t seen each other in years and to suddenly ask him out on a date upon bumping into him for the first time in forever seemed a little... strange.

Their number was called then and before Stiles could stand, Cora waved him back down and said she’d get it, hurrying to the counter and grabbing the tray. She returned with it and turned it sideways so that each of their meals was facing the correct person, Stiles grabbing at his wrap and undoing the foil around it with interest. He’d never had a butter chicken wrap, and was very intrigued. The ‘wrap’ itself was naan bread, and it looked like there was the curry and some rice inside the wrap. This was going to be good, he could feel it in his bones.

“So, Stiles Stilinski, tell me about the past few years. What have you been up to? Anything of interest to share? Sports teams, achievements, milestones, girlfriends?”

He was really starting to wonder about Cora’s intentions with her last question. “Nothing special, really. Did lacrosse throughout high school, but never made first line. Graduated salutatorian behind Lydia, of course. Then I mean, just came here and now I’m looking into a degree in criminology. Thinking about trying to snag a spot at the precinct, work with my dad except in the background. He’d never let me be on the front lines as long as he’s in office.” Stiles rolled his eyes. “He worries too much. Like anything truly dangerous happens in Beacon Hills.”

Cora gave him an interested look at that, and he couldn’t figure out why. It wasn’t like she knew he went out at night to fight Supernatural beings that were intent on making his little town their home.

He just smiled awkwardly at her look and shoved another bite of food in his mouth before motioning her so she could provide some details on her life.

She spoke about how they’d moved off to New York when Derek got accepted into NYU, the whole family picking up and following him across the country. She’d spent her first two years of university going there, as well, but once Derek graduated and finished a year of additional schooling in another field, he wanted to move back home so they packed up and came back.

Stiles found it interesting that everything seemed to be about Derek. They’d left Beacon Hills when he’d graduated high school, and now that he was done university, they were all back again because he’d wanted to return. Stiles knew the family owned a large portion of the town, so they’d have made their way back eventually, but it was weird that everything was about Derek.

It made him wonder if this family was super old fashioned and the eldest son was the most important person in the family or something. Cora didn’t seem to be annoyed about it though, she spoke about Derek the same way she did her older sister Laura or her two younger brothers. They were a close family, and she didn’t seem to care either way where they lived as long as they were
together.

It was all very weird, in Stiles’ opinion. Then again, he was an only child, so what did he know?

“Speaking of my brother,” she muttered, pulling her phone out, “I need to remind him to come and get me at five.”

“You don’t have a car?” Stiles asked, surprised. Their family was rich, he’d have thought all of them would have their own vehicles.

“No,” she muttered. “I got a lot of speeding tickets in New York, and almost crashed one of dad’s BMWs last year. My parents revoked my use of vehicles for a year so I’m still paying for that. Inconvenient when school is so damn far.”

“Well hey, you’re off at five, I’m off at five, I can give you a ride back.” Stiles thumbed over his shoulder. “No point in making anyone come out and get you when we’re both going the same way.”

“Are you sure?” She beamed at him. “That would be so awesome! You’re much better company than my grumpy brothers. Seriously, I think Laura and I got all the charisma in the family, all the boys are so ugh. Well, Eric’s actually pretty okay, but Derek’s so grumpy all the time and Merrak is the angriest shit ever.” She rolled her eyes, then grinned. “If you don’t mind, that would be amazing.”

“Sure, no problem. We’re heading the same way anyway.” Stiles smiled. “Just meet me at the coffeeshop on the corner of Grandview after your last class and I’ll show you where I’m parked.”

“You are a lifesaver!” She reached across the table and clutched his hand, smiling brightly. “Thank you so much!”

“No problem.”

She started texting on her phone, letting her brother know she had a ride, then the two of them got their garbage thrown out and wandered back out into the cooling air of approaching spring, heading for their next classes of the day.

“So you never did answer my question,” Cora informed him, poking him lightly in the arm.

“Which one?”

“Girlfriends?” She paused and gave him a feral grin. “Boyfriends?”

Stiles shook his head. “Neither. I had the misfortune of being friends with both Jackson and Scott in high school. Scott really filled out in sophomore year.” Thanks to being a Werewolf, he added silently. “Most people looked right through me to them, so I spent the majority of my high school life just listening to Jackson’s constant stories about how much sex he had, and Scott’s woes of too many women throwing themselves at him, and him only having the two hands.” He rolled his eyes.

“Their loss. You turned out really cute.” She poked his cheek this time.

“Thanks,” Stiles said, surprised and a little pleased. “You turned out pretty great yourself. But you’ve always been pretty, so I’m not surprised.”

Cora laughed and shoved him lightly. He stumbled but regained his footing, the two of them joking and laughing on their way to their next classes. Stiles didn’t really know why Cora was being so
nice to him, or why she was acting like they were old friends who’d lost touch for a few years and were reacquainting themselves with each other, but he really liked it. It was nice having a normal friend, for once.

“Well, I’m this way.” She stopped and motioned behind herself. “I’ll see you at five?”

“See you at five,” Stiles agreed with a wave.

They headed off in different directions, Stiles feeling pretty good about the rest of his day. He didn’t think about the Supernatural stalker once for the rest of his classes, and when he headed to the coffeeshop to meet Cora at five, he was actually whistling. It was just really nice to have another friend who wasn’t involved in the weird Supernatural bullshit that his life had turned into.

He waved at her when he spotted her and she moved to meet him on the sidewalk, the two of them heading for the parking lot a little ways past the quad. When the Jeep was finally in sight, Cora let out a small laugh.

“Holy shit, you still have that thing?” she demanded.

Stiles gave her a weird look, because he hadn’t had his license yet the last time he’d seen her.

“How do you know about Roscoe?”

“Roscoe?” she asked with a small smile. “Cute. You’re adorable.” She stepped off the green and onto the asphalt, moving towards the vehicle. “Everyone knows about your Jeep. It was sitting in your driveway for years, we all knew it was going to be the car you ended up driving when you got your license. I can’t believe it’s still running.”

“She’s a tough old thing,” Stiles insisted, patting the hood on his way around to the driver’s side. He unlocked the door and climbed in, then reached over to unlock Cora’s.

As soon as the door opened, she froze, tensing slightly before muttering, “Come on, moron, really?”

“What?” Stiles asked, barely having heard her.

Her head shot up, as if not realizing she’d spoken aloud, and she just smiled before climbing in, shutting the door loudly behind her and dumping her bag on the floor at her feet, half-crushing Stiles’ own books.

“Oh nothing. It’s surprisingly roomy in here, I like it.”

“Thanks,” Stiles said uncertainly. He didn’t know what to make of her previous comment, but he tried not to dwell on it.

The drive home was comfortable, and Cora was actually a lot of fun. She said weird things sometimes, but Stiles knew he was also fairly weird so he tried to take it all in stride.

She had to give him directions to her place once they were back in town, since she lived out in the middle of the Preserve. It was weird, and he asked if she ever got nervous living in the middle of nowhere with no neighbours. She insisted that was the best part about it, and then made jokes about how no one could hear all the victims screaming.

Stiles had only laughed half-seriously. The other half was somewhat awkward, because he hadn’t ever thought of that and now a part of him was seriously wondering about the Hale family before remembering he was overly paranoid right now.
He slowed at the end of the long dirt road that led up to a gorgeous fucking mansion surrounded by trees with a wrap-around porch, a huge garage, and various vehicles littering the paved front area of the house.

“That’s my car,” Cora informed him, pointing out a sleek 2018 metallic dark green Mustang. It was fucking stunning, and sitting beside an equally gorgeous black Camaro. It looked to be an older model, but still fucking gorgeous and Stiles felt very embarrassed of his Jeep right then.

“Nice ride,” Stiles said, a little subdued.

“Thanks. It sucks on gas though, and it’s small as shit. It just looks pretty, but I’d never want to take it on a long trip. I actually think your Jeep is better, personally.” She punched him in the shoulder with a grin. “So... what’s your schedule like?”

“What?” Stiles asked, still staring at the multitude of gorgeous cars.

“You know, your schedule. Wednesdays sound like we’re about the same, and I was thinking—I mean, obviously, no pressure, but I was kind of hoping maybe I could catch rides to and from school with you. It’s more fun driving in with you, and I can pay for gas, and maybe bring breakfast and stuff as payment.” She offered him another smile. “Please?”

“Oh.” He was startled by the request, because he honestly hadn’t realized she enjoyed his company. Stiles liked her a lot, she was interesting, if a little weird. But he was totally on board with this new friendship of theirs. “Sure! I mean, I actually scheduled it so I only do Monday, Wednesday and Friday, eight to five.”

“Shit!” Cora punched him in the arm. It hurt. A lot. Wow. “Me too! That’s awesome! Do you mind? I mean, I shouldn’t have just blurted it out like that, sorry, but I just figured if we have the same schedule, it’d be fun. I like hanging with you, and it saves my family from having to drive two hours out of their way.”

“Yeah, no, I’m down with that. Sure.” Stiles offered her a smile, rubbing at his arm. “I usually leave my house around quarter after six, so I figure if I have to come and get you, maybe I can leave home at six? And meet you here at quarter after?”

“Sounds perfect.” She punched him again, a little less violently this time. “I’ll bring breakfast on Friday, so don’t worry about grabbing anything. See you then?”

“Sure, see you then.”

She smiled, exited the Jeep, grabbed her bag, then waved before slamming the door. He watched her head to her house and when she disappeared through the door, he started to back out of the drive when he noticed movement in one of the upper windows.

He couldn’t see properly with the sun reflecting off the glass, but it kind of looked like someone was watching him from the second floor. He shrugged it off, figuring it was one of her siblings wondering about the person who’d driven their sister home.

Stiles just backed out of the drive, turned around when he had space to, and headed home, rather pleased with this new friendship that had kind of fallen into his lap.

Stiles was actually quite annoyed when he was startled awake, because it was the first time in a long time where he was actually managing to sleep. Nothing was out to kill them, it was the weekend, and he had plans to sleep until he didn’t know what being awake felt like anymore.
But, unfortunately for him, he'd been having a nightmare and when he was thrown off the end of a ravine by some goblins—seriously? Lamest way to die—he jerked awake just as his falling dream body was about to hit the ground.

Groaning and rubbing at his face, he rolled onto his back and let out a loud whine. His heart was pounding in his chest, he could feel sweat sticking his hair and shirt to his skin, and now he was wide awake from the adrenaline. It was dumb that dreams still somehow produced adrenaline.

He was never getting back to sleep, now.

Dragging his hands down his face, he sighed and started to roll back onto his side when he froze. His eyes had just caught sight of a shadow in the corner of his room. A distinctly human-shaped shadow.

Stiles stared at it, positive he was imagining things, because there was no way there was someone just lurking about in the corner of his room, that was insane. But still, just in case, he kept his gaze locked on the shadow while one hand slowly reached out towards his nightstand. He patted around for his phone, finally finding it, and unplugged it one-handed.

Bringing his phone back towards his face, he kept both the shadow and his phone in his line of sight, swiped the bottom of the screen to bring up the menu, and stabbed at the flashlight function, beam aimed right into the corner.

Where the shadow was illuminated and showed an actual physical person.

“What the fuck!” Stiles shouted, leaping to his feet on his bed and grabbing urgently for his bat. His hand closed around it and he raised it over his head, twisting back towards the shadow, except it was gone.

His heart was in his throat, and he heard his blinds slap against his window, making him shout again and turn in that direction.

His window was wide open, and when he jumped off the bed and hurried to it, he could see a dark figure running off down the driveway and disappearing into the darkness of the night.

Stiles’ hands shook while he kept the bat raised over his head for a few seconds. Then he hastily slammed the window shut and rushed for his light, slapping his hand against the switch, illuminating his room. He hurried to check his closet and under his bed, heart pounding painfully in his throat, and then went back for his phone, which he’d dropped in his haste to get his bat.

His dad was obviously at work, evidenced by his lack of appearance at Stiles’ shouting and the missing cruiser on the street, but Stiles wasn’t going to call him, anyway. He started to call Jackson, then realized he didn’t know what was going on yet so he dialled another number and held the phone at his ear, feeling it bump against his skin since his hand was still shaking from the adrenaline.

“Do you know what ti—“

“He was in my room!” Stiles shouted into the phone.

“What?” Scott asked sleepily. “Who was in your room?”

“The dude! The-the murder face dude! The guy following me! He was in my room, Scott! He was watching me sleep! Who does that?!”
“I’m coming over,” Scott said, sounding instantly alert.

The line went dead and Stiles gripped his phone tightly in one hand, bat still held in the other. He didn’t understand. The guy had been right there, why hadn’t he done something? Why was he just standing there? He obviously knew Stiles was awake and had seen him, he’d been staring right at him. But he’d just stayed perfectly motionless, like he was hoping Stiles wouldn’t completely lose his shit at the sight of him lurking in his room.

Why was he lurking in his room?! Why was he following him?! Who was he?! Stiles needed answers, this was insane!

He really didn’t understand what was going on. This wasn’t normal. He knew for sure this guy was Supernatural now, but he was following him around and sneaking into his bedroom, and this all felt very movie-esque to him.

Stiles froze at the realization, eyes widening. Oh God, was he being stalked by a sparkly Vampire?! Wasn’t this what Edward Cullen had been doing to Bella Swan in Twilight?! She woke up to him lurking in her room, he followed her around giving her ‘I want to eat you’ looks, he was basically a stalker. Oh God, Stiles had an Edward Cullen!

“Stiles?”

He screamed and swung the bat wildly, Scott catching it in one hand inches from his face, giving Stiles a concerned look.

“I am not Bella Swan, Scott! Do I look like Bella Swan to you?!?” he demanded the moment he realized it was his friend.

Scott hesitated, staring down at Stiles with concern, still wearing his pyjamas and looking exhausted. “Are you—are you asking me if you look like Kristen Stewart?”

Stiles balked. “No! Shut up, Scott!”

He let go of the bat, Scott setting it down on the bed beside Stiles and turning to scowl at the corner the creepy murder eyes dude had been standing in. He moved over to it, inhaling deeply and grumbling under his breath while Stiles rubbed at his face.

When he dragged his hands down his cheeks, he noticed his window was open again, suggesting that was how Scott had entered his room. He would need to start locking that. Maybe nail it shut, or put a piece of wood in the slider so that no one could push it open. He did not want any more uninvited guests in the middle of the night!

“It’s the same scent as your Jeep,” Scott informed him with a frown, moving back to the bed. “What happened?”

“I literally woke up and saw him in the corner,” Stiles said, motioning it wildly. “He was just-just standing there! Watching me sleep! Like a creepy creeper! Who does that, Scott? Who?!”

“Did he touch you?”

“What?” Stiles demanded.

“The guy, did he—I don’t know, do you feel okay? What if he’s some kind of creature that feeds off human fear or something?”
Stiles was sometimes very sad to learn how ill-informed the leader of his little pack was. “No, Scott. He isn’t a Baku or a Mare. They do not look like hot, murderous men.”

“What the hell is a Baku?” Scott asked with a frown.

“Something that eats nightmares. My point, Scotty, is that he wasn’t... I don’t know what he was doing here, but he didn’t... I mean, I don’t even know how long he was here before I woke up. He could’ve been here for hours. So what is his deal?!” He grabbed the front of Scott’s shirt and wrenched him down. “I cannot live with this anxiety, Scott! He either has to do something to me or leave me alone, the wait is killing me!”

“I think we should tell your dad,” he insisted quietly.

“We can’t tell my dad! How is my dad going to put out a warrant for his arrest?! Stiles flailed. “’Officers, be on the lookout for some hot dude sneaking into my son’s room who manages to disappear into thin air’?!”

“What does he look like?” Scott asked, sitting on the bed beside Stiles. “We can try and track him down, see what his deal is. Maybe talk to Argent about him.”

Stiles raked an agitated hand through his hair and tried to describe the guy as best he could. It was hard, mostly because every time he blinked he could see the guy’s murderous gaze locked on him. He didn’t know what he wanted, but it was terrifying. The man looked at him like he wanted to eat him, and it was really making Stiles think about Twilight. His life was enough like a bad horror movie, he really didn’t need to add a love story with sparkly Vampires to the mix. No thank you! No thank you!

“This is insane,” Stiles insisted. “This is utterly and completely insane. I swear, I’m going to murder someone. I am not Bella Swan! But apparently, I have this dude stalking me.” He turned to grab at Scott’s arm, giving him a shake. “He’s stalking me, Scott! Sneaking into my bedroom! And he looks at me like he wants to eat me! Edward was like that with Bella! And he’s Supernatural! Did I mention he’s Supernatural?!” he demanded, then answered before Scott could say anything. “He is! One-hundred percent Supernatural! And, Bella’s dad? You know what he is? Sheriff of a small town. What’s my dad, Scotty? Huh? What is he? Sheriff of a small town!”

“Beacon Hills isn’t really that small,” Scott offered.

Stiles turned to give him an incredulous look. “Oh my God, Scott, that’s what you focussed on?! Did you not hear anything I said?!?”

“I did,” Scott insisted. “How do you even know so much about Twilight?”

Stiles stared at him, unable to believe the words coming out of his mouth. “Shut up, Scott!” He buried his face in his hands, letting out a slow breath. This was the worst.

Scott wrapped an arm around him and pulled him close, resting his cheek against Stiles' head. “If you won’t tell your dad, we at least have to tell the rest of the pack. I’ll stay with you tonight, but we need to figure this out. I don’t want anything to happen to you.”

“Me neither,” Stiles muttered, rubbing at his face and then letting out a slow breath.

He stood and went to slam his window shut, locking it and balancing a textbook above the window so that it wouldn’t open all the way if someone managed to unlock it from the outside.
Returning to his bed, he got comfortable under the covers while Scott kicked his shoes off and joined him.

Years ago, sharing a bed would’ve been weird with anyone other than Scott, but given his new Supernatural life, Stiles had quickly learned to get over it. Especially since he ended up in bed with Jackson a lot. Purely platonic, of course, but still. He found sharing with his packmates somewhat comforting now, if he was honest.

“Sorry if I end up spooning with you, I’m used to sleeping in the same bed as Kira,” Scott said.

“It’s fine, as long as your hands don’t wander.” Stiles rolled onto his side, facing away from Scott, and felt his anxiety skyrocketing.

He had no idea what the fuck was going on, all he knew was he didn’t like it.

Stiles was not Bella Swan!

He didn’t even like Twilight!

“Are you okay? You seem kind of... off.”

“I’m fine,” Stiles lied, eyes skirting to the rearview mirror every now and then, like he thought someone was following him. To be fair, someone could be following him. He didn’t know, because he had no idea who the dude was or what he wanted, and he was probably going to lose his mind soon.

He’d spent the whole weekend at Scott’s place after waking up on Friday night or Saturday morning—depending on how people looked at it—and found the dude in his bedroom. He didn’t want to risk it, and Scott wasn’t willing to take any chances.

This morning had been a little hectic considering Stiles had been forced to rush home to change, grab his books, and pick up Cora. He’d spent entirely too long looking for his favourite red hoodie though, and hadn’t ended up finding it. He figured his dad had shoved it in the wash without telling him, he’d find it later. He had more important things to worry about.

Thankfully, Kira was back today, so they all had plans to meet up after Stiles was done class so they could discuss their options and see what they could do to figure out who and what this guy was. And what he wanted, apart from Stiles. And why he wanted Stiles. God, was it because he was a virgin? Stiles needed to get laid, stat. Maybe he was a virgin sacrifice and the dude was watching him to make sure he didn’t lose his virginity. After all, how many twenty-one year olds going to university hadn’t gotten laid yet? Stiles was willing to bet not many!

“Stiles.”

He jumped and looked over at Cora, who was watching him with concern, her breakfast burrito half-eaten in one hand.

“What’s going on? Why are you acting so jumpy?”

“Nothing, I’m fine. I’m fine.” He waved one hand at her absently, then focussed on the road again. His own breakfast burrito was sitting uneaten in his lap, because he couldn’t work up the appetite to eat it.

He’d spent all weekend oscillating between insisting he wasn’t Bella Swan and completely
freaking out over the fact that he sort of kind of was Bella Swan. Except without the concrete knowledge that his Edward Cullen wasn’t out to get him in a “you’re a tasty human” way.

Cora said nothing, even though he knew she could tell he was lying. She just pulled her phone out and texted someone for the next twenty minutes. They’d just passed the halfway mark to school when she let out an explosive sigh.

“Really? Come on, man,” she muttered, stabbing angrily at her phone.

“Everything okay?” he asked hesitantly. He figured she had every right to insist everything was fine, given his obvious lies earlier, but surprisingly, she wasn’t like that.

“My brother just—did something really dumb over the weekend,” she said with a grunt, continuing to text. “So I am now tattling on him to Laura. So she can tell my mom.”

“That’s kind of mean, isn’t it?”

“You don’t have siblings, this is basically what we do. Ruin each other’s lives.” She turned to offer him a small smile then went back to texting. Her phone rang moments later and when she answered it, the angry voice on the other end was loud enough that Stiles could hear it.

“Are you fucking serious?!”

“Yup,” Cora sighed. “He’s a moron, are you surprised?”

“He is so fucking stupid!”

“Yup,” Cora said again. “By the way, I’m in the car right now with Stiles, so this should probably wait for later.”

The buzzing on the other end quieted down, and Stiles figured he wasn’t supposed to hear the conversation so the girl—probably Laura—had lowered her voice.

“Not great. Definitely not great. We’ll chat later, yeah? Punch him in the head for me, okay?”

There was a short affirmation on the other end, then Cora hung up and sighed, rubbing at her face.

“Is your brother in trouble?” Stiles asked uncertainly.

“Oh, he will be,” she said with a dangerous smile. “He’s just—it’s complicated. I’ll tell you about it sometime.”

“Okay. Which brother, anyway?”

“The dumb one,” she replied, which wasn’t really an answer. “Speaking of dumb brothers, that is the say the only one I have who isn’t, Eric apparently has a group thing today that finishes around six. If I pay for dinner, are you okay sticking around for an hour and driving both of us home?”

“Oh,” Stiles said, a little startled. He had the pack meeting tonight after class, they were supposed to meet up around seven because Stiles would be home by then. But Cora looked so hopeful and he didn’t really know what to do.

“It’s cool if you can’t, Laura will come and pick him up, I just figured—“

“No, no, it’s fine. I’ll uh, I’ll just talk to Scott later. We were meant to hang out tonight, but I’m sure we can push it back by an hour.”
He was positive one hour wasn’t going to kill him, after all. He could just tell Scott he would be a little late, and they could start the meeting without him. It wasn’t like he had to be there for them to talk about the weird dude following him around.

“Are you sure? It’s really okay.”

“No, it’s fine.” He waved one hand at her again. “It’d be nice to see him again. Last time I saw him was in middle school. Poor guy always got bullied. Does he still only wear blue, or did he grow out of that phase?”

Cora let out a bark of laughter at that, insisting she couldn’t believe he remembered that, and confirmed he was still very much continuing to wear blue because all other colours were inferior. Stiles just laughed and they started talking about her family some more for the other half of their drive.

Laura had succeeded in getting a job at the hospital in Beacon Hills almost immediately after they’d moved back. She worked the exact opposite hours of Scott’s mother, but they always spoke during shifts changes. Her brother Derek was a cop at the precinct, working for his dad and partnered with Parrish, which interested Stiles and he figured he should drop in and introduce himself. Merrak was being an asshole in high school right now, which she said wasn’t different from normal, but he was a little worse than they were all used to because he was pissed about having moved halfway through sophomore year. Apparently he was also a ladykiller and Cora anticipated a lot of broken hearts before the end of the school year since Merrak had no interest in dating.

Surprisingly none of the Hale siblings were tied down. Laura was in her mid-twenties but hadn’t dated in years, Derek apparently had his eye on someone but wasn’t in the right headspace to move forward, and Cora herself said she wasn’t sure her romantic endeavours were going to pan out. Eric was a bookworm who was too focussed on school to realize one of the girls he was tutoring was crushing on him, and Merrak thought he was too good for anyone who showed him any interest. And so, they were all single.

Which was crazy to Stiles, because if the rest of the Hale siblings looked as attractive as Cora did, that was just criminal.

When they arrived at the school, they headed to class together, waving goodbye to one another when they split at their first class. Stiles met up with Scott around ten-thirty for their usual morning snack—wherein he told him about the delay in their meeting that night, and Scott informed him he smelled weird—and then he met up with Cora at lunch.

They went back to the Jeep during that break to clear off one half of the back seat, since Stiles had things back there from years past, and he saw Cora let out a deep, frustrated sigh as soon as he opened the door. He wondered if she was annoyed about the mess, but she didn’t seem to mind helping him move everything to one half of the back. If anything, she found it entertaining, pulling random things out and asking him why he even had them. Which he couldn’t answer because he probably should’ve tossed half the stuff away ages ago.

After that was done, they headed back to class to finish off their days. They met up again after they were done to grab a bite to eat a little ways off campus, and when Cora’s brother texted them, she paid for dinner—as promised, despite Stiles’ insistence that she didn’t have to—and they headed back to campus to pick him up.

When Stiles eased to the curb where Eric Hale was waiting, he felt like he was probably right about how attractive all the Hales were. He had the same dark hair as his sister, buzzed short on the
sides and styled on top of his head kind of like a mohawk but not quite, with striking green eyes and a muscular build. He eyed Stiles with interest while he waited for the Jeep to stop, then pulled open the back door and climbed in.

He let out a scoff and rolled his eyes the second he did so. “Come on, really?”

“Right?” Cora demanded, turning to her brother. “Seriously.”

“Moron,” Eric said.

“Did I miss something?” Stiles asked slowly.


“Hey.” Stiles awkwardly shook his hand, the angle weird given how they were seated, but he managed it.

“Thanks for the ride home. Sorry if Cora bullied you into it, I told her I could ask Laura to come and pick me up.”

“It’s okay, no problem.” Stiles eased away from the curb and turned around so they could begin the long trek home.

He expected there to be some kind of chatter between the two siblings, but surprisingly Eric spent a majority of the drive back to Beacon Hills peppering Stiles with questions, everything from his favourite colour to the last time he’d gone out to dinner with someone in a date-like capacity.

It was kind of weird, and made him feel like he was being interrogated. It was very reminiscent of his first meal with Cora, and he wondered why the Hales seemed so interested in his personal life. He didn’t mind, it was just weird.

When they finally pulled up to the Hale house, something scraping up underneath the Jeep, it was relatively dark out, the entire area illuminated only by the bright lights of the large house. Stiles felt like he’d really hate living all the way out here, but Cora and Eric didn’t seem to mind.

“Thanks again for doing this, Stiles,” Cora said with a smile, unbuckling her seatbelt.

“Yeah, thanks for the ride.” Eric patted Stiles’ shoulder. “Hope to see you again soon.”

“You too,” Stiles said, a little uncertainly. He didn’t know what other possible questions Eric could have for him that would have him looking forward to another encounter.

The second Eric was out of the car, the door shut behind him, he called out to the house.

“Mom! You need to talk to Derek again!” He disappeared through the front door with a slam and Cora rolled her eyes.

“What did Derek do?” Stiles asked uncertainly. “Is he the one you’re all tattling on all the time?”

“It’s fun to tattle on him.” Cora winked. “He’s the golden boy, so we like to make his life miserable.”

“Siblings sound great, so sad I missed out on that,” Stiles said sarcastically.

Cora laughed and shoved him, said she’d text him later, then exited the Jeep. Stiles waited for her
to enter the house, waving back at her when she did so from the porch, and watched the door close behind her.

He backed up as usual, turning around and jolted slightly when his car did something weird. He paused, foot on the brake, wondering what had just happened. He hesitantly eased up on the brake and turned the wheel, but everything seemed all right so he shrugged it off and pulled back onto the dirt road leading away from the Hale house.

When he reached the main road once more, he turned onto it, the wheel clicking loudly, making him take the turn wide. He scrambled to readjust, getting back on the right side of the road and staring down at the wheel.

“What’s going on?” he muttered, easing the wheel lightly from side to side, but it seemed fine, the car moving with the action. He figured it was probably time for another checkup.

Trying to keep the car at a decent speed in case it happened again, he pulled his phone out of his pocket and hit Scott’s name, keeping it down low and on speaker so he wouldn’t get in trouble if he passed a cop.

“Hey, you on your way?”

“Yeah, I just dropped Cora off. Should be there in about ten minutes.” Stiles rounded the corner at the end of the road and let out a shout, dropping his phone, when the wheel didn’t follow through on the action and almost had him drive head-first into a tree. He managed to correct so he didn’t end up going over the guardrail and down a huge drop on the other side, but once he was back on the road, the wheel wouldn’t cooperate. It was like it wasn’t connected to the undercarriage anymore.

“Shit!”

“Stiles? Stiles, what’s going on? Hey!”

He ignored Scott, because he was on the wrong side of the road, and he slowly looked up when he heard a loud honk.

There was a semi coming towards him. It looked like it was trying to ease on the brakes, but it wasn’t going to stop in time.

“Shit!” he repeated heatedly, slamming on the brakes. He didn’t want to leave the car, but if the semi had to plow through it, he’d rather not be in it while it did so.

He reached hastily for his seatbelt, trying to get his fingers to cooperate while the semi blared its horn again, sounding dangerously close.

“Fuck, shit, come on!”

“Stiles!”

He couldn’t get his seatbelt off. He couldn’t get his *fucking* seatbelt off!

Stiles looked through the windshield at the semi barrelling towards him, heart in his throat.

“Scott—”

Stiles’ head smashed into the side window, the glass cracking from the impact when the Jeep skid
sideways off the road. Everything was spinning, and for a second, Stiles thought it might just be his head until he was violently slammed forward into his seatbelt, and then back into the chair, and then sideways into the window again, hearing it break, glass raining through the cab. He was pretty sure he blacked out for a second, and when he came to, the Jeep was at an angle with his door up against a tree, branch clean through the side panel, trapping his legs down.

Everything hurt and he could feel blood streaming down his face.

“Scott?” he asked weakly, letting out a cough. “Scott?”

He heard nothing, so either his phone had been thrown from the vehicle when it had tumbled over the side of the road, or Scott had hung up. He doubted it was the latter.

“Stiles!” A voice he didn’t recognize was screaming his name. He turned his head, but he couldn’t see anything from where he was, the Jeep at too much of an angle.

He coughed again, his vision swimming, trying to get his seatbelt off. Even if he managed it, he didn’t know if he’d get out, the branch had him pinned down pretty well. He was lucky it hadn’t gone clean through his head. Or chest. Or anything else, really.

“Stiles!” the voice shouted again, and he heard a loud thump.

A shadow appeared above him at the passenger side door and he winced at the sound of tearing metal before the door was ripped clean off.

He stared up dizzily at the man bearing down on him from the other side of the car, looking terrified and reaching in to rip through the seatbelt.

It was him. His stalker. The guy following him around town and sneaking into his bedroom at night.

He’d... done something. He’d gotten his car off the road so the semi wouldn’t hit it. Stiles liked to think, based on the panic on the guy’s face, that he hadn’t meant to send the Jeep tumbling down the ravine on the other side, but he couldn’t be sure.

“What fresh Twilight bullshit is this?” Stiles demanded weakly.

He passed out at the sound of the man screaming his name again.

Stiles swam in and out of consciousness for the next few hours. He remembered being pulled from the Jeep. He even remembered trying to shove the guy away from him, another voice belonging to someone who wasn’t his stalker insisting he had to stop moving. Then someone was shining a light in his eyes while voices spoke urgently around him, blue and red lights flashing in his peripheral. Someone was asking him questions while he was being loaded into an ambulance, and everything hurt.

The next time he woke up, Melissa was at his bedside petting his hair, and Scott was standing beside her looking pale and terrified. Stiles could hear his dad out in the corridor shouting at someone before his eyes rolled back and he passed out again.

The next time he woke up was a little less disorienting. He could hear a heartrate monitor to his left and the pinch in his hand suggested he had an IV. He shifted slightly, relieved he didn’t have a catheter—he’d had that once, and he was not eager for a repeat—and blinked open his eyes. The lights were too bright, which concerned him because he could tell most of them were off. The
room was only partially lit, and he could feel someone holding his hand.

“Stiles? Son?” A chair creaked and his father’s face swam into view above him. He was having a hard time focussing, but he’d recognize that blur anywhere.

“Oh.” It was all Stiles could think to say. Everything hurt, his brain felt too big for his skull, and he honestly wasn’t entirely sure he wasn’t dead.

He reached out with his free hand, the one his dad wasn’t trying to crush, and touched his legs. They ached, but they were there. He wiggled his toes just to be sure, and was relieved to feel them. He then started to reach up for his head but his dad caught his hand and set it back down on his stomach.

“What happened?” He tried to say those words, but they came out slurred and weird-sounding. Evidently his father still understood because he moved closer, looking relieved and terrified at the same time.

“Your steering column disconnected,” he said patiently, one hand brushing at Stiles’ hair on the opposite side of the pain. “You ran off the road, tumbled down a hill. A trucker saw it happen, called an ambulance.”

“No.” Stiles grabbed at his dad’s sleeve. “The guy. What about the guy?”

“What guy?” his dad asked with a frown.

“There was a guy. He pulled me out of the Jeep.” His words were still slurring heavily, and he felt like he was seconds away from passing out again, but he forced himself to stay conscious.

“Deputy Hale and Deputy Parrish were first on the scene. It took both of them to get you out of the Jeep. Hale wasn’t even on duty, he was just on his way home when it happened.”

No. No, no, no, that wasn’t right. Stiles remembered him. He remembered that the guy was there. He’d-he’d ripped the door off his Jeep. He’d reached in and snapped Stiles’ seatbelt.

“Roscoe—”

“Towed. It’s in the shop. Don’t worry, we’ll-we’ll figure something out.”

That meant it was beyond saving. That meant his Jeep was toast, and his dad didn’t know how to tell him.

Stiles felt his eyes burning. That was his mom’s car. He couldn’t let it go, it was all he had left of her. He couldn’t lose that car!

His dad shushed him, suggesting the tears had spilled over, and kissed his forehead.

“Sleep, Stiles. You need to get some rest.”

“Dad—”

“It’s okay, son. Just get some rest. We can talk later.”

Stiles wanted to insist they needed to talk now, but he couldn’t keep his eyes open and he felt them roll back in his head before he passed out again.

When he woke up again, feeling just as groggy and out of it as the last time, his dad was gone, and
Scott was pacing at the foot of the bed. Well, he assumed it was Scott, his vision still wasn’t great.

“Hey,” he said when he saw Stiles’ eyes open, confirming it was him. He hurried to the side of the bed and sat on the edge, grabbing at one of Stiles’ hands and squeezing it just a touch too tightly. “Hey. You’re awake.”

“Sort of,” Stiles managed to get out, closing his eyes and swallowing hard. His mouth felt dry. “How long was I out?”

“About thirteen hours, give or take. Your dad went to get some food. He should be back any minute.”

“At least he can’t cheat in the hospital, I doubt they have anything here he’d want,” Stiles managed to get out, forcing a laugh and then wincing when it hurt his ribs.

Fuck, how injured was he?

They were silent for a long while, Stiles trying to take stock of all his injuries, but he didn’t think he’d manage it until he was on his feet again.

Which would likely be soon, he had to pee. He definitely didn’t want a catheter, and he didn’t want to use one of those in-bed urinals either, so he’d figure out how to stand without falling over in a minute.

“You scared the life out of me,” Scott finally said, voice barely above a whisper. “Stiles, all I heard was you swearing, and then the crunching of metal, and then—then nothing. I thought—Stiles, I thought...” Scott sounded like he was about to hyperventilate.

Stiles squeezed his hand back, eyes still closed. “I’m right here, buddy. I’m okay.”

“I thought you were dead,” Scott insisted. “I didn’t know what to do. I didn’t know where you were. I called your dad, and then he heard over the radio that someone had called in about your Jeep, and—I was so fucking scared, Stiles. Jackson almost lost his fucking mind when I called him on my way here. He wanted to come, but he’s not allowed in right now. Technically I’m not allowed in, but my mom bends the rules for me sometimes. I just—I couldn’t, Stiles. I thought you were dead.”

He felt Scott’s forehead on his shoulder and reached out with his other arm, patting him lightly. “I’m okay, Scott.” He didn’t know if it was true, but he at least wasn’t dead, and he seemed to have all of his limbs. He was just really tired, and in a lot of pain.

“You smell terrible,” Scott said with a wet laugh. “What are they giving you?”

“Probably morphine,” he guessed. “I need to pee.”

“I’ll find my mom.”

Stiles felt Scott shift away and he released his hand. The door opened, then shut and Stiles let out a weak groan of pain.

God, everything hurt. And the room was spinning, which was talented, considering his eyes were still closed. He kind of felt like he was drunk, actually. This was what being drunk felt like. Except minus the pain and with a lot more fun involved.
Man, he could imagine Jackson was going out of his mind right now. He didn’t do well with not
being up to date on everything involving Stiles. He hoped he wasn’t waiting out in the waiting
area, emanating doom and gloom. It would be a waste of time and make everyone uncomfortable.

And fuck, his *Jeep*! He was going to freak the fuck out once the morphine wore off if he couldn’t
get it back in working order. He couldn’t lose it, he *couldn’t*! They *had* to fix it! He didn’t care
what they did, he wanted it fixed. Even if it cost him every cent he owned for the rest of his life, he
needed that car back.

The door opened and shut quietly once more, and Stiles let out a pathetic groan.

“Scotty?”

He heard footsteps approach, then a large, warm hand pressed against his forehead. He almost
sighed with relief when the pain slowly began to fade away, like it was being sucked right out of
him. Shit, maybe they’d upped the morphine, not that he was complaining.

The hand on his forehead slowly slid to his cheek, thumb brushing against his cheekbone.

“Dad?” He managed to get his eyes open, but his vision was blurry and the figure above him
retreated quickly. He frowned, turning his head, and saw dark hair and a black jacket before the
door closed.

Less than thirty seconds later, it opened again and Melissa walked in, looking just as blurry as the
person who’d just left, but he’d recognize her anywhere.

“Hey sweetie,” she whispered, pressing her hand to his cheek exactly like the previous visitor had.
“How’re you feeling?”

“Really good, actually. Did you up the morphine?”

She laughed. “No, you’ve got the same dose you had earlier. Scott says you need to use the
bathroom. Can you sit up for me?”

Right. Using the bathroom required getting to his feet. This was going to be fun.

“If I fall over, don’t tell Scott.”

“If you fall over, guess who’s getting a catheter?”

Stiles let out a groan, but allowed Melissa to raise the bed slightly to get him started on sitting up.
He definitely didn’t want the catheter, so he was going to do everything in his power not to fall
over.

He fucking hated hospitals.

Stiles had never been so happy in his life to see his home again. While he hadn’t been in the
hospital for very long—just over two days—it was more than enough for him to hate doctors, hate
food, hate showers, and even almost hate Melissa.

No, that wasn’t true, he loved Melissa, she was an angel.

He’d also met Laura Hale, since she was the nurse assigned to his area when Melissa finally went
home. She was extremely nice and, as predicted, gorgeous like the rest of her siblings. She’d
pursed her lips upon entering the room, like she smelled something foul, and he’d almost
apologized for the stench considering he hadn’t exactly had the chance to shower, but the look had quickly disappeared and she’d been all smiles with him.

She was worried about him, and came by more often than Melissa had during her time working. She kept checking in to make sure he was doing okay, to check on his pain, to double-check all the stitches in his head and his various injuries. Stiles didn’t mind, because he actually always felt better whenever she came by to check on him. The pain would always dissipate somewhat when she was poking at him, and the reprieve felt good.

Now, he was finally out, and while the pain was still there, it was more tolerable. He had one arm in a sling since he’d mentioned it was bothering him and the doctor figured he’d bruised it, so he had to take it easy for a little while.

He had eighteen stitches in his head, another six on his face, and various scrapes and bruises from where glass had bitten into his skin or he’d been knocked around in the vehicle. His thighs both had large, ugly bruises from the tree that had pinned him down, and he had the most disgusting bruise and broken skin line all along his chest from the seatbelt.

Then again, it was better than his head having gone through the windshield. Really, he felt like he was lucky to be alive.

And he kind of owed it to his stalker. Which was weird. And something he hadn’t spoken to Scott about yet.

His dad led the way into the house, making sure Stiles made it in all right and that he was seated on the couch before going to fetch him some water.

“Dad, I’m injured, not an invalid,” Stiles insisted when he returned with it, setting it down on the coffee table.

“The doctor said to take it easy for the next few days. I expect you to listen.” He pointed a finger at him. “Scott said he’d be by after class, Jackson mentioned he’d drop in at some point today, and I’m a phonecall away if you need me.”

“And how do you propose I call you without a phone?” Stiles inquired.

The sheriff rolled his eyes and moved out of the room. When he came back, he tossed a brand new, sealed box on the couch beside him.

“Smartass,” the sheriff said, bending down to locate the remote and handing it to Stiles. “Please take it easy, for once in your life. If I find out you’re on the lawn doing cartwheels, I’m taking the phone back.”

“Yes sir.” Stiles saluted with his good hand, then reached out for the sealed box. It was an Iphone eight, which was better than the last model he’d had, but not the most recent. Made sense, considering the eight had probably cost a small fortune, nevermind it was going to be outdated soon.

Apple were dicks like that, but man were their products worth it.

His dad continued to lecture him while Stiles ripped through the plastic on the box and started trying to get his phone organized. He grunted responses to his dad while he went through the setup screen, and looked up when the man snapped his fingers in his face.

“I know you like your new toy, but this is important.” He set a bottle of prescription medication on
the coffee table. “Don’t forget.”

“I won’t, dad. I’m fine, I promise.” He shooed him away with his good hand. “Go forth. Be a cop. Catch some bad guys and all that stuff.”

“What did I do to deserve you?” the sheriff asked with a sigh.

“Something wonderful, I am clearly a reward.” Stiles offered him a smile.

His dad smiled back, bent down to kiss the crown of his head—which Stiles groaned at—and then told him he’d be back around dinner time. Stiles stood to follow him to the door, and once his dad was outside, he locked it behind him, watching him head for his cruiser. When he’d finally left, Stiles turned and stared into the rest of the house, listening hard for any signs of intruders.

Hearing nothing didn’t stop him from heading upstairs to check the rooms, but he’d barely gotten to the landing when someone rang the bell. He paused, turning to stare back down the stairs, and debated going to answer when the ringing came again, twice in succession.

“Ah,” he said in understanding. “Jackson.”

Only Jackson was that impatient when he came over.

Stiles went back down the stairs and moved quickly to the door, pulling it open. As predicted, Jackson was standing on the porch. He gave Stiles a quick once-over, and the way his lips turned down at the corners suggested he was unhappy to see him so injured. He didn’t say anything though, because Jackson wasn’t allowed to show that he had feelings, but he at least didn’t shoulder past Stiles into the house like he normally did.

“Still alive, then?”

“Unfortunately,” Stiles said, shutting the door after stepping aside and leading the way to the living room. “Don’t you have class? It’s Thursday.”

“I bailed. Figured you could use the company.”

That was Jackson speak for he was worried about him. Which was sweet, and Stiles appreciated it, because he still wasn’t entirely sure the house was devoid of any mystical creatures looking to suck out his bone marrow or whatever.

Stiles sat back down on the couch while Jackson went about looking through the movies he owned. He settled on one of the Fast and Furious movies and then joined Stiles on the couch.

He ended up watching it more than Stiles did, since he was busy trying to get his phone back in order. He was sad about all the lost photos and videos, but figured if his dad had found his old phone out by the crash, one of the guys at the precinct would probably help him get all of that stuff back.

It paid to be the precinct baby, people loved him.

Once the new SIM card was in his phone, he went about adding in all the phone numbers he could remember by memory. Jackson didn’t say anything when Stiles input his, but he seemed to preen a little at the fact that Stiles had it memorized.

It was dangerous not to have numbers memorized! Phones could go missing or disappear or contact lists could suddenly vanish! If Stiles was in dire need of a Kanima and only had a landline, he
damn well better know Jackson’s number!

Jackson made a comment about hoping his new phone was better than his old one on the butt-dials, but Stiles didn’t know if that would make a difference. His old phone had been an Iphone, as well, so he was just under the impression that Jackson was doomed to forever get crotch-dialled and he’d just have to live with it.

Stiles was in the process of re-downloading all his preferred games—no, his high scores!—when Jackson stiffened and turned to look out the large window. Stiles paused in what he was doing, looking at him, then turned as well, but saw nothing.

“Someone’s coming,” he said, getting to his feet. He moved to the window and pulled the blinds shut, which darkened the room considerably. He was peeking between two slats, watching, as if convinced whoever it was was on their way to Stiles’ place despite there being many more houses along the block than just his.

Stiles heard two cars idling outside, one of them stopping and turning off, but the other’s engine still running. A car door slammed and Jackson narrowed his eyes.

“A girl driving a Mustang is walking up your driveway.”

“Oh!” Stiles grinned and got to his feet. “Cora.”

Jackson beat him to the door and pulled it open when Cora had just barely rung the bell. Stiles grinned from behind him, but when he tried to move forward, Jackson blocked his approach with his body, not letting Stiles move closer.

Which was weird. And rude. He just assumed it was the wolf in Jackson not wanting an injured packmate to be close to an unknown person.

Well, unknown to Jackson, since Stiles knew Cora fairly well now, he felt.

“Hey,” Cora said with a smile directed at Stiles, completely ignoring the fact that Jackson was blocking her way. “You’re alive.”

“I know, so tragic,” Stiles said with a sigh. Cora rolled her eyes.

“I was worried about you, loser. How are you doing? You okay?”

“Does he look okay?” Jackson snapped.

Stiles frowned at the back of his head, not understanding the animosity, but Cora just smiled pleasantly at him like she found his presence amusing.

“Whittemore. Never thought I’d see the day where you weren’t trying to shove Stiles’ head into a toilet.”

“What are you doing here, Hale?” Jackson demanded, crossing his arms.

“Dude,” Stiles shoved at him, but Jackson wouldn’t budge. “She’s my friend, chill.”

“It’s okay,” Cora insisted, still smiling. “I mostly came by to drop this off.” She tossed keys at Stiles, who would’ve fumbled them, except Jackson’s hand shot out and snatched them from the air before they could reach him. Cora didn’t comment on it, she just kept speaking to Stiles. “I told mom about what happened. How you only got into that accident after driving Eric and I home. She
feels bad, so I was allowed a temporary lift on my driving ban to bring the Mustang over. You can use it until your Jeep’s out of the shop.”

Stiles balked. “What? No way! Cora, that’s—are you insane? Your car is  so nice!”

“Oh.” She waved a hand dismissively. “I like your Jeep better. It’s roomier. But my car will have to do until yours is back. You gonna be okay to drive tomorrow?”

“Hopefully.” Stiles’ eyes were on the gorgeous car outside, parked in the driveway where his Jeep usually was. He was going to be terrified driving that car, it was so fucking nice, getting bird shit on it was going to give him anxiety.

“Cool. Well, originally I was gonna stick around, but looks like your guard dog doesn’t want company. Laura figured you’d be busy, she insisted on tagging along to give me a ride home.” She thumbed over her shoulder.

Stiles craned his neck and could see the eldest Hale in her car. She smiled and waved when she saw Stiles looking and he waved back with his good hand, phone still held in it.

“Oh hey, new phone?”

“Huh? Oh, yeah. Hey, what’s your number?” Stiles opened a new contact for Cora and typed in her number while she recited it. Jackson was getting visibly impatient the longer the conversation went on, so once she was done, she bid them farewell and waved over her shoulder while turning to leave.

Jackson slammed the door before she’d even cleared the porch, locking it and striding back to the living room.

“Dude, what the hell?” Stiles demanded, following after him. “I know you have a reputation, but that was rude even for you.”

“She smells weird,” Jackson insisted, baring his teeth, eyes going gold while he lifted two slats once more, peering through them.

Stiles frowned, watching the way Jackson struggled to pull his claws back in, to get his shift under control. He moved up beside him, watching through the gap while Cora climbed into her sister’s car—it looked like an Audi—and then they drove off down the street, Jackson’s watchful eye on them until the car was no longer in sight.

He dropped the blinds and turned to Stiles. “How did you and Cora reconnect?”

“Are you serious?” Stiles asked, eyebrows shooting up. “Cora’s my friend, she’s nice. She’s not dangerous.”

“She smells dangerous,” Jackson countered, looking offended that Stiles had the audacity to have friends outside their little pack. “She smells like—I don’t know. I couldn’t place it. But she’s something, and that something is making me uneasy.”

“And territorial, apparently.” Stiles rolled his eyes. “Cora’s fine, can we focus on the more pressing issue?”

“Your stalker.” Jackson crossed his arms. “Why do you think I skipped class? The others are coming by later so we can discuss. Though my vote is tell your dad.”
“I can’t just tell my dad,” Stiles insisted, throwing one arm in the air and wincing when he tried to follow through with his injured one in the sling. “This guy is Supernatural, he might hurt my dad!”

“He was in your bedroom, Stiles!” Jackson snapped.

“Yes, okay, fair point, but,” Stiles pointed a finger at him, “he’s also the one who saved me from the semi.”

“What?” Jackson demanded, frowning.

“I didn’t swerve off the road, Jackson, the steering column disconnected and I ended up on the wrong side of it. A fourteen-wheeler was coming right at me, and I couldn’t get my seatbelt off. It was literally going to crash right into me but something slammed into the side of the Jeep to knock it off the road and out of the way. I’m fairly certain having it go crashing down the ravine wasn’t part of the plan, but when I was at the bottom, the guy was there, screaming my name, and he literally tore my door off to get to me.”

Jackson stared at him. “And this doesn’t concern you more?!” he shouted, face going red like he was about to explode. “Stiles, he could have killed you! Maybe he was trying to! I heard that two deputies showed up to get you out of the Jeep, maybe he was planning something malicious but the deputies’ arrival chased him off!”

Stiles groaned and covered his face with one hand, phone crushed against his nose. This was a fucking disaster, he had no idea what was going on. He was also fairly certain the person who’d come into his hospital room when he’d been doped out of his mind was his stalker, too.

But like—what kind of stalker went out of his way to keep someone safe? Seriously, this had Edward Cullen written all over it, and Stiles was not okay with being Bella Swan.

Before he could even open his mouth to argue, Jackson turned back to the window and pulled the slats down again.

“Scott’s here,” he grumbled, moving past Stiles. “Maybe he can knock some sense into you.”

Stiles just sighed and fell back onto the couch, then winced because the action hurt his ribs. Note to self: do not fall onto couch with bruised ribs.

At least they weren’t broken.

When Jackson returned, he had Scott, Kira and Lydia with him, suggesting they’d all come over with him. Lydia eyed Stiles critically, like she was trying to determine the scope of the damage without asking, but Kira looked horrified. Scott was already used to it, so he just patted Stiles on the shoulder before sitting down in one of the chairs.

Stiles lacked the energy for a pack meeting right then, but he knew they were only having it because of him. Because of his Supernatural stalker who may or may not have been looking out for him in some weird way. Then again, maybe he was right that the guy was keeping his young, virgin ass alive to be a sacrifice or something, so it was more than time for him to get laid.

When he suggested this to Lydia, she told him that just because he was injured didn’t mean she wouldn’t punch him. He decided to let that idea slide for now.

“By the way,” Lydia said, tucking her feet up underneath herself, heels on the floor and skirt pulled down slightly so she wasn’t giving any of the straight men in the room a show. “Whose car is that?”
“Cora Hale’s,” Jackson said grumpily, arms crossed and slouching. “Came by to offer it up to keep Stiles on her good side.” He glanced at Scott then. “She’s something we need to worry about.”

“She is?” Scott asked, confused, turning to Stiles. “I thought you liked Cora.”

“I do, he’s the one getting territorial,” Stiles insisted, motioning Jackson.

“She smells off. Like something dangerous, but I can’t put my finger on what. Her scent shifts, it’s weird.”

“Huh,” Scott said with a frown. “The stalker’s scent is kind of like that, too. Like I should be able to tell what it is, but somehow can’t. It’s like different scents mixed together.”

“Exactly,” Jackson said, he and Scott staring at one another.

“Cora is not my stalker,” Stiles insisted, waving his good hand between them to cut off their weird staring discussion. “My stalker is definitely a dude. A hot dude. With murder eyes. And resting bitch face. Or maybe just regular bitch face, it’s hard to say.”

“For those of us who weren’t kept in the loop about your potentially dangerous new nighttime friend,” Lydia said, raising one hand in a ‘stop talking’ motion, “start from the beginning. When did you first notice him following you?”

It was frustrating having to go right back to the very beginning, but Stiles conceded and told all of them about the encounters. They’d been regular and of no concern at first, seeing him at the store, walking down the street, around town, the usual. No more concerning than bumping into any one of the other hundred people who lived there.

Then he moved on to the movie, seeing the man at the mall, and later in the same theatre. Then the fact that he was around the night they’d been staking out the woods. Then the school. And his bedroom. And the accident. And his hospital room. And every time he brought up a new encounter, he was just reminded of parallels from Twilight, which he’d only seen because of Lydia! But now he couldn’t get the comparisons out of his head and he kept bringing them up and addressing them during his tirade, getting more and more incensed as they progressed until he finally snapped.

“I am not Bella!” he insisted, shaking his fist angrily at Jackson, as if he’d been the one to suggest he was. “I am not Bella! I am, like, a Jacob, at least!”

Lydia made a noise of debate from his right and he whipped around to look at her.

“What?! What was that sound?!”

“You’re more of a Mike,” she insisted, shrugging neatly and flipping some curls over her shoulder.

“Wha—” Stiles had never been so offended in his life! “I am not! No way! I am a solid Jacob!”

“Mike,” she argued.

“Who’s Mike?” Scott asked.

“Shut up, Scott!” Stiles insisted, pointing a finger at him but still glaring at Lydia. He heard Kira explaining that Mike was the awkward potato who’d asked Bella to prom and was basically infatuated with her until Edward Cullen came along.
“It doesn’t really matter whether you’re a Mike or a Bella,” Lydia said.

“Or a Jacob!” Stiles interjected, but she ignored him and continued.

“The fact of the matter is, this has gone way beyond simple interest. This is dangerous. Scott says he thinks the guy was in your Jeep. What was he doing in there? What was he doing in your room? Why is he following you? I hate to agree, but I think your father needs to be involved. This has moved out of the realm of Supernatural.”

“But—”

She raised one hand to silence him, and it was as effective as if she’d snapped for him to shut up.

“I know that whoever he is, he’s not human, but having this on record at the police station is a good thing. People will keep an eye on you, and you know Parrish will drop everything and race to wherever you are if you call and sound like you’re in trouble. Most of the station would kill for you, you’re like the obnoxious little brother they all never knew they wanted.”

Stiles let out an offended sound, but she either didn’t notice or didn’t care as she continued.

“You need to speak to your father. You need to open a file. Stalking in general is dangerous, it’s even worse with a creature of unknown origin. We need to address this with the police, and once that’s been done, we can think about how to address it in the pack.”

“Lydia’s right,” Scott insisted softly. “Your dad should know something’s been going on. What if the guy shows up at your house and says he’s a friend from school and your dad just, I don’t know, invites him in?”

“Inviting Vampires, sparkly or otherwise, into a house is never a good idea,” Stiles insisted, pointing a finger at Scott.

“Exactly. I know you don’t want to, but you need to tell your dad.”

Stiles knew they were right. He knew this was something he had to tell his dad was happening. He was just worried, because he didn’t know what this Supernatural hot dude was going to do once his dad knew. What if he hurt his dad? What if he went after the policemen who tried to help him?

Then again, Parrish was something, so he’d probably be fine. Maybe. Stiles still wasn’t sure what he was, but hopefully durable.


“I would suggest sooner rather than later,” Lydia insisted. “Who knows when you’ll see him next, and what nefarious plans he might have in store for you.”

“No one says nefarious, Lyds,” Stiles insisted with a sigh.

She just gave him an annoyed look, told him to try not to die, and snapped her fingers at Scott demanding he drive Stiles to the precinct.

There went his day of not over-exerting himself.

Stiles stared out the window apprehensively, as if the station were the most terrifying thing he’d ever seen in his life. Which was stupid, because he used to do homework here before he was old enough to stay home on his own.
Kira and Scott were both turned in their seats to stare at him, waiting for him to get out. Lydia had left with Jackson, because she had more important things to do than babysit Stiles to the station when a Werewolf and Kitsune were going with him. Stiles just insisted she was too embarrassed to go because she had a crush on Parrish.

“We can go with you,” Kira offered. “If you think that’ll help.”

“It’s not that,” Stiles insisted, rubbing at his injured arm. He’d taken the sling off, not wanting people to coddle him more than necessary since his face was enough of a mess.

He just didn’t want to admit that, more than being worried his dad would get hurt, he was also kind of worried his father wouldn’t believe him. Stiles wasn’t exactly the kind of guy who got stalked. He was barely attractive, if everyone he’d ever been interested in was to be believed, and he was annoying and hyperactive. The idea of someone stalking him was as ridiculous as his father being some ancient God that people worshipped on the down low.

But he couldn’t tell Scott or Kira that, because they’d think he was feeling sorry for himself and insist he was perfectly likable, and attractive, and all that other stuff. And Stiles knew he wasn’t.

He was a Mike wishing he was good enough to be a Jacob. And that was depressing, because Jacob wasn’t even all that great.

“I got it.” He sighed and kicked open the door, climbing out and turning back to them. “I’ll call you later, tell you how it goes.”

“We can wait for you,” Scott insisted.

“Nah, it’s cool. I’ll call you later.” Stiles slammed the door and turned back to the precinct.

With another sigh, he climbed the stairs, patting his pocket to make sure his new phone was there. He was going to be super paranoid about it because it was so new.

He noticed Scott wait until he entered the station and had to admit, at least he had great friends. They really cared about him, and he appreciated that. Even if they were making him have an uncomfortable conversation that his dad may or may not believe and could, potentially, get him killed.

“Hey Val,” he said with as bright a smile as he could, walking up to the front desk.

“Jesus,” Valerie Clark gave him a once-over, face pinched with sympathy. “You look like you went through hell.”

“No, just down a ravine,” he insisted with a forced smile. “My dad free?”

“He just got off a call, so he might be in a mood.”

“Great. Thanks Val.” He patted the desk and moved past her towards his dad’s office. The door was ajar and he knocked on it, poking his head inside. His dad didn’t look up, he just grunted for whoever it was to come in, two pieces of paper held in either hand.

“Hey dad.”

The sheriff did look up at the sound of his son’s voice. “Stiles. What are you doing here? How did you get here?”
“Scott drove me.” Stiles waved the other question away, shutting the door behind himself and moving forward to take a seat, wincing as he did so. “Um, I needed to talk to you about something. It’s kind of... well, work-related, I guess. And important.”

His father frowned and set his papers aside, giving Stiles his full attention. “What is it, son?”

He had no idea how to even begin this conversation. Everything in his brain kept insisting his father wouldn’t believe him, that he’d roll his eyes and insist he didn’t have time for this. But he knew he had to get it out. And if the sheriff thought he was lying, well... he’d deal with how much that hurt later.

“Okay,” Stiles said, shifting forward in his seat and rubbing one hand across his mouth. “Okay, so, I know this is going to sound a little—crazy. And you’re probably going to laugh, or insist I’m seeing things, because it’s impossible, but I—Dad, I think I have a stalker.”

He paused, waiting for the laughter. The eye roll. The annoyed sigh and insistence he didn’t have time for this.

He got none of that. Instead, his father straightened in his seat, face hardening. “What?”

“I know it sounds impossible, and insane,” Stiles insisted, words just coming out of him now, “but I’m pretty sure I do. Dad, I’m—I’m not making this up. He was—he’s around a lot. Like, a lot. I think—he was in my hospital room. I remember... I saw someone, but my brain was still fuzzy, and it wasn’t one of the nurses or doctors and I just... I think... I might be in trouble.”

His father was sitting perfectly still, and for a second, Stiles wondered if he was going to explode. After a moment, the sheriff let out a slow breath, looking livid, but calm somehow.

“I need you to make an official report about this,” he said, getting to his feet. “You can’t just be talking to your cop dad, we need to do this properly.”

Stiles assumed he could’ve done that with his dad, but he supposed he understood why he didn’t want that to happen. After all, if his dad learned too much about the case, he might go apeshit on someone who was on the suspect list, so it was probably best he keep himself at arm’s length from an officer point of view. He could be as close as he wanted from a father point of view.

“Come on.” He motioned for Stiles to follow him, pulling open his office door. Stiles got out of his seat and joined his father at the door while the man surveyed the bullpen, seemed to hesitate, then pointed someone out.

“Speak to Deputy Hale over there. He’s a good man, he and Parrish can look into this once Parrish gets back from his rounds.”

Stiles followed his dad’s finger, taking a step towards the man he’d pointed out, and promptly froze, feeling his stomach hit his feet.

His eyes found the individual he was being asked to go and see, the man currently on the phone and looking more and more annoyed with each passing millisecond, one hand rubbing at his forehead with a pen held between his fingers.

He was attractive, really attractive, with jet black hair, broad shoulders, a neatly trimmed beard and what looked to be blue-green eyes, as far as Stiles could tell when he raised his gaze to the ceiling, as if asking for patience.

But that wasn’t all Stiles noticed about this man, because Deputy Hale was incredibly familiar. He
remembered seeing his face staring down at him worriedly from the passenger side of the Jeep while it was on its side. He remembered those murderous eyes intent on his half-awake form from the corner of his bedroom. He remembered that piercing gaze right on him from a bench outside his classroom.

It was his stalker.

It was him.


Abort Mission!

“Hah!” Stiles said, so loudly he actually made himself jump, along with everyone else in the vicinity.

Not deputy McStalker, though! He was still on the phone.

“Stiles?” his dad asked slowly.

Stiles turned back to him, feeling like he was about to laugh hysterically. His dad’s new deputy, one of the fucking Hales, was his stalker. He was Supernatural, and a cop, and his stalker, and his life was a fucking disaster, he just wanted to laugh, and laugh, and laugh.

“April Fool’s!” Stiles insisted to his dad, pointing his good pointer finger at him. The hysterical laughter was threatening to bubble up, and he had to fight really hard to keep it down.

The sheriff stared at him for a long moment, then said, “It’s May.”

“Is it?” Stiles asked, voice an octave too high. He tried to inch away, not wanting Stalky McStalkerson to see him. Thankfully, he was still on the phone. “Hah, you know, they just... they’re so close together, it’s so easy to get them confused, hard to keep track and all that. Anyway, uh, sorry, totally a joke, not at all true, made the whole thing up, see you for dinner, bye!”

Stiles didn’t let his dad call him back, he just raced to the door, almost taking out Parrish who was coming back with two coffees. Thankfully they avoided colliding with one another and Stiles hurried down the stairs, head swivelling while looking for Scott. Maybe Scott had waited! Maybe he was still there!

No dice.

His hand was shaking when he pulled his phone out, because what was happening?! Maybe Jackson was right and it was weird that Cora had randomly bumped into him. Who transferred halfway through the year anyway?! Why had she caught up to him? Why were they all friendly?

Why was her brother stalking him?!

“Hey, how’d it go?”

“My stalker is a cop!” Stiles blurted out, pacing in front of the precinct and then realizing Deputy Hale aka Stalker McStalkerton might walk out any second. He hurried to the side of the steps and crouched down so he was mostly out of sight. “Scott, my stalker is a fucking cop! And not just any cop, oh no! He’s a Hale! A Hale, Scotty! I swear, I’m living in a Twilight movie, this is ridiculous! What do I do?!”
“I’m coming back to get you.”

Stiles could feel his heart slamming against his ribs, eyes scanning the area wildly when he paused, noticing a sleek black Camaro in the parking lot. A Camaro that he recognized, because he’d seen it once before.

“Wait,” he said. “I have an idea.”

“It’s probably a bad one! Stiles—”

“I’ll call you back.”

Stiles hung up and glanced around before standing slowly. Most people knew who he was, so they didn’t pay any attention to him while he walked slowly across the lot, trying for innocent. When he reached the Camaro, he looked around to make sure no one was looking, and tried the handle.

Surprisingly, the door opened. It was likely that no one was stupid enough to steal a car from the lot of a police station, but still, ballsy. Stiles quickly slid into the driver’s seat and slammed the door, slouching so he wouldn’t be seen as easily.

The first thing he noticed was a red hoodie on the passenger seat and he instantly bristled, grabbing at it and turning to glare towards the station. It was his favourite hoodie, he’d been looking for this! What the fuck!

“I’m taking this back,” he muttered, struggling to pull it on over the hoodie he was already wearing. He ended up hurting his arm in his efforts, but it was worth it getting the hoodie on and knowing deputy Hale wouldn’t have it to—do whatever! Gross, maybe he was jerking off into it.

“If there is any cum on this sweater, I will murder you,” he hissed towards the station.

Returning to the task at hand, he opened the glove box and started going through everything in there. There wasn’t really anything of interest, and while he knew the answer to which Hale was in the station, he still felt a little better having it confirmed with the registration.

Derek Hale. Derek Hale was stalking him. The question now was why?

Every time the door to the station opened, Stiles glanced up, but it was never anyone to be concerned about. He just finished going through everything in the glove box, then moved into the back seat to go through the bags back there. Mostly just clothes, some gym shoes, a grocery list. Nothing that explained anything.

Stiles was in the middle of shoving the bag back onto the floor when his blood ran cold. Derek Hale was a Supernatural being. Stiles knew he was, he’d seen it himself. With the shoving the Jeep out of the way, and the ripping the door off, and leaping out his window with ease.

So if Derek was a Supernatural being, then that meant...

“Cora.” God dammit, could he not have nice things?! Why couldn’t he have nice things?! It wasn’t fair. Couldn’t he have just one friend who was normal?!

But Jackson had said she smelled weird. And the stalker in his car and room—aka Derek fucking Hale—also smelled weird, according to Scott. So if they both smelled weird, they were obviously both the same thing. The question was what that thing happened to be.

Stiles jumped when his phone went off, pulling it out.
head up your dad just called asking for your new cell number

“Shit,” Stiles hissed just as it began to ring. He answered it, glancing at the station door. “Hello?”

“Stiles, where are you?”

“Hey pops! Dad! Daddio. Fatherman. Sheriff sir.”

“Stiles!”

“Right. I am, uh, on my way home. Figured I’d walk, get some fresh air, been cooped up for a while, it’ll do me some good. Hey, sorry about that joke. Totally off-colour, shouldn’t have done it.”

“Son,” his dad insisted, sounding exasperated. “I know you. You have a terrible sense of humour, but not this terrible. And you looked scared when you left. What’s going on?”

“Nothing,” Stiles insisted with a sharp, fake laugh, eyes skirting back to the station doors and freezing.

Derek Hale was coming.

Derek Hale was coming!

“Uh, something just came up, gotta go, love you, bye!” Stiles hung up and turned his phone off, then flailed slightly trying to figure out what to do. He could try and sneak out the back door on the opposite side, but there were people on the road and they might see him and call attention to him.

But if he stayed where he was, he was basically allowing himself to be kidnapped by his stalker! Lose-lose.

Then again, he could also interrogate Mr. Deputy Derek Hale if he stayed in the car, and while he recognized that wasn’t one of his brighter ideas, he ran out of options when the guy was literally right there and just ended up ducking, heart slamming against his ribs.

He felt the car jostle when Derek climbed into the front seat, the door slammed, and then silence. When Stiles glanced up, he saw Derek staring down at him, looking both terrified and furious.

“What the fuck?” he demanded. “What are you doing in my car?!”

“I don’t know, Deputy Hale!” Stiles snapped, sitting up and sounding much braver than he felt.

“What is an officer of the law doing stalking the sheriff’s underage son?!”

Derek had a good poker face. A really good poker face. Because he didn’t look guilty at all, he just stared at Stiles like he didn’t have time for crazy teenagers hanging out in the back seat of his car.

Stiles’ heart was beginning to increase in speed and he was ready to just make a break for the door and leap out when Derek finally spoke.

“I’m not stalking you,” he insisted, voice perfectly even. So perfectly even. Like he’d practised it a few times in his head. “And you’re not underage.”

Stiles pointed his finger at him accusingly. “How would you know that unless you were stalking me?!”
Derek had the audacity to roll his eyes. “Everyone knows that, Stiles.”

“No they don’t!” he insisted angrily. “No one knows that!”

“Fine, you’re my sister’s friend, you were in the same grade, my sister is twenty-one, thus you are also twenty-one. Math. It’s a thing.” Derek let out a small scoff. “Though as I recall, you were pretty terrible at it.”

Stiles balked. Okay, stalking was one thing, but insulting his intelligence?! “I was salutatorian!” Stiles shouted at him angrily. “I can do math! I’m really good at math!”

“Good for you. Get out of my car.”

“Not without answers!” Stiles insisted. “Why are you stalking me?”

“I told you, I’m not stalking you,” Derek insisted, sounding annoyed. Stiles noticed it looked like he was trying not to breathe. If that wasn’t some Edward Cullen bullshit, Stiles didn’t know what was.

“You were in my bedroom!” He pointed his finger at Derek when the man opened his mouth to argue. “Don’t lie! I saw you! You were there! And Scott knows you were there! You were there! You stole my hoodie!” Stiles gripped the front of the hoodie he was wearing, tugging it a few times for emphasis. “This is my favourite hoodie!”

“I was only in your room because your dad asked me to check your security system,” Derek said dryly. “I went through the only window I saw that allowed me access, and you woke up while I was still in there. I didn’t know what to do, I panicked, so I just bolted.”

“And my dad will corroborate this far-fetched story of you checking our non-existent ‘security system’?” Stiles asked, using his good hand to do air quotes around the last two words.

“Yes, actually. He will.” Derek crossed his muscular arms and Stiles glanced down at them. Derek was definitely strong enough to manhandle his weak, injured ass out of the car. Stiles figured he was really pushing his luck, but he wanted answers!

“You threw my Jeep down a ravine!”

“That was an accident, I was just trying to get you off the road before the semi hit you,” Derek insisted.

“You broke into my Jeep!”

“Yeah, to lock the door for you because you suck at locking your car up. That thing is going to get stolen, and I won’t have any sympathy.”

“You know you’re not helping your ‘I’m not stalking you’ case at all, right?” Stiles demanded. “You are admitting to following me!”

“Following you and stalking you are not the same thing.”

Stiles balked. “Following someone is literally the definition of stalking them!” Stiles shouted. “But you know what, I don’t care, I don’t. Clearly you have issues, so that’s a you problem. What I want to know is why. I need answers!”

“Then go find them somewhere else,” Derek said, smiling at him. It was not a kind smile. It was
the kind of smile that prefaced painful death via unconventional means. Like buzzsaw or lawnmower or, fuck, who knew, a spoon maybe?!

“No, no, no,” Stiles insisted, shifting to the opposite end of the back seat so he had some space between him and Derek. “You need to tell me why you’re following me! Are you, like...” Stiles didn’t even know so he went for Edward Cullen. “Are you lusting after my blood like some creepy bloodsucking stalker?”

Derek looked both annoyed and offended. “Not a stalker,” he insisted again, though he didn’t say anything about the bloodsucking part of that sentence, so that wasn’t reassuring.

“Are you after my transparently gorgeous skin?!” Stiles continued, ignoring him.

“What?” Derek demanded.

“Are we secret special friends I don’t know about that you want to bone every time I’m within smelling distance?!”

The way Derek’s shoulders went rigid and he didn’t say anything was definitely cause for concern and all the blood drained from Stiles’ face. That couldn’t be it, it had to be one of the other two.

“It’s... it’s not the bloodsucking one, is it?” he asked slowly, eying Derek suspiciously and inching closer to the door. “Because I’m telling you straight up, I had garlic for lunch.” Which he did not, but Derek didn’t know that! Unless... he did know that...

“That’s a myth, Stiles,” the other man said with an exasperated sigh, rubbing at his eyes like he wished he was anywhere else right then. His own fault for stalking Stiles! He should’ve known what he was getting into!

“Well, still. I’d probably taste bad.”

“I don’t want your blood, Stiles,” Derek said, annoyed, looking back over at him and scowling.

Stiles scoffed. “What? Why not? Are you saying it’s not good enough for you? I’ll have you know,” Stiles pointed a finger in Derek’s face again, “my blood is top tier blood, thank you very much!”

Derek looked like he was about to lose it. “You literally make no sense!” he insisted angrily. “You don’t want me to take your blood, but when I say I don’t want it, you insist it’s the best blood around! Do you want me to suck your blood or don’t you?!?”

“Ha!” Stiles pointed at him again. “So you admit you want my blood!”

“The only place I want your blood right now is on my hands,” Derek said dryly. “After I murder you.”

“Still counts!” Stiles shouted.

Derek opened his mouth to retort when they both froze at the sound of knuckles rapping lightly on glass. Derek whipped around and Stiles glanced over at the driver’s side window where his dad was bent down with his hand still raised, looking in at both of them.

“Deputy Hale. Stiles. Out of the car, please.”

Stiles saw Derek swallow hard, the man turning to look at him briefly before he obediently kicked
open the door rather violently and climbed out of the car, slamming it so hard the whole vehicle rocked. Stiles followed suit, climbing out on the other side to keep some distance between him and Derek, but his father motioned for him to come around the car so he obediently made his way around the hood and stood a little ways from Derek, shoving his good hand in his pocket, the other pressed against his stomach in an attempt to alleviate some of the pain.

“Do I even want to know what’s going on over here? Because I have to say, I’m a little concerned.” He looked back and forth between Derek and Stiles, crossing his arms. “Stiles, what were you doing in deputy Hale’s car?”

Stiles opened his mouth to tell him that this deputy was his stalker, but even as he inhaled to do so, the words stuck in his throat. His dad might have believed him about the stalker, as far as Stiles could tell, but this was one of his deputies. This was someone that his father had been working with for the past few months, no way was he going to take Stiles seriously.

If anything, he’d get mad at him, insist it wasn’t a joking matter, that rumours like that could ruin people’s lives. And Derek was a cop, why would a cop be stalking the sheriff’s son? That was ridiculous, and stupid, and he was never going to believe him. And he was a Hale, he could have anyone he wanted, why choose Stiles?

Besides, he had no idea what Derek was. What if he could manipulate memories? What if he did something to make the sheriff turn against him? Stiles didn’t want to put his dad in danger like that, not without knowing what Derek was after.

So instead of saying what Derek’s face clearly assumed he was going to say, Stiles instead said, “Nothing is going on here. Just—catching up with my good buddy Derek. You know, from high school. Real close. Awesome friends. I hang out with his sister all the time, so we were just... you know. Joking about her.”

Derek looked startled, but his father looked suspicious, arms still crossed.

“Stiles, did you break into his car?”


“Do I look like I’m joking?” the sheriff asked.

Stiles stared at him, pressing his lips together. “Little bit, yeah.”

His father’s expression didn’t change in the slightest. “I’m not joking.”

“Oh.” That was the safest thing to say, but he still somehow managed to follow it up with, “Technically, his door was unlocked, so it wasn’t so much me breaking into his car as it was him letting me in by not locking his door.”

His father did not look impressed. Or pleased.

“Stiles, why are you really bothering my deputy?”

He felt his chest tighten at the words, because it only reaffirmed what he’d already been thinking. His dad would never believe him, and coming to speak to him had been a stupid idea. If Derek wanted to murder him while he slept, well, whatever. Hopefully he’d make it quick.

“I wasn’t... I was just gonna play a prank on him for Cora,” Stiles said softly, feeling all the fight
leave him. He ignored the look he was getting from Derek and just raked a hand through his hair. “Look, can I go? I have homework, and I’m already behind enough as it is.”

“I’ll give you a ride,” the sheriff said, uncrossing his arms and pointing at the cruiser. “To make sure you actually go home this time.”

Stiles started for the cruiser, but paused when he was about to pass Derek, turning to look at him. “You and your family need to stay the hell away from me. I mean it.”

“Stiles!”

He turned away from Derek and hurried after his father towards the cruiser.

He could foretell a lecture in his future.

Stiles did not sleep that night. To be precise, he spent a majority of the evening pacing in his room with his thumbnail in his mouth, and said pacing continued long after his father had finally called it a night and gone to bed.

He’d called Scott to explain everything that had happened, and his friend had been sufficiently furious for him, which he appreciated, but now he had a problem. Because he had Cora Hale’s Mustang in the driveway, and tomorrow was Friday, and he was meant to use said Mustang to go to the Hale house to pick up Cora to drive almost two hours to school with her.

Scott had offered to drive him instead, and while Stiles had taken him up on it, it didn’t solve his return trip home problem since Scott had work and wouldn’t be there at five when he finished classes for the day. He supposed he could call Lydia or Jackson for a ride. They’d be annoyed, but they’d do it if they were free.

It also didn’t solve the Mustang in his driveway problem. Or the fact that Cora would be waiting for him problem. She’d already texted him twice to ask what the hell was going on because Derek said he’d ambushed him in his car and then had clammed up.

He shouldn’t have to deal with this. He was not in a God damn movie about sparkly Vampires no matter how many similarities there were! And now it was just past five in the morning and he was exhausted and starving and he hadn’t done any of his stupid homework. And Scott was going to be there in forty minutes to pick him up. This was a fucking disaster.

Sitting in his desk chair, he buried his face in one hand and let out a slow breath.

“Okay, what do I know?” he asked, trying to make a checklist. Checklists made him feel better. In theory, anyway, he’d only done it once before in his life, but it had helped! “He saved me from the semi. Point for him. He also sent me tumbling down a ravine, so there goes that. He broke into my room, into my car, so two more lost points. Told the truth about dad asking him to check our security system I still haven’t found, so back up one point. Lied about it being in the middle of the night, so back down.”

Realistically, none of that mattered because the bottom line was a Supernatural being with superstrength was following him around and breaking into his room. And he always looked like he wanted to eat him. Stiles was sure he was tasty, but he wasn’t interested in being Derek Hale’s meal. He was sure there were many other tastier people out there that Derek could eat!

But seriously, he mostly just wanted an explanation. A part of him felt like this couldn’t be
malicious, because he’d never felt anything other than friendship while with Cora, and Derek had technically saved him, what with the whole semi coming right for him thing.

“No, that’s how Twilight happened!” Stiles insisted to himself, then groaned and banged his head against his desk. “Curse you, Lydia.”

The movie was just entertaining! He couldn’t help it! Sometimes he watched it when he needed to laugh. And he just couldn’t stop comparing his life to it, which was sad and pathetic, but the parallels were insane!

Small town. Rich family of Supernaturals living in the woods. One sought after human. One of the Supernaturals—not the oldest, not the youngest—stalking the human. The human’s dad was the sheriff. The Supernatural stalker saved the human from a car accident. The human had a shitty car. So far the only thing that differed was that none of the Hale siblings hated him. Then again, he hadn’t met Merrak yet, but he wasn’t eager to meet any more of the Hales.

Stiles’ head shot up when his alarm went off and he fell off his chair in his haste to get to it, shushing it loudly while crawling to his nightstand and shutting it off, listening hard. He heard his dad mumble something from down the corridor, but it didn’t seem like he’d woken him.

He hadn’t realized he’d fallen asleep, but at least he managed to get about twenty minutes of it. Better than nothing, which he was already used to, so it worked out.

Stumbling sleepily around his room while rubbing his injured arm since crawling across the floor had not been kind to it, he managed to get dressed and shoved his phone into his pocket, pulling the sling on once he’d changed shirts. He headed to the kitchen so he could grab himself something to eat considering he and Scott wouldn’t be stopping—they were both poor, they couldn’t afford it. He was at the bottom of the stairs and about to turn to head towards the kitchen when he paused.

There was a dark grey Mercedes parked at the bottom of the driveway.

Stiles did not know anyone who owned a dark grey Mercedes. The only person he knew with enough money to own a Mercedes was Jackson. And Lydia. And Kira. Basically everyone he knew except him and Scott.

Why were all their friends rich? That wasn’t cool.

Inching towards the door and peeking out the side window, he squinted to try and get a look at the driver, and jumped a mile high when Cora appeared right in front of him.

“Jesus!” he hissed, backpedalling and almost falling on his ass. “Trying to give me a heart attack?”

“Come on, let’s go.” She tapped her watch. “We’re gonna be late.”

It was earlier than usual, not even quarter to six yet, so be doubted it.

“Thanks, but I’ve got a ride,” Stiles insisted. “Scott’s coming. So, uh, all good. I’m covered. You have fun though.”

She gave him a look. “I swear to God, if Derek ruined our friendship, I’m going to murder him. Will you just get out here? Trust me, you don’t want her to come and fetch you, she’s ten times scarier than I am.”

Stiles didn’t know who ‘her’ was, but he suspected it wasn’t Laura. He’d seen Laura’s car, it was a red Audi, not a grey Mercedes.
And considering there was only one other woman in the Hale family, he really didn’t want to piss off the matriarch. Moms were scary, he’d seen Melissa get mad enough times to know he didn’t want to ever see it again.

“Look, I don’t want to drink your Kool-Aid,” Stiles insisted. “And I don’t want anyone sucking my blood. I eat a lot of garlic, I’d taste bad.”

“No one wants your blood, Stilinski.” She rolled her eyes. “You’re gonna wake up your dad. Look, you can text your little pack friends and let them know who you’re with, but we are literally going to be late for class, so put on your big boy pants and get out here. Now.”

Stiles didn’t like that she knew about the pack. Were they going to go after the pack next? This was bad, so very bad. Why were they even after him? Were they lacking in humans in their pack? Or whatever they had? He didn’t know what the Hales were, only that they ‘smelled weird,’ according to the Werewolves in his pack.

“I will break your door down,” Cora said dryly. She tensed, then turned and muttered something. Stiles assumed whatever they were, they had superhearing. She sighed explosively and turned back to Stiles. “My mother said not to break the door down, but is politely asking you to give her a few hours of your time. She is going to buy us breakfast for the drive. She wants to apologize for Derek. Can you please stop acting like we want to eat you.”

Stiles wasn’t entirely sure they didn’t want to eat him, but he had to protect the pack, and if going with them meant they’d leave the others alone, then... then fine. He could do this. Sacrifice himself. Or something.

“Let me get my bag,” he muttered.

Turning, he headed back upstairs while pulling out his phone. It was entirely possible they would hear him make this call, but he couldn’t not tell Scott.

He grabbed his messenger bag and started shoving all of his various books in it, annoyed about how heavy it was going to be since he didn’t have the Jeep to switch them out in, and put his phone on speaker once he’d tapped on Scott’s number since he only had one hand. He held it in his injured hand since he could at least angle the phone upwards for the microphone.

“Hey, I’m almost ready, just finishing up breakfast.”

“Yeah, don’t worry about it. I am being kidnapped by the Hales.”

“What?!”

“Mother Hale is outside with Cora,” Stiles said, lowering his voice and moving to the window, glancing out of it towards the road. The Mercedes was still there, and he could see Mrs. Hale sitting in the driver’s seat, waiting patiently. “They’ve made it pretty clear they won’t leave until I go out there.”

“I’m coming over!”

“No, just—keep an eye on the others. Whatever this is, I’ll figure it out.”

“Stiles, you’re human! They could kill you!”

He shrugged. “YOLO?”
“Stiles!”

“What else am I supposed to do?!” he hissed. “If she rings the doorbell, dad’s gonna wake up and wonder why I’m being rude! He’s already pissed about what happened yesterday with Derek, I can’t really fuck things up with mama Hale, too! Just—I’ll call you in an hour, okay? If I don’t, assume I’m dead and tell dad Werewolves are real and the Hales are soul-sucking demons or something, I don’t know.”

“Stiles—”

He hung up on Scott, and almost turned his phone off before realizing his friend would panic at that. He just resolved not to answer it if it rang. Which it did. Immediately.

Shoving it into his pocket, he hoisted his bag onto his shoulder and winced before carefully switching sides, the bruise from his seatbelt making it impossible to comfortably carry his bag. Terrific. Just what he needed.

Hopefully his death would be swift.

Heading back downstairs, he moved up to the front door and saw Cora was still waiting on the porch. Letting out a slow breath, he pushed open the door and exited the house, turning to lock it behind him.

“We’re not soul-sucking demons, by the way,” she said dryly.

He turned to give her an innocent look. “What? Of course not, that was just a joke.”

“You’re a terrible liar, no wonder your dad doesn’t believe a word you say.” She rolled her eyes and motioned for him to follow while turning to head back to the car. “Come on, then, or we won’t have time for food.”

Stiles severely hoped he wasn’t the food, but wisely kept that thought to himself to avoid giving anyone any ideas. Cora pulled open the passenger door and climbed into the car, shutting it behind herself and buckling herself in while Stiles took his time moving to the back. He decided to sit behind her, because if he sat behind Talia Hale in the driver’s seat, for one thing, it meant Cora could turn and stare at him the whole drive, and for another, it would put the seatbelt exactly where his bruise was and he didn’t need that kind of pain before death.

Opening the back door, he tossed his bag in first, then climbed in and shut it behind himself, buckling himself in and then clearing his throat uncomfortably. When he glanced up, Talia was watching him in the rearview mirror. He pressed his lips together and looked out the window instead of acknowledging the stare.

Talia said nothing and eased away from the curb. When the car increased in speed, all the locks engaged automatically, trapping Stiles in the car with two monsters masquerading as women.

“It’s nice to see you again, Stiles,” Talia said once they’d reached the end of the street, her signal on while she waited to ensure it was safe before turning, nevermind that there were no cars around right now. “It’s been a long time. You’ve grown up.”

“Tends to happen,” Stiles said, unable to help himself.

“I suppose,” she admitted with a fond smile. “I’m sorry for commandeering your morning commute with my daughter, but after the conversation I had with my eldest son last night, I thought it best I do a little bit of damage control.”
“Considering Derek still insists following someone around and stalking them isn’t the same thing,” Cora said with a snort. Stiles practically heard the eye roll. “Has he looked up the word ‘stalking’ in the dictionary? The literal definition relates to following someone.”

“That’s what I said!” Stiles insisted.

“Cora.” Talia’s voice was pleasant, but the reprimand was there and Cora went silent in her seat. Stiles waited for someone to say something, but they were both quiet for the next stretch of the drive, so he just turned to stare out the window, watching the scenery go by and looking out for any signs that they were taking him somewhere other than school.

When they were about twenty minutes outside of town, making good time since they’d left earlier than usual for Stiles, Talia eased off the highway and stopped at a small diner that felt like it was in the middle of nowhere, but was attached to an outlet mall so wasn’t really the middle of nowhere.

“I hear you like pancakes,” Talia said, turning in her seat to smile at Stiles. “This place makes delicious flapjacks.”

He managed an awkward smile and a half-nod, wondering if they were fattening him up before devouring him. Talia and Cora climbed out, so Stiles said a little prayer and told his mother he’d see her soon, then followed them. They headed inside together, the diner surprisingly well-travelled given the early hour, and were led over to a booth.

The Hales were kind enough not to sit beside him so he didn’t feel boxed in, the two of them taking the seat across from him and pulling their menus over. Stiles dragged one over for himself, but honestly wasn’t sure he could eat right then. Though their pancakes did look delicious. They had chocolate chip pancakes, complete with cocoa powder in the batter, real chocolates chips both in and on the pancakes, whipped cream, Nutella ‘syrup’ and a side of bacon, for some reason.

If he was going to die today, that sounded like a pretty good last meal. Even if it did cost fifteen ninety-nine.

When the waitress came over to ask what they wanted, Talia ordered some scrambled eggs and a coffee, Cora got a breakfast wrap with a chocolate milkshake, and Stiles asked for the pancakes to put their orders in, Stiles had nothing to distract him from the two women staring at him.

He pressed his lips together and drummed his fingers on the table. The hum of the lights overhead sounded deafening, and he was about two seconds away from going insane when Talia finally spoke.

“I wanted to apologize to you,” she said. “About Derek.”

“Hm?” Stiles asked, raising his eyebrows.

Talia let out a slow breath, reaching up to grab her napkin and unfolding it. She placed it in her lap, smoothing it out while watching her hands, and then folded them together on the table once more, staring at Stiles intently.

“We thought he was ready to come back to Beacon Hills. He insisted he would be better this time around, but it’s become clear to us he’s not. It’s too late for us to relocate for another few years, and quite frankly, I’m inclined to believe the distance is what caused this problem in the first place.”
“And he was such a dick while we were in New York,” Cora muttered. “I swear, I wanted to kill him like, every other day.”

“Cora,” Talia reprimanded without looking at her, and Cora obediently made like she was locking her lips and tossed an imaginary key over her shoulder.

“I don’t understand,” Stiles said slowly.

“Derek is... very protective. Of what he perceives belongs to him.” Talia offered him a small smile. “How good is your memory, Stiles?”

He shrugged in answer, because she was kind of going all over the place and he had no idea what they were supposed to be talking about.

Before she could continue, the waitress reappeared with their drinks, handing over Stiles’ coffee, then passing the drinks to the two women next. Stiles found that to be backwards, since usually women should be served first, but the waitress looked so far past caring that he didn’t bother saying anything about it.

Once she was gone, Talia continued as if there hadn’t been a pause.

“I’m sure you don’t remember this, because it was many years ago, but you were very badly injured at school one day while trying to help Eric. It was when you were perhaps, nine? Maybe ten years old. He was only seven, and he was being bullied by people in your class. You could’ve walked away, but instead you helped him, and they ended up hurting you instead of him.”

“Yeah, that sounds like me. Winning fights since never.” Stiles was really, really good at picking fights. Winning them... not so much.

“You protected someone very important to Derek. When he found out, he became... interested. In the boy who tried to help his brother.”

“So because I protected Eric twelve years ago, your son became a stalker?” Stiles asked, unable to hold back his snark.

Talia smiled, as if amused. “Not exactly,” she said, taking a sip of her drink.

Cora let out an annoyed sound, sliding down in her seat and staring at the ceiling. “If I’d known you were going to take your time with this, I wouldn’t have agreed to let you come.”

“You say this as if Stiles would’ve gotten into the car with you had I not been there,” Talia said pleasantly, putting her coffee down and folding her hands together, smiling at Stiles. “It’s not my place to explain everything, I’d like for Derek to do that, but I did want to apologize for how he’s been acting. I understand that his actions have been cause for concern, and I’ve spoken to him about it multiple times. Breaking into your home while you sleep is not something I am proud of. Breaking into your Jeep while you’re in class is also not something I am proud of. He’s been spoken to, and he’s promised to try harder, but he’s difficult to predict. That being said,” she said, smoothing out her napkin again, even though it likely hadn’t moved, “I just want you to know that we don’t mean you any harm. If anything, we mean you the complete opposite of harm. Derek didn’t mean to scare you, and he is terribly sorry for the actions that led to your injuries. He was desperately trying to get you off the road, and in his panic, he overestimated his own strength.”

“He totally trashed my Jeep,” Stiles said miserably.

“Something we will be paying to fix.”
Stiles blinked at her. “What?”

“Consider it an apology for his actions. We’ve already been in touch with the garage, and your father. He was quite adamant it wasn’t necessary, but given you were only in danger to begin with because you were driving Cora and Eric home, and then Derek pushed your car over the side of the road, it seems only fitting we should help restore—Roscoe, was it?” Stiles just stared at her, but Cora grunted confirmation and Talia nodded before continuing. “It seems only fitting we should help restore Roscoe to her former glory.”

Cora slurped at her milkshake loudly in the silence that followed. Stiles licked his lips, leaning forward on the table.

“So you—you don’t want to eat me?”

“Heavens no.” Talia laughed. “Whatever gave you that idea?”

“Have you seen the way Derek stares at him?” Cora asked her mother with a snort, using her straw to try and scoop some of the whipped cream out of her milkshake. “Even I think he wants to eat him.”

“Well, we’ll have to ask Derek to tone down the—hungry looks.” She sighed, as if exasperated. “We should not have returned so soon, he wasn’t ready.”

“Nope,” Cora agreed, tilting her head back with her straw in one hand and sticking her tongue into her glass to try and scoop at the whipped cream with that instead.

“So... what are you?” Stiles asked. “I mean—you’re not sparkly Vampires, right?”

Talia smiled at him, and Stiles jerked back when her eyes suddenly turned red. Oh God, he was right, sparkly blood-sucking Vampires!

But when he glanced at Cora, who’d put her glass down, her eyes were a soft gold colour. One he recognized, and that was when he realized that—

“You’re Werewolves.” His eyes shot back to Talia. “You’re actually Werewolves. Like—“ He cut himself off before giving away any secrets, but it turned out to be pointless.

“Like your friend Scott, yes.” She smiled, her eyes returning to normal. They were the same soft brown colour as Cora. Stiles assumed the green eyes came from Mr. Hale.

“Why are your eyes red?” Stiles asked.

“Because I live off a diet of young male human blood.”

Stiles leaned back further in his seat and Cora rolled her eyes, kicking him hard under the table.

“She’s joking, dingus. It’s because she’s the Alpha.”

“Alpha?” Stiles supposed that made sense. Their pack only had two gold-eyed Werewolves, but he remembered both of them saying they’d been bitten by someone with red eyes, and both had been sneered at about how they would be formidable provided the bite didn’t kill them. Considering the two of them couldn’t turn other people, it made sense that there was a specific type of Werewolf out there who could turn others into Werewolves.

“It’s what we call the pack leader,” Talia explained. “As I understand it, your friend Scott is your
‘Alpha,’ though he isn’t truly. Alphas are not made, they are born or they steal the ability. Your friend might be in charge of your pack, but he is not an Alpha any more than Cora or yourself.”

“Dodged a bullet,” Cora said, fist-pumping. “Gold eyes for the win.”

“So you’re a...?”

“Beta,” she explained with a smile. “Alpha’s at the top of the hierarchy. Then there’s the Mate, who’s usually second but it varies depending on the pack. Next is the Second, which is Laura in our pack, and the rest of us are Betas. Any Werewolves not part of a pack, or who go rogue or turn feral are called Omegas. And, of course, the last tier is the Heir. Which is Derek.”

“The Heir to what?” Stiles asked slowly.

“The Alpha.” Talia smiled. “Blue eyes. He is my Heir. As I said, not anyone can be an Alpha, so when my children were born, we knew one of them would be the next Alpha in line for the Hale pack. When Laura turned eight and shifted for the first time, it became clear it wasn’t her because her eyes were Beta gold. Upon his shift two years later, Derek’s eyes burned blue, and we knew he would be next in line. When he is ready, I will pass the Alpha spark to him, and he will be the new Alpha of the Hale pack.”

Stiles stared at her for a moment, realizing what Cora had meant back when she’d explained all their moving around.

“That’s why you guys followed him,” he said, looking at Cora. “Whenever he went anywhere, because he’s—next in line, or whatever, you all followed him wherever he went.”

“Unfortunately,” she said with a sigh. “He wanted to stay here and go to school here, but he was becoming a problem, so mom used her Alpha voice and told him he needed some time away. So he chose New York and off we went.”

“Time away from what?” Stiles asked slowly.

“A conversation for another day,” Talia said with a kind smile, leaning back. Stiles realized why when their waitress appeared beside him with their food, setting everything down in front of them. His pancakes smelled so good, he was salivating, and he immediately dug in while Cora poked at her wrap and sighed, clearly displeased. Talia just took a bite of her eggs, eating like they were in the fanciest of restaurants as opposed to a diner off the side of the highway.

“Why did you tell me all this?” Stiles asked when he was halfway through his meal. “Weren’t you worried I’d think you guys were crazy?”

“We knew you were in a pack, so we didn’t have any concerns about you believing we were Werewolves,” Talia said, taking another sip of her coffee. “The damage I was more interested in repairing was the perception you had of our family. I’m sorry Derek has been difficult to control, and while I’m sure he’s causing you great unease, please rest assured he isn’t interested in eating you.”

Cora said something under her breath with a grin and Talia turned to her sharply. Stiles didn’t pick it up, though, but figured he’d ask her about it later.

“He isn’t interested in hurting you,” Talia amended, and Stiles wondered about the difference in word choice. “Besides, Cora was quite distraught when she thought you might not want to spend time with her anymore.”
“Mom!” Cora insisted, her cheeks pinking.

Stiles grinned. “Aw, were you scared to lose your closest friend?”

“Shut up.” Cora kicked him under the table again. He chose to believe she hadn’t meant to kick him that hard.

“We just wanted to clear up the misunderstanding. I’ve spoken to Derek, he’s agreed he’ll keep his distance. For now.”

Stiles didn’t like the ‘for now’ part of her sentence.

“I would appreciate it if you would be patient with him. And if you would kindly not alienate my other children. Cora is rather fond of you.”

“Mom,” she whined, hiding her face behind her burrito.

“And Laura and Eric also seem rather invested in friendships with you. Merrak has been whining about being the only one not to have seen you since our return, so expect him to show up unexpectedly.”

“Great. Is he going to play twenty questions with me, too?” Stiles asked, remembering Eric’s unending inquiries on the drive home.

“No, Merrak’s pretty blunt,” Cora offered. “He’ll ask you one question and it’ll be right for the throat. He’s a real treat.”

“You can’t blame him, he’s had to grow up with four Werewolf siblings. The sharpest thing he has is his words.”

Stiles stared at Talia, but she looked fond, like she enjoyed her youngest child’s quick wit.

“Wait, is he not a Werewolf?”

“Nah, he drew the short straw.” Cora grinned. “He’s human, like dad.”

“Your dad’s human?” Stiles asked, a little floored. He hadn’t expected that. He’d kind of assumed that everyone in the family was a Werewolf.

“Yup. Poor guy didn’t know how to handle a house full of Weres. Laura says he was sobbing with relief when he found out Merrak was human.”

“He was not sobbing with relief,” Talia insisted, rolling her eyes slightly. “He might’ve teared up, but it was only just.”

Stiles laughed, shoving another bite of pancake into his mouth and chewing thoughtfully.

He still wasn’t sure how he felt about Derek McStalkerHale, what with his sneaking into his room while he slept, but he at least felt a little better about the rest of the Hales. At least, he was positive they didn’t want to eat him right now. Maybe they were trying to lure him into a false sense of security, but that was a problem for future Stiles.

Present Stiles was just glad the Alpha mom and his friend weren’t interested in making him breakfast right now.

His phone buzzed in his pocket and his chewing slowed. He knew it was Scott, for the tenth time,
and he felt bad for worrying him. He wasn’t dead yet, but Scott didn’t know that, and considering they’d stopped to have breakfast, it was entirely possible Scott had sped to the university and was now in a panic because Stiles wasn’t there.

“You can answer that,” Talia said, making Stiles jump. He’d forgotten how good Werewolf hearing was. “I’m sure your friend Scott is anxious to hear how you’re faring with the soul-sucking demons.”

Stiles laughed awkwardly, but at least she just looked amused.

Reaching into his pocket, he pulled his phone out and twisted away from them, giving the semblance of privacy before swiping on the answer button and putting the phone to his ear.

“I’m okay, Scotty. I’m having breakfast.”

“Where are you? What did they want? Are you still with them? I’ll come get you!”

“I’m fine,” he insisted with a sigh, rubbing at his forehead. “We’ll talk later, okay? We’ll grab our usual morning snack and chat then, okay?”

“Are you hurt? Are they forcing you to say this?”

“Wow, you’re turning into me. Scotty, I’m fine. I’m having pancakes. I swear. I’ll talk to you when we grab our snack later.”

“If you’re not at the coffeeshop immediately after class, I’m calling your dad, and he’ll have the whole force at the Hale house!”

“You’re the best, Scott. See you in a few hours.” He hung up and let out a small sigh, then turned back to his meal. Neither woman said anything, but Cora was smirking into her milkshake and Talia had a small, fond smile on her face.

“He’s protective,” Stiles said awkwardly in explanation.

“He’s not the only one,” Cora insisted. “Never thought I’d see the day where Jackson Whittemore would stand between you and a perceived threat.”

“Yeah, he’s pretty great, actually,” Stiles admitted with a smile. Then he frowned, something occurring to him. “Hey, how come Scott and Jackson keep saying you and Derek smell weird? Why do you smell weird?”

Cora shook her head, licking some chocolate ice cream off her lips. “It’s not that we smell weird, it’s that we’re born wolves. Not bitten. We smell different, and we can mask our scents to keep ourselves safe from other wolves. Their senses aren’t as developed because they’re bitten, so whenever Derek broke into your Jeep, or I hung around you, we masked our scents so your friends wouldn’t know we were Werewolves. I guess smelling the unknown was perceived as a threat to them because they’ve never experienced it before.”

“Yes, it’s quite common among our kind. My children often did it when they snuck out of the house so I wouldn’t know which one of them to ground.”

“Yeah, until Merrak was old enough to get bribed into tattling,” Cora muttered. “Stupid human brother, valuing money over solidarity.”

“Your brother would’ve kept your secrets, Cora, if only you’d paid him more than I did,” Talia
said with a pleasant smile.

Stiles was, again, very glad he didn’t have siblings.

They were still eating when Talia asked for the bill, since they’d made good time but would definitely be late if they didn’t hurry things along. Stiles scarfed down the rest of his pancakes and got a to-go cup for his coffee, which he brought back to the car with him. He’d tried to fight to pay for his breakfast, but Talia insisted it was as an apology for scaring him into thinking they wanted to eat him.

He didn’t find it as funny as she and Cora seemed to.

The rest of the drive to school was actually comfortable, considering he was less nervous about dying now. He asked a few questions about Werewolves, since Scott and Jackson had kind of been playing it by ear, what with not having any other Werewolves around to ask.

Thankfully, they’d gotten the whole pack thing right, but generally a pack needed an Alpha, which was why they were considered an Omega pack. Still a pack, but none of them fulfilled the role of Alpha to make it a real pack. Talia said a majority of her pack was spread out across town—which was terrifying, because how many were there?!—and that apparently Parrish was in it.

“I knew he wasn’t human!” Stiles proclaimed triumphantly.

Apparantly he’d been the one put in charge to keep an eye on the town during their absence. Most specifically, on someone in the town, but Cora had let that part slip and Talia had given her a sharp look for it.

Stiles was starting to think that a lot of this had to do with him. He wasn’t exactly a moron, no matter what people thought.

The Hale pack was all back in town, and they’d all noticed that Scott had made his own little ragtag pack, but he was clearly a good Werewolf and a strong leader, so no one had ever bothered him about how he was going outside the norm. To be fair, he had no teacher, and Talia very graciously offered for him to come by with Jackson whenever he pleased if he’d like to learn more about being a Werewolf.

Stiles said he’d pass along the message, though he wasn’t thrilled at the idea of their pack being disbanded, especially since he was the only human and he wasn’t sure what that meant for him. Then again, Talia’s husband and son were human and they were in the Hale pack, so he supposed if Scott and Jackson got absorbed into the Hale pack, technically he, Kira and Lydia would follow suit.

He hoped.

She also explained that they needed to stop putting their lives in danger unnecessarily, since a majority of the times they’d won Supernatural battles, the members of the Hale pack who’d stayed behind over the years had been helping them from the shadows. Suddenly, Stiles’ injuries and late nights seemed a lot less awesome given they weren’t as badass as he always thought they were.

Though Talia was quick to insist that Stiles was doing surprisingly well for a human, and that he should be proud of the difference he’d made in keeping the town safe. He wasn’t sure if she was just backtracking to make him feel better, or if she meant it, but he chose to believe she meant it.

When they finally reached the school, Stiles climbed out feeling better than he had in weeks, Cora following suit and wrapping an arm around his shoulders. Talia said that her husband would be the
one picking them up later since she had errands to run, and told Stiles it was nice seeing him again. He waved goodbye to her and then he and Cora headed for their first class.

“So,” Cora said, sounding way more nonchalant than he was sure she felt, “still friends? Derek didn’t fuck things up irreparably?”

“I mean, he kind of did, but not with you.” He punched her lightly and she grinned. “Just tell him to stay away from me, he seriously freaks me out.”

“Trust me, mom made that stick last night. You should’ve heard her. She was so mad.” She nudged him with a grin. “But proud of you, actually. Well, proud and also annoyed. Because you faced off against someone you knew was stronger than you and you had no idea what his intentions were, but you stood up to him anyway. She said you were very brave, but also kind of stupid.”

“That’s me. Stupidly brave,” Stiles offered with a grin.

Cora shoved him again and Stiles motioned that she was heading the wrong way, since they usually split for their morning classes. She just waved his words off and walked him towards his building.

“So, answer something for me. That first day back in March when we bumped into each other, was that intentional?”

“Will you judge me if I say yes?”

“Kind of,” Stiles admitted.

“Then nope, not at all, complete accident.” She smirked at him. “I just—didn’t know how to say hi to you again. We’d been back for months and I’d never had the opportunity to touch base. I noticed you had class there in the morning, and figured if I just bumped into you, it would give us a reason to talk. It’s kind of nice having a friend who knows what I am and isn’t freaked out by it. Or me, because of who my mom is.”

Stiles cocked an eyebrow. “The Alpha?”


“And you call me a bad liar.” Stiles rolled his eyes and walked into his building. Cora followed him up the stairs, and the second he reached the floor his class was on, he let out a shout when someone grabbed his bad arm and yanked him across the hall.

“Ow, ow, dude!”

“Are you okay? Are you hurt? What took you so long?” Scott gave him a worried once over, then narrowed his eyes over his shoulder.

“Relax, tweedle-dumb,” Cora insisted, rolling her eyes. “Your human’s fine. By the way, we’re sharing him. Not enough humans in our pack.”

“What?” Scott asked, some of the anger melting off his face to give way to confusion.

“Long story, I’ll explain when we grab coffee later.” He turned to Cora. “You, class. I’ll see you at lunch.” He looked back at Scott. “You, also class. I’ll see you for coffee.”
“I’m not leaving until you’re in class,” Scott said, crossing his arms.

Cora rolled her eyes, bid Stiles farewell, then turned to leave. Stiles figured with her gone Scott would follow suit, but he still walked Stiles all the way to his class, and didn’t leave until he was satisfied there were enough people between him and the door.

Stiles was starting to feel like Bella again.

He supposed that if Derek was his Edward, Scott was probably his Jacob. In a non-romantic way. Not that Derek was his Edward in a romantic way either but...

He really didn’t want two packs fighting over him.

“My life sucks,” he informed the girl sitting beside him.

She gave him a weird look, and promptly switched seats.

Stiles’ morning coffee with Scott was extremely hostile. Not because Scott was hostile towards him, but because Stiles had explained the situation about the Hales and extended Talia’s invitation to train Scott and Jackson.

Scott had immediately taken it as an insult, insisting he and the others in the pack were perfectly capable of dealing with their own problems and would *not* take her up on that offer *ever*. He also took offense to the suggestion that the other members of the Hale pack who’d stayed behind were the real reason behind all their successes fighting off monsters.

To be fair, Stiles had been a little annoyed himself, and he firmly believed that their pack was just as good and that the Hale pack hadn’t helped as much as Talia seemed to think, but he knew logically that it made sense. They were all teenagers when this had started, and half of them couldn’t control their abilities.

Scott used to wolf out when he got mad at school, and Jackson was even worse, going into full Beta shift on the lacrosse field a lot. It had taken so much trial and error to get them both under control, and no sooner than that had started to calm down than Lydia tapped into her abilities. And once she was sorted out, along came Kira.

And who helped them all? Stiles, that’s who. So Stiles was in a perpetual state of trying not to get killed poking large, angry monsters that were friends when they were in control, and graduating high school. He was surprised he hadn’t gone crazy, honestly.

The worst part was that neither Jackson nor Scott had wanted this. Sure, they loved it now, but Scott especially was very distraught when he’d been bitten. While unsure, he and Jackson thought they might have been bitten by the same Werewolf—an Alpha, according to his conversation that morning with Talia. It was strange to realize someone had bitten them and then run off on them instead of being in a pack together, but when Stiles brought that up hours later during lunch with Cora, she said it wasn’t uncommon for rogue Alphas to try and amass an army.

The ones who were registered, who had gained their Alpha spark through family and not by stealing it, were content to expand their packs and live their lives as Werewolves should, alongside humans and other Supernatural beings. But some Alphas stole the power. If a Werewolf murdered an Alpha, they could steal the Alpha spark and become an Alpha themselves. But there were laws against that, strictly enforced by a Council in New York, and rogue Alphas were always hunted down to stand trial. Some were killed, some imprisoned, and some were given a year to prove their worth. If they succeeded, they were left to make their own pack, and if not, they were either...
imprisoned or killed.

Stiles found all of this interesting, because he’d never known Werewolves had rules and laws, and that there was a Council. It all sounded very political, and Cora bemoaned it a great deal. He asked a bit about Talia’s involvement in it—and Derek’s—but she was cagey about what she said. Stiles didn’t really understand why, but figured it had something to do with him being human and not being allowed to know this stuff, so he let it slide.

When they parted for class after eating, Stiles found it hard to concentrate. His brain was far more focussed on the Werewolves in his town than the Criminology lecture he was currently sitting in. It was almost five when his phone buzzed with a text from Cora, informing him that her father had just arrived and was going to be their ride home.

Stiles knew Scott was not happy about it, but he always worked after class so he’d been gone for hours already. He’d offered to come back and pick him up, but Stiles just said he’d be fine. The Hales didn’t seem interested in hurting him, and barring Derek, all of them had been nothing but nice to him.

Not that Derek had been mean, per se, but he wasn’t exactly in Stiles’ good books.

When Stiles left class at five, he and Cora texted where to meet up, and headed for the lot her father was parked in. It was easy to figure out which of all the cars belonged to him, considering he’d learned all the Hales had expensive taste in vehicles.

There was a pristine white Tesla parked furthest from the other cars, as if worried it would get dinged if it dared venture too close. Stiles couldn’t stop himself from grinning when Cora opened the back door and it eased upwards instead of outwards. Teslas were so fucking cool, and he was thrilled to get to sit in one.

Not that he’d forgotten the fact that he had a brand new Mustang up for grabs in his own driveway, though he still felt anxious about that. He was scared of ruining it somehow.

“Hey dad. Turd-face,” Cora said, sliding into the car on her side. Stiles followed suit, the two of them in the back since the passenger seat was occupied by the only Hale Stiles had yet to meet again since their return.

“Hey Bitch,” was the response from the front seat.

Blunt, just like Cora had said he was.


“Why?” Merrak asked, sounding bored, but Stiles noticed he was shifting in his seat, like he was anxious to turn around but wanted to make sure Stiles couldn’t leap out of the car.

Once the doors were all shut, Michael turned to smile at Stiles while he buckled himself in. Stiles was behind Merrak, so it was harder for him to see him without fully turning around.

“Hello Stiles. It’s been a long time.”

“Hey.” Stiles didn’t remember ever meeting the patriarch, but he was sure he’d seen him come by to pick up Cora during their shared year of high school.

He was also right about the eyes, because Michael’s eyes were a bright green, which he knew at least two of his sons had inherited. His hair was light brown, though, and Stiles could see enough
of Merrak’s head to notice his hair was much lighter than the rest of his siblings’.

When the car began to move, Merrak finally seemed to have lost his patience and he pulled away from his seat, struggling to twist around so he could look at Stiles. His eyes were hazel, so he was the most mixed between his parents’ appearances. And apparently the only human of the Hale siblings. Stiles had to wonder how he felt about that; he could relate to being the token human, but it had to be hard being the only human in a house full of Werewolves.

Well, barring his father, he supposed.

“So,” Merrak said, eying Stiles critically, “this is him, then?”

“Stiles, Merrak.” Cora motioned between them. “The asshole of the family.”

Michael sighed, but said nothing, and that had Stiles believing maybe it was true. Especially when Cora’s words were followed up with Merrak giving Stiles a long once-over before shrugging.

“He can do better,” he said, facing forward again.

“Merrak,” Michael reprimanded, looking mortified. Stiles wished he didn’t bother, he wasn’t offended or anything.

“I meant Stiles could do better, dad.” Merrak’s whole head rolled along with his eyes. “Stiles is human, which automatically earns him awesome points for being in a pack. And Cora talks about him literally all the time, so I feel like I know him better than I should.”

“Dude!” Cora leaned forward to punch at her brother, but he managed to evade her, evidently used to being abused by his Werewolf siblings.

“What? It’s true. You’re annoying, but at least you’re entertaining. And besides, Stiles sounds awesome, he can do better. He should marry someone cool, not some random lame-o.”

“Merrak,” Michael said, a note of warning in his tone. “Remember what your mother said.”

“I’m just saying that Stiles should marry someone cooler. Like Cora.”

“Dude!” Cora insisted once more, reaching forward to smack at him again. She missed, but only just this time. “Shut up! Those are dangerous words!”

“Me marrying you is dangerous?” Stiles asked with a cocked eyebrow. “I feel like we’d make a good couple.” He shrugged.

Cora turned to him, looking both horrified and alarmed. That was kind of insulting, but her words suggested there was a deeper meaning behind why she looked like that. “No! No, there will be no marrying of the Cora! You’re not marrying me! You can’t even think about marrying me! Stop thinking about marrying me! Stop it! I am off limits!”

Merrak was laughing in the front seat, clearly pleased by the distress in Cora’s voice, and she reached over to smack him again. This time, the blow connected, Merrak too distracted by his hyena impression to pay enough attention. He immediately turned to punch at her, cursing and shaking out his hand when he only succeeded in hurting himself. He bent down, digging through his backpack, and re-emerged with a book, which he promptly threw at Cora’s face.

It smacked her in the cheek because she’d been too distracted by her smugness to notice it in time to fully dodge it.
“Kids,” Michael insisted, turning to give Merrak a look before facing the road once more. “Can you please behave? What are you, children?”

“I mean, technically I still am, yeah,” Merrak offered with a grin. He ducked when Cora hurled the book back at him, the item slamming into the windshield.

“Cora!”

“He started it!”

The deep sigh that followed suggested to Stiles that this man had seen a lot of things in his life being the father of four Werewolves and a human. Stiles pitied him, his own dad had suffered greatly with only one child.

To be fair, Stiles was a handful. He was like, eight Coras, at least, so really, his dad had gotten the shorter end of that stick.

“I’m very sorry, Stiles,” Michael said, eyes flicking to the rearview mirror to look at him. “You must think our family is a bunch of savages.”

“Actually, it just keeps reminding me I’m lucky I’m an only child,” he insisted with a grin. “Or maybe my dad’s lucky I’m an only child.”

“Oh my God, imagine two of you?” Cora grinned. “Chaos. Utter chaos.”

“My dad would still be drinking,” Stiles admitted with a deep sigh. “Poor guy, we’d have driven him crazy.”

He and Cora spoke for a few minutes about what Stiles having a sibling would be like, the earlier conversation of Cora as his future wife having mostly been forgotten. He knew it would come back to him later, once he’d had time for his brain to circle back around to it, but for now he focussed on the absolute chaos that would be his father’s life if there were two of him.

During a short break in conversation, Cora laughing and slowly coming down from a giggle fit over something Stiles had said, Merrak turned around in his seat to look at him again and spoke.

“So you’re single, right?”

“Jesus, Merrak,” Michael sighed, giving him a look.

“Right for the throat,” Cora agreed, just as predicted.

“Yes, I am single,” Stiles said. “What is with everyone’s obsession with my love life?”

“Are you single because something’s wrong with you?”

“Merrak!” Michael sounded horrified. “I should’ve left you at home!”

“What?” Merrak demanded. “He’s been single for so long, we gotta ask. If he’s gonna be part of the family, we need to make sure he doesn’t make us look bad.”

“I thought I wasn’t marrying Cora,” Stiles insisted.

When Merrak opened his mouth again, his eyes shot to Cora and he shut it again. When Stiles glanced at her, he saw her eyes were gold. She let them fade back to brown when she saw Stiles looking, but he was going to have to talk to her about this later.
Cora had almost let something slip in the diner, and Merrak was about to tell him something now. Both times a parent had been present, suggesting the quiet was their order. Stiles assumed Cora had been trying to ensure Merrak wouldn’t say something that would get him into trouble.

Stiles liked Merrak though. His bluntness reminded Stiles of his own lack of brain-mouth filter. He would probably be the most entertaining of the Hales to hang out with.

Michael seemed to recognize that letting silence stretch was bad for Merrak, because he started fidgeting and turning in his seat to look at Stiles. It was only a matter of time before he said something again so Michael filled the silence with chatter. He asked Stiles about his classes, how his dad was doing recently which suggested they’d spoken since the Hales returned, what his future plans were. He apologized about the Jeep, and alleviated Stiles’ concerns about driving the Mustang by promising he couldn’t trash it any worse than Cora had done to his BMW in New York.

It was actually kind of nice, because Michael was very normal. Stiles didn’t have many normal people in his life anymore, and knowing that this man was someone who was human but had to deal with the Supernatural every day was kind of refreshing.

The cruiser was parked outside when Michael pulled up to the curb. He bid Stiles a good night, Cora punched him in farewell and said she’d text him later. Merrak just watched Stiles with interest, like he was some kind of puzzle he was trying to figure out. Stiles just thanked them all for the ride and shut the door, heading into the house.

His dad was at the living room window sipping a coffee and wearing his uniform, suggesting he was on the graveyard shift tonight. He was watching the Hale car drive off, Michael not having pulled away until after Stiles was inside the house with the door firmly shut behind him.

“Nice car,” he remarked, turning to look at Stiles. “Didn’t know Michael got a Tesla.”

“Yeah, it’s awesome,” Stiles agreed with a grin, dropping his bag on the floor by the couch and falling onto it, staring over the back of it at his father. “Heading to work?”

“In a minute.” He sipped at his coffee, then moved over to Stiles, eying him briefly. “How’re you feeling? How’s the arm?”

“Sore, but manageable. The weekend will help for sure.”

“Mm.” He reached out with one hand to turn Stiles’ chin, inspecting the head wound he had. “That’s healing up nicely. Can probably get the stitches out soon.”

“As long as it doesn’t scar, or I’m gonna have a weird bald patch.”

His dad didn’t say anything, and he didn’t let his chin go. Stiles could imagine where his mind was. Probably somewhere dark, imagining what he would’ve done if Stiles hadn’t survived that crash. It was a fear Stiles had about his father all the time. What if something went wrong at work? What if his dad got called to a crime scene and was hurt? What if some monster came into town and the police didn’t know it was Supernatural and tried to take it out? His dad would be the first to try and protect other people, and that thought scared Stiles. It had always scared him.

“Dad,” he said quietly.

It snapped the man out of his thoughts and he released his chin, patting his cheek lightly before retreating his hand.
“Got plans for the night?” he asked, draining his coffee while moving into the corridor to head to the kitchen.

“Nah.” Stiles lay down more comfortably on the couch now that his dad wasn’t leaning over the back of it. “Scott’s out with Kira and Lydia has a date.” He hadn’t heard from Jackson yet though, and he pulled his phone out to check what he was up to.

Jackson often tended to have plans given Stiles was almost always with Scott, and tonight was no different. He was apparently going to Jungle, and while he invited Stiles to join him, he was a little too injured and tired to deal with that many bodies. When he told Jackson this, his friend insisted he was a killjoy, which suggested he was hoping for a wingman.

Not that Jackson needed a wingman with those cheekbones, but he liked having Stiles around to fall back on if someone got too handsy. Then again, the hilarity of it was that Stiles got hit on a lot when they went out, and Jackson ended up spending more time watching his back then getting laid.

Stiles assumed it was because Jackson couldn’t get drunk. A drunk Stiles was an entertaining Stiles. Also an easy target, and Jackson was protective. Well, to be fair, so was Scott. After all the conversations he’d had today, he wondered if it was because Scott and Jackson didn’t have an Alpha in their pack. Sure, Scott was their leader, but maybe the lack of an actual leader made them both extremely protective of the people that relied on them. After all, they were the only two in the pack with supernatural strength. Kira was badass and had abilities, but super strength was not one of them. And Lydia, while also in possession of abilities, as well as a brain Stiles was in love with, she didn’t have the ability to fight back as easily as the two Weres and Kitsune did.

Stiles was the lowest rank of their pack. The human with the brains and the plans, but he didn’t have anything else to fall back on. Lydia had her scream and Kira had her foxfire, but Stiles had a bat. A bat and a smart mouth.

Not to say he couldn’t handle himself, he was hardly helpless. But still, he was only human. Vastly different from the rest of his Supernaturally-inclined packmates.

“You heading out?”

Stiles glanced up at his dad, who was putting his jacket on, clearly ready to leave for work.

“Nah, Jackson wants to go to Jungle. I’m not really in a position to do that.” He shrugged one shoulder. “All good. Maybe order pizza and hang out on the couch.”

“All right.” His dad patted his pockets, as if making sure he had everything. “I’ll see you in the morning. Maybe we can grab breakfast together before I head to bed.”

“Sure.” He waved. “Be safe, make good choices, don’t cheat on your diet or Parrish and Tara will tattle.”

His dad sighed deeply but just bid him a good night before leaving, locking the door behind him. Stiles just grinned, glad to have two people watching his dad at work. Conveniently, one of them was always scheduled to work at the same time as him, making it infinitely easy to spy on his father’s eating habits.

Thinking of Parrish reminded him that he was part of the Hale pack. He wondered what he was, because he knew he wasn’t a Were, but he was definitely something. Maybe a Kitsune, like Kira.

Shrugging it off and figuring he could talk to Cora about it later, he debated actually asking her if she wanted to hang out before deciding he’d had enough Hales for one day. It felt like the longest
day ever, and he’d gone through a lot of different emotions throughout it.

Ordering his pizza, Stiles pulled up Netflix and browsed through it for something scary to watch. He just felt like he needed to get his mind obsessing about something terrifying that wasn’t his actual life. It would make him feel better.

When the doorbell rang twenty minutes later, he paused the episode of *The Haunting of Hill House* he was on and went to answer it, pulling out his wallet. When he pulled the door open, his eyebrows shot up.

“I thought you were going to Jungle.”

“Changed my mind. Didn’t want to go alone, it’s boring,” Jackson said, entering the house with the pizza in his hands. Stiles could see another car leaving from the bottom of his driveway and figured Jackson and the pizza guy had shown up at the same time.

Stiles shut the door behind him and headed for the kitchen to grab some plates and two pops from the fridge. He also perused the pantry for some chips he usually kept hidden away from his dad, because with Jackson there, the pizza was going to be woefully inadequate to satiate both their hungers. Jackson would probably eat seven pieces, leaving only one for Stiles, so he’d need something else to tide him over later.

He could see the edge of a Dorito bag and he pulled that down, mentally reminding himself to grab more snacks next time he was out. Heading back into the living room, he saw Jackson browsing through Netflix, having turned off what Stiles was watching.

“I was watching that,” he informed him.

“Seen it,” was Jackson easy dismissal.

Rolling his eyes, Stiles set the plates and pop down, dropping the bag of chips on the coffee table. He flipped open the lid for the pizza and grabbed himself three slices to stop Jackson from eating the whole thing.

“How’re you feeling?” Jackson asked, having stopped on *Orange is the New Black* for a few seconds, as if debating, before continuing on to find something else.

“Good,” Stiles said. “Arm’s still kind of sore, but I took the sling off a little while ago. It’s been okay though, just a little sore.”

Jackson grunted, stopping on *Dirty John* and starting that up. Stiles wasn’t really interested, but he didn’t say anything about it. Jackson wouldn’t listen, and it wasn’t like Stiles had been entirely focussed on his own show, anyway. His mind was a little preoccupied.

He munched away on his pizza while they both sat in silence watching the show, his mind wandering every now and then. Evidently Jackson didn’t enjoy it much because he stopped it ten minutes in and went back to the main menu to browse what else was trending.

He did this again with four different choices, like he couldn’t decide what he wanted to watch. Or like he was antsy. Stiles knew Jackson fairly well after five years of being friends, and he knew when something was bothering him, even if Jackson wouldn’t admit it to him.

Not without incessant prodding, anyway.

“We gonna show jump all night?” Stiles asked, well into the bag of Doritos by now. “Or you
“Gonna tell me what’s bothering you?”

“You lack of entertainment,” was Jackson’s response as he stopped on one of the Marvel movies, seeming to debate it before moving on.

“Could’ve gone to Jungle.”

“It’s not as fun without your drunk ass there to keep me entertained.”

Stiles was silent for a few moments, watching Jackson continue to browse through the shows and movies, chewing thoughtfully on his Doritos. It wasn’t until Jackson passed *Scream* that he realized what was bothering him.

“Scott told you,” he said, and Jackson’s scrolling stopped. Stiles turned to look at him, and Jackson was scowling right back, as if annoyed he’d been caught.

It made sense, really. While he and Jackson hung out a lot, Jackson rarely showed up at Stiles’ house, he usually just bullied Stiles into leaving it to do something else. The only exception was pack meetings.

Usually when they watched things, they went over to Jackson’s, or they drove around town in his Porsche. Stiles’ place wasn’t one of Jackson’s favourite haunts, even if he liked Stiles himself. The running joke was that it hurt Jackson’s pride to be in a poor person’s house, which he always took offense to, but it was still funny to tease him about.

Since Scott and Kira were out together, and Lydia was on a date, it meant that Stiles would be alone if Jackson didn’t come around. So Jackson had been waiting for Stiles to touch base so that they could do something together, but when his request to go to Jungle had been turned down, the Werewolf realized the only way he was going to be able to spend time around him without explaining why was to just show up at his house.

He should’ve clued in earlier that Scott would’ve told the rest of the pack about what had happened that morning. They didn’t keep secrets, it was how people got hurt, or killed. They shared everything, but Stiles figured he’d be present for the conversation. To know the pack had met up behind his back kind of stung, but he supposed he understood. Scott would’ve wanted to share what he’d learned about the Hales as soon as possible to keep his safe and Stiles had class until five.

“You know I’m perfectly safe in my own house, right?” Stiles asked.

“Stalker Hale got into your bedroom,” Jackson reminded him.

“Yeah, and mama Hale said she’d spoken to him and he wouldn’t do it again.”

Jackson snorted, turning to give him an annoyed look, shifting so he was turned more in Stiles’ direction. “Right. And we believe this bullshit about her being an Alpha and that she only wants to help us tap into our potential. She basically kidnapped you this morning.”

“I mean—technically I got into her car of my own accord, so it’s not really kidnapping.”

“You were coerced,” Jackson snapped, clearly irritated. “I don’t like them. I don’t like when other people take my things.”

“Not a thing, and not yours,” Stiles reminded him, exasperated.
“You know what I mean.” Jackson sounded even more irritated, now. “The Hales are forcing their way into your life, and I’m not okay with that. Scott’s not okay with that. You were ours first, they have no right to try and steal you. You belong to our pack, not theirs.”

“Who said anything about me being in their pack?” Stiles cocked an eyebrow.

“That’s the endgame,” Jackson insisted, clearly annoyed Stiles hadn’t clued in to that. “They only extended the offer to train Scott and I because it meant pulling you into their pack. We’re not going to let that happen. You were ours first.”

“Man, wolves are possessive.” Stiles rubbed the back of his head, sighing deeply. He was going to need to have a sitdown with Cora and Scott about this. He’d rather Talia, leader to leader, but he was concerned how Scott would behave in that kind of situation so Cora seemed safer. But they all needed to talk and get along.

Stiles wasn’t going to leave Scott’s pack. Jackson’s possessive ‘you’re ours’ aside, this was his pack. He’d grown up with these people, and while sure he and Jackson used to hate each other, and Lydia had given him the cold shoulder for years, they’d all grown up together regardless. And once they’d gotten close, realized there were all in this together, things had really changed. Stiles couldn’t even imagine not being in a pack with them. Even if the Hales asked him to join their pack, he wouldn’t unless the others were invited, too. And if the others refused, Stiles would stick by them. He’d respect their decision, because they’d operated as a five-man team for a long time, and there was no need to fix something that wasn’t broken.

Really, the only reason Stiles wanted Scott and Jackson to speak to the Hale pack was so they could get more training. There was still so much they didn’t know, and Jackson himself wasn’t even fully Were. He was also part Kanima, which none of them understood, and despite how much research Stiles did, it wasn’t enough. He was never going to have the wealth of knowledge a pack like the Hales had.

Realizing Jackson was glaring at him for his long silence, Stiles just rolled his eyes, shoved him lightly, and promised he wasn’t going anywhere. Didn’t stop Jackson from being obnoxiously territorial all night, though. He was sitting closer than necessary, and had thrown one arm around Stiles’ shoulders at one point. Stiles knew it was a scent thing, because Scott did it all the time. Jackson only did it whenever he felt threatened, like when they went clubbing and guys started dancing suggestively with Stiles. He always plastered himself to Stiles’ back, wrapping a possessive arm around his middle and growling at whoever was trying to get into his pants. It was sweet, in a territorial kind of way.

Man, Stiles had too many Werewolves in his life, now. He hoped they didn’t start some weird scenting war, he would not be happy.

When midnight rolled around, Stiles expected Jackson to head out and go home, but he instead followed him upstairs and crashed on his bed. It wasn’t the first time he’d done it, but it was rare enough that Stiles was always a little thrown by how worried Jackson was. He obviously wanted to keep Stiles close to ensure he knew he was appreciated in their pack.

Unnecessary, but it was kind of sweet.

Less sweet when Stiles got crushed against the wall because his bed wasn’t huge and Jackson was a violent sleeper.

Still, he just tried to feel loved and closed his eyes to sleep.
Saturday was spent with the pack hanging out together at Scott’s insistence, clearly his version of trying to remind Stiles of how awesome their pack was—“See? We do pack things together!”—which Stiles would’ve appreciated more if he didn’t have a mountain of homework waiting for him.

Sunday was fully dedicated to homework and studying for his upcoming finals, and he texted Cora to confirm he would be picking her up the following morning to head to school. It would be the first time he drove the Mustang and he was terrified, but also thrilled. Because it was going to be an epic experience and he just hoped he didn’t crash it.

He went to bed early that night, exhausted over the week’s excitement, and kind of thrilled nothing bad had come to town lately. Then again, it was entirely possible the Hale pack was dealing with it all, and Stiles honestly couldn’t say he minded. It was doing wonders for his sleep schedule.

It was just a little past two when Stiles jerked awake at a sound. He didn’t know what it was at first, but then realized it was his dad cursing. He’d been working the night shift, so he should’ve been home around midnight, but being sheriff meant he spent more time than necessary at work.

He’d probably tripped on his way up the stairs again, Stiles kept telling him to use the light on his phone before he brained himself on the banister.

Deciding his father was not in any danger of killing himself, Stiles rolled over and snuggled more into his pillow, closing his eyes to go back to sleep. Then he heard the breathing.

His eyes snapped back open, because that was definitely someone breathing, trying to be exceptionally quiet about it. Honestly, Stiles probably wouldn’t have heard it at all if not for the fact that his father had gone silent and his laptop was off. It was so slight the fact that he caught it at all was amazing to him.

Sitting upright in bed, his head whipped towards the same corner he’d looked at last time and, sure enough: human-shaped shadow.

“What are you doing in here?!” Stiles demanded, heart in his throat. He managed to keep his voice down enough that his father wouldn’t hear him unless he was right outside his door. “Get the fuck out!”

Derek Hale moved forward from the shadows so that the lights from outside danced off his features, shadowing only half of his face.

“I just came to apologize,” he said quietly, evidently trying to ensure his boss didn’t find him in his son’s room. Which, really? Why was he stupid enough to even risk it?! Stiles was going to start demanding his dad schedule Derek to work all the same night shifts!

“Then do it like a normal person,” Stiles hissed angrily, scooting closer to the wall when Derek took another step closer. “During normal waking hours! After knocking on a door! And being invited in!”

Derek Hale moved forward from the shadows so that the lights from outside danced off his features, shadowing only half of his face.

“I just came to apologize,” he said quietly, evidently trying to ensure his boss didn’t find him in his son’s room. Which, really? Why was he stupid enough to even risk it?! Stiles was going to start demanding his dad schedule Derek to work all the same night shifts!

“Then do it like a normal person,” Stiles hissed angrily, scooting closer to the wall when Derek took another step closer. “During normal waking hours! After knocking on a door! And being invited in!”

Derek was silent for a long moment before saying, “I didn’t think you’d invite me in.”

“Well, breaking into my room while I’m sleeping isn’t doing you any favours on that front!” he insisted angrily. “Get out!”

It took a few seconds of angry staring from him for Derek to finally move towards the window. He slid it open, straddling it so he could climb out one leg at a time, but before he fully disappeared, he turned back to Stiles, watching him for a moment before his eyes flashed blue.
He’d never seen a Werewolf with blue eyes before. He’d never seen one with red eyes before Talia, either, so the Hales were just full of surprises. He remembered Talia saying that was how they knew Derek would be the next Alpha.

“Please don’t tell my sister,” he said quietly, almost pleadingly. “She’ll tell my mother.”

“Good!” Stiles snapped, motioning for him to shoo.

It was obvious Derek didn’t appreciate that, his face hardening and tone going cold. “I’m trying, you know,” he insisted defensively. “I really am. It’s just hard.”

Before Stiles could ask what was hard, Derek had exited his room and shut the window. Stiles kicked his covers off himself hastily and hurried to look out of it. Derek was already on the front lawn jogging away from the house. Stiles frowned after him, not understanding his comment.

He was trying? Trying what? Trying not to be a complete creeper stalker-man? Well clearly, he needed to try harder, because he was failing miserably.

He almost jumped out of his skin when his door opened and he whipped around. His father was standing in the corridor, looking exhausted, but also confused.

“Stiles? What are you doing?”

For a second, Stiles just stared at him, contemplating telling him what had just happened. But he didn’t want to drag his father into whatever Supernatural bullshit this was. Besides, he’d have to spill the beans about Scott too, and he didn’t want to do that without asking Scott first.

Also, he had an almost two-hour drive to school with Cora in the morning, so he figured that was ample time to get some answers.

“I was hot,” he blurted out, turning to pull his window open again. “Just opening my window.”

His dad grunted. “Well, get back to sleep, you have school. I’ll see you later.”

“Right. Night dad.”

“Good night kiddo.” He shut the door. Stiles listened, waiting for his father’s own bedroom door to shut, then hastily closed his window once more and locked it, wedging a textbook against the frame and hoping it would keep it closed to avoid any more unwanted visitors.

He tried to go back to sleep, but by three-thirty, it was a lost cause and he just got up and did some more homework. When his alarm went off, he moved sluggishly to the bathroom and got ready for school, figuring he could stop at the McDonalds drive-thru on his way out of town to grab a coffee.

Once he was ready to go, he texted Cora a ten minute warning, like he usually did back when he had the Jeep, and went out to the Mustang. Sitting in the driver’s seat was like melting into a cloud. It was so fucking soft, and everything smelled like new leather, and he couldn’t help but whistle appreciatively while sliding his hands along the steering wheel. When he started it, the purr of the car was so silent he was sure all his neighbours would be sobbing with joy. His Jeep was loud enough to wake the whole block, so they would probably appreciate this vehicle as long as he had it.

Backing out of the driveway, he marvelled at the power steering since the Jeep did not have that, and then started on his way down the street. He was literally awed at everything involved in the car, and hit so many buttons on his way to Cora’s he worried he might crash from distraction.
alone.

The radio worked in this thing. God, he loved it so much, he wanted to keep this car forever. But, he would never give up his Jeep. Nostalgia and sentimentality. Once it was fixed up, he was going to appreciate having it back even if the seats were lumpy and the radio didn’t work and he had to roll the window up and down with the crank.

When he pulled up in front of Cora’s house, she was waiting on the porch like she usually was. She grinned and jumped down the steps, hurrying to the car with her bag and two breakfast burritos in one hand. Climbing in beside him, she dropped her bag in the back since the front was definitely more crowded than the Jeep, then handed over one of the tinfoil wrapped burritos while closing her door.

“So, how do you like it?”

“I love this car,” Stiles admitted. “The radio works.”

“Radios work in most cars,” she insisted with a laugh. “Your Jeep is just old.”

“Don’t badmouth Roscoe,” he insisted with a fake glower, unwrapping his breakfast before turning the car around. It was so much easier driving with one hand in this car, the wheel didn’t require his entire strength to turn it.

Crazy!

They were mostly quiet while they headed out, munching on their breakfasts and listening to the weather forecast on the radio. When they neared the McDonalds, Stiles told Cora he was stopping for a coffee and she insisted they should also get hashbrowns. That was how Stiles found himself shoving fried potato into his mouth ten minutes later with a large coffee in the cupholder by his elbow on the door side. It was on the dash instead of beside him in the partition, which was weird, but easier to reach. Less awkward to pick up and put down.

When all the hashbrowns had been devoured, Stiles figured Cora would have nothing left to use as a means to avoid speaking and he let out a slow breath, trying to figure out where to start.

Eventually, he just went for it.

“We need to talk about Derek.”

“What about Derek?” Cora asked, staring out her side window, almost bored. “Did he do something again?”

Stiles hesitated, not sure he wanted to tell her, but he was silent for too long because she turned back to him and narrowed her eyes.

“Is that why you needed coffee? He came home late last night, said he was out running the perimeter. He was at your place again, wasn’t he? I knew it, what a liar!” She started to pull her phone out but Stiles reached out to stop her.

“He said something to me,” he insisted. “Last night. He said he was trying, but that it was hard.”

He turned to glance at her, then faced the road again. “I don’t want to hate your brother, or be scared of him, or avoid him. Something is obviously going on, and I need you to be straight with me. Ever since your family came back, things have been weird and strained all over for me, and I really need answers before every relationship in my life is ruined. Jackson says you guys are trying to pull me into your pack, and Scott is getting mad that your family is acting like I belong to you.
They were my pack first, so if you guys start making me have to choose, it’s not going to be in your favour, sorry.”

Cora pressed her lips together, clearly unhappy with hearing that, but he felt like she should understand. It wasn’t that he was trying to make her feel like she had no choice, it was just that he really wanted answers and he was tired of all the Hales acting weird around him, not to mention one of them worked with his dad, and another worked with Scott’s mom. He had to look out for his own people, too.

Letting out a sigh, Cora slouched in her seat, staring out the windshield and shrugging one shoulder. “Mom didn’t technically forbid it, she just asked the rest of us not to tell you. She wanted Derek to do it, to explain himself, but he keeps being creepy with you so the chances of you letting him anywhere near you for a conversation are pretty slim.”

She side-eyed him for a moment, like she was weighing the pros and cons of telling him what he wanted to know, then seemed to decide she could get away with it.

“Don’t tell anyone I told you, and I’ll explain everything.”

“I promise,” Stiles said quickly. God he wanted answers, he wouldn’t tell a soul. Not even Scott! And to be fair, Derek had told him to go somewhere else for answers, he was just doing as he was asked.

“So there’s this thing that happens with Alphas,” Cora said, turning a bit so she was looking at him, like she was trying to get comfortable for a long story. “It’s a purely Alpha thing, doesn’t happen to the rest of us. It can manifest over time for normal Weres, but it’s never as... intense. It’s not like, a need the way it is with Alphas. It happens with people who steal the Alpha spark or who weren’t originally born to be an Alpha, but it’s more common with born Alphas like mom and Derek. “Mom always said that it has to do with the pressures of being an Alpha. You need someone beside you that you can lean on. Rely on, be with, share your concerns and troubles with. She says it’s like...” Cora paused then, like she was trying to think of a better way to put it before giving up and going with what her mom said. “It’s like a weird version of love at first sight. Not exactly love at first sight, but kind of a... feeling. Like a need. Rightness.”

Stiles glanced at her when she said this, his heart immediately increasing in speed. She evidently noticed, considering the look she cast him, but didn’t comment on it.

“Usually it happens when an Alpha is, well, an Alpha. When they’ve come into their skin, understand their role. Mom met dad when she was in her mid-twenties, and she knew right away that he was it for her. She said it takes a few years for the need to really sink its teeth in, but usually the Alpha and their mate have formed a strong bond by then so that it’s less of a problem. Usually by the time the physical need part hits, when things go well, they’re usually already together. Mom and dad were married by the time she started feeling that she needed him, couldn’t live without him. She got protective and possessive, and she admits, a little obsessive. It doesn’t last long, usually because the mate being there, in the Alpha’s orbit, helps calm them down. Mom said hers lasted maybe four or five months before her wolf settled and realized that it had claimed its mate and then everything was fine.”

“So...” Stiles trailed off, brain working fast. He thought back to Cora’s inquiries about him having a girlfriend or boyfriend. About Laura’s own questions on the matter. Eric’s twenty thousand questions during the drive home. Merrak’s blunt inquiry about if he was single, and that he was too good to marry someone lame and that he should marry Cora. Cora’s own panic at the idea of Stiles marrying her.
“Yeah,” Cora said in response to his silence.

“Okay.” Stiles didn’t know what else to say to that. He hadn’t even known mates was a thing. What the hell was a mate, anyway? Like, he knew that it was a sexual partner for life, but... what was it in the context of Werewolves?

If pregnancy was a thing for him, he was moving to Alaska. He’d heard enough horror stories from Melissa to know he was not interested and perfectly happy being born a man who wouldn’t have to bear children.

“How long is it going to last with Derek?” Stiles asked. “Considering...”

Cora winced. “Well, it’s different for Derek. It’s true, you know. He is trying. Mom talks to him all the time, tries to coach him through it, but it’s not the same for him. Alphas don’t usually find their mates until they’re young adults. Derek found his when he was thirteen.”

Stiles shot her a surprised look. “What?”

She shrugged. “The likelihood of it being you from the get go was high. He probably would’ve noticed you in high school, gotten interested, but managed to hold back the wolf until you were both older. The problem is, you made him notice you too early.”

“I didn’t do anything!” Stiles insisted, a little offended. He felt like she was blaming him, but the roll of her eyes made him realize she wasn’t.

“Remember that story mom told you on Friday? About Eric?”

“Yeah...?”

“That was the problem. Like I said, Derek probably would’ve noticed you eventually in high school, but he would’ve been older by then, he would’ve had less of a problem with it. You both would’ve had more time. But Eric was getting bullied, and you got to him before I did. You stopped the guys from hurting him, and in the process, you caught Derek’s attention. You protected someone that belonged to him, so he was interested.

“Laura says that mom freaked when Derek came home and said he’d found someone he thought was interesting. It’s not that the words meant anything bad, it’s that mom knew exactly what his look meant. Apparently she and dad locked themselves in the study for hours arguing about what to do. He was too young, it was too early, you were ten. And to make matters worse, they found out a few days later who it was. The sheriff’s son. Your life had just been turned upside down, your dad was... he wasn’t doing well. They knew this couldn’t be a discussion to have now.”

“They were going to tell my dad about Derek being my mate?” Stiles asked, surprised.

Cora cuffed him lightly. “Don’t be dumb, they were going to tell him about Werewolves. But... it wasn’t the right time. For either of you.”

Stiles knew what she meant. His mother had died only two months before Stiles’ tenth birthday. He didn’t remember when he’d helped Eric Hale out, but he did remember being a total fucking wreck until he was about twelve. That he’d jumped in to protect some kid from bullies during that period didn’t surprise him in the slightest. He hadn’t been doing so well mentally at the time.

“So what happened?”

“They just... dealt with it.” Cora shrugged. “Mom coached him through it as best she could, but the good thing was he was still young. I mean, it was bad, but also good, because at thirteen, he wasn’t
exactly itching to get into anyone’s pants. Sure, he was interested in sex and whatever, but his hormones weren’t crazy. He managed to stave off the obsession and possessiveness for a long time. It helped that mom mostly kept an eye on him and made sure he stayed as far away from you as possible, but he was actually doing really good for a long time.

“When he hit sixteen was when the problems started. His wolf was more prominent, he was getting more training and lessons on being a good Alpha. He understood what a mate was by then, and he’d known for a while already that it was you. Mom and dad hadn’t told him when he was thirteen, but by the time he was fifteen, he knew. He’d figured it out on his own. And when the lessons moved into that realm, well, it only exacerbated the problem.

“Mom had to keep a closer eye on him. She made sure Laura didn’t let him out of her sight at school, because he’d sometimes skip class to come down to our school just to make sure you were doing okay. I always had to tattle on him when he did it, I’d call Laura and tell her Derek was at my school again and she’d race down there to get him. When she graduated, I had to start calling Boyd.

“Then we both turned fifteen and went to high school. Surprisingly, he was a little better. Having you in his line of sight made him less... crazy. He could see you, he knew you were okay, he could protect you. I don’t know how much you remember Derek from high school, but he was around you a lot. He followed you around, made sure people weren’t being dicks to you, mouthed off at a bunch of guys who wanted to make your life miserable for being the sheriff’s kid.”

Stiles didn’t remember any of that. He remembered the one incident with Jackson—which made a lot of sense now, in retrospect—but that was it. If Derek had been stalking him when he was just a tiny freshman in high school, Stiles didn’t recall this.

“When he graduated,” Cora continued, “it turned into a problem again. He actually tried to fail his senior year specifically so he could stick around, but mom put a stop to it. They had a really long conversation, and she made him realize that he was going to do something irreparable. If he kept this up, being around you, he was going to snap eventually. He thought he was okay just having you close, but in the last few months of his senior year, the need started.

“He wanted to claim you, he wanted to make sure you were his, and only his, that no one else would dare touch you. But you were fifteen and he was eighteen, and he was struggling to keep control. So when mom told him he was going to lose you if he didn’t get his shit together, he finally agreed that school elsewhere was the better option.

“Mom didn’t want to let him go off on his own. There was no guarantee he wouldn’t just come back, and besides, she was his Alpha. He’s her heir, she needed to be close to him, to train him, to make sure he knew what was coming. So she and dad spoke and they decided the best thing to do was move the whole family. We had a pack meeting, mom explained the severity of the situation, and the family left for New York, the rest of the pack staying behind. They were given the most important task any Alpha can give to members of their pack. Keeping the Alpha’s mate safe.”

Cora glanced at him then, and he understood the weight of those words. He didn’t know who all the pack members of the Hale pack were, but he was starting to think that all the lucky breaks he’d ever gotten the past few years were because of the Hale pack keeping an eye on him.

The future mate of the future Alpha.

“You left Beacon Hills because of me,” he said quietly, realizing what lengths Talia had gone to in order to keep him safe from her own son.

“Derek left Beacon Hills because of you. Mom gave us the choice of staying here with dad, but Laura was already at NYU and Merrak was too young to have much of an opinion. Eric and I felt bad splitting up mom and dad, and we missed Laura. This way, we’d stay together.” She shrugged.

“It sucked having to move, but we understood. We made peace with it. So we went.” She let out a
small laugh. “What I said about Derek on Friday is literally an understatement. I said he was a dick in New York, but it’s more than that. He was—off. He’d changed completely, and we could all see the desperation in him. He described it as someone having ripped off one of his arms, like a huge piece of him was missing. He called Boyd every day, and when Parrish got into the precinct, he called him multiple times a day because you always used to go bug your dad and hang out to do homework.

“When Scott turned into a Werewolf and you started getting into more trouble, the pack told mom, but she kept it from Derek for a long time. She was really worried about how it would affect him, given he was already losing his mind over being so far away from you. He kept worrying something would happen to you, that you would find someone else, that you would get hurt. He lashed out a lot, mostly at mom, but it trickled down. It was a very tense and unpleasant few years, and she didn’t want it to get worse.

“He found out eventually. Overheard Parrish talking to mom and lost his shit. Actually made it to the airport before mom and dad caught up to him. He was about to get on a plane, fly back here, make sure you were safe with his own two eyes. They managed to talk him down, but only just. He made mom promise never to keep secrets from him again, and she agreed. So he was kept in the loop on everything involving you, no matter what it was.

“He hated that you had a pack, but he was glad you were safe. None of us knew who was in the pack, because ours back home didn’t know, either. They just knew you had one, and that was enough for Derek.

“When he finally graduated from university, he was the worst we’d ever seen him. The need was literally driving him crazy, and mom was worried about what that would do when we came back. So she postponed it, made him take some more courses, got him into a bunch of martial arts programs. He originally wanted to be an architect, but he ended up going to a police academy for a little over a year instead and figured that worked out. He kept insisting you had a cop in the family, so it would work in his favour. I called him an idiot, but well, whatever.”

Cora shrugged expansively then, Stiles waiting for her to continue. He was trying to detach himself from this as much as possible, because the more she spoke, the more freaked out he was getting. He just focussed on things that his brain could latch onto, like why they left Beacon Hills, why Talia hadn’t told his dad about Werewolves, why Derek had become a cop. Things that wouldn’t make him panic as much as the rest of Cora’s words.

“By the time he finished that, I was halfway through Junior year at NYU, and Derek put his foot down. He and mom had a huge fight, he insisted it wasn’t fair, that she couldn’t keep him away from you forever. He tried to argue he was ready, he was fine, he could control himself. Mom only partially believed him, but it wasn’t until Derek asked her how she’d feel if dad was kept from her that she finally relented. It had been six years, he was literally a nightmare to be around, and all he wanted was to see you. To just see you. He promised he wouldn’t touch you, he swore to mom that he wouldn’t lay a finger on you, he just needed to be able to have you within his reach.”

Letting out a loud sigh, Cora shrugged her shoulders again, crossing her arms and slouching more in her seat.

“Merrak was pissed. He’s sixteen, he’s perpetually angry, but he was halfway through sophomore year and high school is hard enough without being the new guy in the middle of the year. Laura had just finished her clinicals and had a good thing going for her in New York. She worried about the staffing levels, didn’t want to leave her current hospital. Eric had just started NYU, but he’s the chilliest person you’ll ever meet, so he basically said he’d do what’s best for the family.”

“And you?” Stiles asked quietly.

Cora turned to him, smiling a little. “I missed home. I wanted to come back. Besides, I wanted to
know what all the fuss was about.” She shoved Stiles lightly. “I remembered the twig Stiles Stilinski, I didn’t know what the big deal was. I guess I figured I wanted my brother back, and if Stiles Stilinski was the way to do that, well, so be it.”

“So what happened?” Stiles asked, easing into the next lane over. They were almost at school by now, Cora’s story taking up almost the entire drive. “You guys all came back. Why?”

“Laura and Merrak were originally told they could stay,” Cora explained. “Merrak could live with her, and they would be able to continue with their lives in New York. It was tempting, especially for Laura, but we’re not just family, we’re pack. Mom’s our Alpha. It means a bit less to Merrak, since he’s human, but enough that he was uncomfortable with the idea of being separated from her. Laura’s anxiety was stronger, and eventually everyone caved and decided we’d all come back together. So we did.”

“Yeah,” Stiles said softly. “December, right?”

“Just after Christmas,” she agreed. “We’d literally barely gotten through the door when Derek climbed into mom’s car and sped away to find you. I don’t know when you started noticing him around, but he was there the second he was able to be. He spent a lot of time watching you the first two weeks we were here. Mom was getting anxiety about it, figured you’d think he was stalking you. Guess she wasn’t wrong.”

“Took me until March to notice,” Stiles commented.

“Werewolf,” Cora explained, offering him a smile. It slowly slid off her face and she watched him for a long moment. “He’s trying,” she said softly, repeating Derek’s own words. “It’s really hard for him. He’s known you were his mate since he was thirteen. He’s been kept away from you for six years. He doesn’t mean to be as creepy as he’s coming off, he just... can’t help it. He’s desperate to be close to you, it’s literally a physical need. But he knows he can’t do that, because you don’t know him. And now, he knows you hate him.”

“I don’t hate him,” Stiles insisted. “I just... he creeps me out.”

“Yeah, I know.” She sighed and raked a hand through her hair as Stiles took the exit leading to their campus. “He wants to talk to you, explain things, but he knows you’re too freaked out by him to give him a chance. Mom told him breaking into your Jeep and your room isn’t helping matters, but he can’t help it. He wants to be close to you, and he says watching you sleep makes him feel calm, because he knows you’re safe.”

“Creepy,” Stiles informed her.

“I know, but he is trying. He just needs more time.”

Stiles parked the Mustang in the spot he usually did the Jeep, cutting off the engine and letting out a slow breath. Cora was watching him with interest for a few seconds, neither of them moving.

“What are you thinking?” Cora asked after a moment. When Stiles said nothing, she shrugged slightly. “It’s hard to tell with you. Your heart rate is abnormally fast all the time, so when something is wrong, it’s harder to tell.”

“I have Tachycardia,” Stiles said, as if that was what they should be focussing on right then. “Means my heart beats too fast.”

“Makes sense. Also makes it hard to know what you’re thinking.” She eyed him a moment longer. “It sounds normal-ish right now, though. And I mean, looking at you, you’re taking this
surprisingly well.”

“Oh no,” Stiles insisted with a small laugh. “I’m going to go have a meltdown in like, five minutes, I’m just trying to hold it together until you’re not around for it.”

Cora winced, evidently able to tell he wasn’t joking.

And he wasn’t.

This was a lot.

A few weeks ago, he found out he had a stalker. On Friday, he found out the Hale family were Werewolves. Today, he found out he was essentially betrothed to one of them.

“What if I say no?” Stiles suddenly blurted out. Cora had been in the process of taking off her seatbelt and she froze, eyes snapping up to Stiles’ face.

“What?”

“The whole mates thing,” Stiles insisted. “What if-what if I wasn’t bisexual? What if I said no? What if Derek asks and I say ‘thanks but no thanks’?”

It looked like Cora had stopped breathing, and that actually made the panic bubbling in his chest rise into his throat. He could not have a panic attack with her so close, he needed to be somewhere by himself, like a bathroom or something. He didn’t want a witness to his meltdown.

“It’s—I don’t know,” she finally said, her voice very small. “It’s never happened before. Not in our family. Mates usually... it usually just works out. If you said no... I don’t know what he’d do.”

“Find someone else?” Stiles offered, her words not comforting.

She winced. “It doesn’t work like that. It’s like-like penguins. You mate for life.”

“But we haven’t,” Stiles argued. “We’ve barely even spoken. And he hasn’t—“ Stiles tried to remember the word she’d used—”claimed me yet. He can change his mind.”

“You can change your mind,” she said, very quietly, avoiding his eye. “He can’t. You’re it for him. If it’s not you, it’s no one. And I don’t know what an unmated Alpha would be like. I only know what ones who lose their mates are like. And they break. It’s awful.” She glanced up at Stiles. “I know this is a lot. And I’m not telling you this to make you feel pressured. You asked, so I told you. And no one said you had to like it, that you have to go along with it, but I guess I was just hoping you can see things from his perspective a little bit. He doesn’t mean to be like this, he literally can’t help it.”

She pushed open her door and grabbed her bag, climbing out of the car. Before closing the door, she leaned back in and pressed her lips together. “I hope I see you for lunch. If you need time... if you end up going home, just text me. I’ll get someone to pick me up.”

She shut the door and left him.

True to his word, Stiles had a panic attack not two minutes later, his mind reeling over all the information he’d just been bombarded with.
Sometimes, ignorance truly was bliss.

TBC...

Chapter End Notes

WARNINGS: I know some people might not like Stalker!Derek so this is to explain that the stalking is a misunderstanding and it's Derek trying to keep Stiles safe by being a creeper. Stiles does not handle it well. Derek breaks into his Jeep/house and watches him sleep but there is a valid reason for it which is explained by Cora by the end of the chapter.

Obligatory Copyright Crap:
- Teen Wolf (c) Jeff Davis
- Twilight (c) Stephenie Meyer
- Captain Marvel ; Avengers: Infinity War (c) Marvel
- Wonder Woman (c) DC
- Peter Pan (c) Disney
- Scooby-Doo (c) Joe Ruby, Iwao Takamoto, Ken Spears
- Supernatural (c) Eric Kripke
- The Fast and the Furious (c) Gary Scott Thompson
- The Haunting of Hill House (c) Mike Flanagan
- Dirty John (c) Alexandra Cunningham
- Orange is the New Black (c) Jenji Kohan
- Scream (c) Wes Craven
He ended up going to class. It was safer to be in class surrounded by people than at home with his mind racing. Not that he was paying much attention, but it was finals soon so he struggled to keep it together as much as he could.

Stiles did skip his first class though, because he’d been hyperventilating and freaking out over the bomb that had just been dropped for close to an hour. It wasn’t until close to the beginning of his second class that he decided he had to get out of the car and focus on something else, so he’d forced himself out and gone to class.

It was a lot to take in. He wondered if this was how people in arranged marriages felt. He was only twenty-one, he’d barely dated in his life, and already he felt like he had no choice in the matter. If he said yes, he wouldn’t know if it was out of some weird sense of duty to the Hale pack for having protected him and his dad all these years without his knowledge, or if it would be out of fear for what Derek would do to him if he didn’t.

What would Derek do? He already followed him around and broke into his house while he slept. If Stiles rejected him, told him he wasn’t interested, what would he do? Would he force himself on him? Would he claim him whether Stiles wanted it or not? Cora had said he was losing his mind in New York, going crazy with need. What if being rejected sent him over the deep end? What if he attacked his dad at work? Or his friends?

Fuck, what if he threatened the people in his life? He didn’t think Derek was a bad person, but the way Cora explained everything made it sound like his obsession could turn him into a bad person.

By the time he went to meet Scott for their morning coffee, he was hyperventilating again, worried about all the people in his life and what Derek might do to them. It didn’t take a Werewolf to know something was wrong, and while Stiles didn’t want to tell him what had happened, he just expressed some strong concerns. His mind was racing, and he wondered if this was how Bella would’ve felt if Twilight had been darker. If she’d said no to the Vampire after her blood, if Edward Cullen would have attacked her, punished her for not wanting him like he did her.

Stiles was sitting on the curb trying to breathe while Scott was yelling into Stiles’ phone. He didn’t know who he was speaking to, but considering he’d fished it out of Stiles’ pocket, it was likely Cora since that was the only number they didn’t both share.

Then Scott sat beside him with an arm around his shoulders, insisting no one was going to hurt his pack, or his family, that they would figure everything out. It wasn’t as comforting as he was sure Scott intended it to be, but at least he was trying.

God, he wanted his dad. So badly. He felt like only his dad would be able to fix this, and he was sorely tempted to call him. Dads could fix anything. Moms could, too, but he didn’t have that anymore. All he had was his dad, and he would literally give anything to have his dad appear
Somehow, shockingly, he did get a dad. It wasn’t his, but it was a dad all the same.

“Hello Scott. It’s been a long time.”

Stiles glanced up at the voice, seeing Scott’s confused expression out of the corner of his eye. Michael Hale smiled down at him, hands in the pockets of his jeans. He looked tired, and worried, like he’d just been given distressing news.

He probably had. Stiles figured Cora had called him after their conversation in the car earlier, because there was no way he’d gotten from the house to the school this quickly. He’d probably already been on his way before Stiles’ second meltdown with Scott.

“Mr. Hale,” Stiles said, which had Scott stiffen instantly.

He pulled one hand from his pocket, holding it out in surrender to Scott, eyes still on Stiles. “I’m not here to cause trouble. My daughter called, and I thought you might like someone to speak to. Someone who understands what you’re going through.”

Stiles wanted to lash out at him, insist he had no idea what he was going through, how terrifying this was, how insane his life had just become. But he stopped himself, because he realized...

Michael Hale did know how he felt. He was a mate, too. Sure, he’d been older when he’d found out, but Stiles doubted it made it any less stressful or terrifying. Knowing a Werewolf, an Alpha, was determined to keep you forever. What if the marriage hadn’t worked out? What if something had happened and he’d begun to resent Talia? What if things just went wrong?

If anyone could possibly understand the fear racing through his veins like acid, it was him.

“He doesn’t need you,” Scott hissed. “Your family needs to leave him alone.”

“I’m afraid we can’t do that,” Michael said softly, eyes still on Stiles, waiting for him to decide if he wanted to talk or if he’d send him away. “Because as much as you might not like it, Scott, Stiles is very important to all of us. And I’m not going to walk away unless he asks me to.”

Scott’s arm around his shoulders tightened, likely ready to help defend him when Stiles told Michael to leave, but he didn’t. He could sense Scott’s confusion at the lack of a response, but Stiles didn’t know what to do. He didn’t want to hurt Scott by insisting this was fine and he wanted to talk to Michael, but he also didn’t want to talk to Michael. He just wanted things to go back to the way they were, he wanted the Hales to leave, and never come back.

But that wasn’t fair. This land belonged to them. Beacon Hills was their home, long before it had ever been anyone else’s. He knew that Michael, even as the patriarch, wasn’t a Hale himself. He knew the man had taken his wife’s name, because of the history the Hale name had.

If anyone could help him figure out how to get through this, unfortunately it wasn’t Scott, it was the man standing in front of him, watching him in silence, waiting for him to make a decision.

“Stiles,” Scott said quietly, almost in reprimand. Like he was annoyed Stiles wasn’t telling Michael to fuck off.

Stiles felt his chest constrict when he spoke next, knowing Scott wouldn’t approve, but he couldn’t help it. “This is a lot.”

“I know,” Michael said soothingly. He offered a kind smile and motioned for him to get up. “Why
don’t we go for a walk? The fresh air will help, and getting your blood pumping will do you some
good. Scott can come with us, if he likes.”

The way Scott’s arm tightened suggested he wasn’t going anywhere. It was actually getting a little
painful, if he was honest, but also comforting. Having Scott there with him was helping.

After a moment, Stiles slowly got to his feet. The startled and almost wounded look on his friend’s
face hurt to see, but he didn’t have the ability to explain everything right now. He just stood up and
Michael nodded once, motioning one of the paths. Stiles started for it with Michael at his side, and
Scott scrambled up after them, moving to walk on Stiles’ other side, almost crushing him into
Michael with how close he was walking.

“Is Cora in trouble?” Stiles asked after a long silence while they walked through the campus,
passing various people rushing to class. “With her mom, I mean?”

“No,” Michael said, offering him a small smile. “Because I haven’t told her mother yet.”

“Are you going to?”

“Depends on how much progress we make,” Michael admitted. His eyes skirted to Scott then, and
he offered him a small smile. “I understand why you’re here, Scott. I know you’re trying to
provide moral support for your friend. But we are going to be having a conversation you might not
understand. I’m going to have to ask you to keep all your questions to yourself, because this
conversation isn’t about you, it’s about him. So you can ask him what you want to know later,
when he’s in the right frame of mind, not now. Do not interrupt us. Do you understand?”

Stiles frowned when he noticed Scott’s spine snap straight in his peripheral, and when he glanced
at him, Scott had the most confused look on his face, eying Michael with a mix of trepidation and
awe. He glanced at Stiles, looking a little helpless, then squeezed his wrist tightly with one hand
before falling back a step so he was trailing behind them instead of crowding Stiles.

It was the strangest thing Stiles had ever seen Scott do, and it really confused him that he’d
actually listened to Michael. He didn’t understand, but that was a question for another day, not one
for right now.

“I know why Cora told you,” Michael said, forcing Stiles’ attention back to him. He seemed to be
acting as if the brief request to Scott hadn’t happened, still focussed on his daughter. “I understand
she had good intentions. Cora and Derek are very close, they always have been. I know the two of
you haven’t been friends for very long, but she could sense you didn’t want to have anything to do
with Derek. He’s going to be her Alpha one day, he’s her packmate and brother, she loves him. She
knew Talia wanted him to speak to you in his own time, but she was worried you would never give
him the opportunity to explain himself. She thought if she explained why he was behaving in this
manner, it might convince you to at least hear him out.” Michael clapped a hand to Stiles’
shoulder, offering him a small smile. “She had good intentions, but the problem is, Cora is a wolf.
She sees her future Alpha struggling with his need, and for wolves, it’s natural to close ranks,
protect their own. She might not understand the need herself, but she understands her Alpha has a
need, and it’s a natural reaction for her to expect you to be all right with it.”

“I’m really not,” Stiles admitted.

“And it’s perfectly normal, Stiles,” he insisted calmly. “Cora was likely very intense. It’s different
for wolves, you see. Being an Alpha’s mate is a privilege, something to be proud of. Something to
want to share with as many people as possible because it’s such an honour. To Cora, she expected
you to react the way a wolf would, with pride and excitement. But you’re not a wolf, you’re a
human, and things are different for us.”

Stiles was suddenly so, so thankful that Michael Hale was a human, because having another human be a Werewolf’s mate was definitely going to get his heart to stop going a mile a minute. It wasn’t going to solve all his anxiety, but at least Michael seemed to recognize why Stiles was not okay with this. Instead of what Cora had done, albeit unintentionally he was sure, Michael was insisting it was fine and normal to be feeling like this. Cora had made him feel like he didn’t have a choice in the matter.

“I don’t know what to do,” Stiles admitted, feeling anxiety rising once more.

“You don’t have to do anything,” Michael insisted, hand squeezing on his shoulder comfortingly. “You don’t have to decide anything now, you don’t have to choose what course of action you want to take until you are ready for it. I know Derek has been coming around a lot, and I know that he hasn’t been making the best impression, but you don’t owe him anything. His wolf chose you, but there is absolutely no obligation for you to accept him.”

Stiles’ head whipped around to look at him, feeling panicked. “But if I don’t want this, and I tell him that, what is he going to do?”

Michael turned to him, frowning slightly. “Do? What do you mean, what is he going to do?”

“To my family, to my pack. What is he going to do in retaliation? To make me accept him?”

The startled look on Michael’s face helped some of Stiles’ anxiety, and the sadness and understanding that followed helped even more. “Stiles, he’s not going to do anything.” Michael stopped them in the middle of the path they were on. There weren’t very many people around them, and most weren’t on their path, so the only person forced to stop with them was Scott, who was still silent behind them.

Michael turned so he was facing Stiles fully, placing both hands on his shoulders and squeezing. He seemed to understand more of why Stiles was reacting so badly to this, and when he spoke next, the last of Stiles’ anxiety slowly melted away.

“You are his mate, Stiles. He cares about you. If you were to reject him, he wouldn’t do anything. He would be really upset, and it would hurt him a great deal to know his mate didn’t want him, but he isn’t going to go after anyone you care about. You mean too much to him for him to dare even think of harming anyone in your life. Admittedly, he would have a very hard time watching you move on, with someone else, somewhere else, but he would accept it. He would let you do it without interfering in your future, but he will always be there to ensure your safety because even if you’re not with him, to him, you are his everything. He will watch out for you forever to make sure you are always safe, even if you told him you never wanted him near you ever again. He loves you, Stiles. He’s an Alpha, it’s just how it is. He isn’t going to hurt you, or anyone you care about. He isn’t going to interfere with your life. He isn’t going to force your hand, or do anything to make you feel like you don’t have a choice. He will be there, but that’s all.” Michael reached up to lightly slap his cheek, offering him a small smile. “Don’t ever think you don’t have a choice here. This is no different than any other relationship. If you decide you don’t want this, Derek will just have to learn to accept it. And he will, in time. But you shouldn’t ever feel pressured into it because you think saying no will cause harm to the people you love.”

The tightness in Stiles’ chest he’d been feeling all morning had finally begun to ease. It felt like he could take a real breath again, the air filling his lungs and relief crashing over him. He noticed Scott’s tense shoulders slowly relax out of his peripheral, and figured now that Stiles wasn’t a walking, talking ball of anxiety, his friend was able to calm down a little bit.
“I can say no,” Stiles said, because he needed to hear it confirmed again.

Michael’s hands on his shoulders tightened and he gave him a small shake. “You can absolutely say no, Stiles. You can say no as long as you want, and if it ever changed to yes, that’s fine, too. If it doesn’t, then it doesn’t. This is not a life sentence.” He smiled slightly. “This is a choice, same as everything else in life.”

“Oh.” Stiles reached up to rub at his face, Michael letting out a small chuckle. He turned them and began walking again, one hand still on Stiles’ shoulder in silent support.

He didn’t speak for a long moment, likely letting Stiles digest everything he’d just said. Michael was way better at explaining this than Cora was. All Cora’s conversation had done was fill him with panic and anxiety, thinking he didn’t have a choice, and the future Alpha of the area was going to come after him and everyone he loved and force him to agree to be his mate.

“Cora said Derek was going crazy in New York,” he finally said quietly.

“He was,” Michael agreed. “But not in the way you’re thinking. He was just panicking about you all the time. Having you out of sight meant he never truly knew if you were all right or not. He didn’t like knowing you were so far away, because if you needed him, he couldn’t be there for you.”

“I don’t understand,” he insisted after a moment.

“Understand?” Michael prompted.

“Cora said when Alphas lose their mates, they break. But you said that I can say no and he’d accept it.”

“There’s a difference,” Michael said, then paused in their conversation when they passed a group of students lounging on the grass in the sun. Once they were past them, he continued. “Rejections are not very common, because of the fact that they are generally Werewolves and, as I said, it’s an honour in their eyes. Humans can happen, but they’re extremely rare. Human rejections are actually even rarer, most of them work out in the long run, but there have been known rejections in the past. None in the Hale line, but that’s neither here nor there.”

Great. If Stiles decided to send Derek packing, he’d be the first to break their perfect record.

“But there is a difference between being rejected after not having a mate’s acceptance, and having a mate that you lose. If an Alpha claims a mate, and they’re lost, it destroys a piece of them. This was someone they adored, they cherished, they relied on, they claimed. This was someone who was as much a part of them as they were a part of their mate. It’s like losing half of yourself, something you’re never going to get back. That would break anyone. But if you have a mate reject you, they were never yours to begin with. It hurts, of course it does, just as any heartbreak would hurt, but it’s more tolerable. They’re only a tiny piece of you, not half of who you are. There is a rather large difference between rejection and loss of a claimed mate.”

“Huh.” Cora was really, really bad at explaining this, because Michael, if anything, was making Stiles feel better about being a mate as opposed to it being a life sentence. Stiles didn’t like being backed into a corner, and knowing he had a choice was doing wonders for his opinion of being an Alpha’s mate.

“You all keep talking about being claimed,” Stiles insisted. “What does that—is that like...?” He didn’t want to talk about sex with Derek’s dad, he’d literally met the man maybe three times in his
entire life, and had only just spoken to him again for the first time in years on Friday afternoon.

“Oh, it’s nothing to be worried about,” Michael insisted. “Wolves have a need to claim everything they deem as belonging to them. Derek is not permitted to claim you unless you explicitly consent to it. If he claimed you without your consent, it would only destroy him in the long run. He knows better.”

“But what—I mean, to do that, is it, uh...?” He didn’t know how to word it without asking if that meant Derek had to screw his brains out.

Michael seemed to understand what he was asking, because he just reached up with one hand and pulled the collar of his shirt down slightly. Stiles frowned, unsure of what he was meant to be looking at, but when they walked another few steps, the sun hit his skin just right and he could see the faintest of scars on his neck. It kind of looked like a bitemark, but it had long ago healed over, and it was so faint that it was barely even noticeable.

“Alphas can turn humans into Werewolves, as I’m sure you know,” Michael said, letting the collar fall back into place, and motioning behind them, presumably referencing Scott. “But only when they’ve shifted. They can also severely injure other Werewolves when shifted. When an Alpha claims a mate, it’s only done with blunt, human teeth. Perhaps a little more painful than I’d have liked, but it was what my wife needed to do.”

“Oh.” Biting. Okay. Not the best thing in the world, but at least he was less worried about Derek breaking into his room and having his way with him. Also, it sounded like Derek wouldn’t ever touch him without his consent, so that was also fairly comforting.

It made sense, he supposed. Cora herself had said Derek was desperate to see him, to just be near him. Michael had reaffirmed that all Derek wanted was to make sure Stiles was safe. Every time he’d caught him in his room, Derek had been across it, in the shadows, just watching him. Hell, he might’ve been doing it for weeks after his return and Stiles just hadn’t caught him. All this time, and he’d never once touched him.

The most he’d ever been touched was when Derek had been pulling him out of the totalled Jeep, and potentially in the hospital when he’d come in to check on him and touched his cheek and forehead. Other than that, Derek hadn’t done anything aside from follow him and watch him from a distance, and considering he’d spent six years away from him, Stiles was kind of starting to understand why. He didn’t necessarily like it, but at least he understood it.

“Thank you,” he said to Michael.

“I know my children,” the man said with a fond smile. “Merrak is probably the only one I don’t need to worry about. It’s very different being a born Werewolf, especially one belonging to our family. There is a lot of pressure, and all of them just want to cling to whatever sense of normalcy they can get. Cora didn’t mean any harm, she just wants what’s best for Derek.”

“I think she should be leaving the big talks to you and Mrs. Hale,” Stiles informed him.

Michael laughed at that and wholeheartedly agreed, squeezing Stiles’ shoulder one last time before finally dropping his hand, clearly sensing that the danger had passed and Stiles wasn’t at risk of running off screaming.

“I think it may be best if you were to get some distance for the next few days,” Michael admitted. “Just for a while. Spend time with your own pack, with your father. You can keep the Mustang until the Jeep has been returned, Cora isn’t permitted to drive it, anyway.”
“I need to drive her home,” Stiles argued.

“I can stay.” Michael smiled. “I brought my work with me, and I’m certain there are many coffeeshops on this campus. I can wait for her until she’s finished and drive her home. Take some time, get some distance. My children often forget that humans are not like Werewolves. Merrak and I will remind them of this, we’ll speak to Derek again. Just take some time for yourself.”

Stiles nodded slightly in thanks, then added, “Thank you,” out loud. “I will.”

Michael nodded once, then paused. “Would you happen to have any mountain ash?”

Stiles frowned. “Mountain ash?”

“Yes. To keep Derek out of your room.”

Stiles turned to glance at Scott, but his friend just shrugged. He looked back at Michael. “What is it?”

Michael seemed surprised, but he just smiled. “I’ll bring you some later tonight when we’ve both returned home. It’s something that keeps Werewolves out. I thought you would’ve known about it, but it appears I was mistaken. It certainly explains why you haven’t used it to keep Derek out. Put it along the borders of your room and he won’t be able to enter. At least it will alleviate some of your concerns, though I will speak to him again.”

Stiles nodded slowly. “And Cora? Is she in trouble?”

“We can keep this between us for now.” Michael winked at him. “No need to worry Talia unnecessarily. Cora has told Derek, though, so he is aware you have been informed.”

“Is he mad?”

“Furious, but he understands why she did it. He knows it didn’t hurt his chances any more than he was already doing on his own.”

Stiles nodded slightly, raking a hand through his hair and sighing. “Thank you,” he said again. “I really—I appreciate that you came out here to speak to me.”

“You’re family, Stiles. Maybe not yet, and maybe not ever as much as Derek wants, but being his mate whether he claims you or not makes us responsible for you. Besides,” he smiled again, “I know what it feels like to be a human thrust into something like this. If you need to speak to someone about it, know I’m always available.”

They stopped when they’d reached one of the larger courtyards with buildings all around them. Michael motioned them all and said, “I believe your next class is starting soon. Best you go and educate yourself. I’ll wait on Cora, you can return home alone.”

“Right. Thank you.” Stiles shoved his hands in his pocket. “Seriously, this—it helped. A lot.”

“Gives you a lot to think about, too. Just know, whatever your decision, it will be respected. It is your right to make your own choices.”

Stiles nodded and Michael nodded back. He looked at Scott, bid him a good day, and then turned to disappear back the way they’d come. Scott and Stiles watched him go, the man walking easily with his hands in his pockets.
It was weird watching him leave, because he walked with all the confidence of a Werewolf. Stiles had noticed people like Scott and Jackson had changed when they became Werewolves, but it was strange to see a human do it. He figured it had something to do with marrying into a Werewolf family and having four out of five children be only part human.

Stiles finally turned to Scott, who was staring at him like he had no idea who he was.

“Thanks for sticking with me,” he said quietly. “And for not interrupting.”

“How did he do that?” Scott asked hoarsely.

Stiles frowned. “Do what?”

“When he spoke, when he told me not to interrupt and to just support you, it was like... I felt it, Stiles. It was like an order. I felt it in my bones, digging deep. Every time I thought about opening my mouth while you guys were speaking, there was a tightness in my chest, insisting I stay quiet. How did he do it?”

He had no idea how to answer that question, because he didn’t know how Michael had done it, either. He turned to look the way the man had gone, but he was too far away to really see anymore. Stiles wondered if it was because he was an Alpha’s mate.

He wondered if that meant he could do that one day, whether he was claimed or not.

“What is happening?” Scott demanded, making Stiles look back at him. “He referenced mates, and that you were Derek’s. What the hell is going on?”

“Not now.” Stiles rubbed his face with both hands, letting out a deep sigh. “I can’t deal with this again right now. I need some time to... sort things out. Can we reconvene on this tomorrow?”

“Stiles—”

“Please.” He gave Scott a pleading look. “I really need to figure this out, I can’t talk about it again right now. We can have a pack meeting tomorrow. Please just—just drop it for now.”

Scott didn’t look happy about it, but he finally agreed. He walked Stiles to his next class, sticking closer to him than normal, and didn’t leave until Stiles was firmly seated in a chair, the class slowly emptying from the previous lesson. Only then did Scott leave.

Pulling his phone out, Stiles opened his messages with Cora.

[Stiles]
Gonna take people’s advice and get some space
[Stiles]
No lunch today, sorry
[Stiles]
Your dad is gonna drive you home

[Cora]
he txted me
[Cora]
i figured
[Cora]
and i get it
“Yeah,” Stiles said with a sigh. “I know.”

He shoved his phone back into his pocket.

True to his word, Stiles agreed to have a pack meeting on Tuesday. He texted Cora to tell her he had no choice but to share what she’d told him, even though he’d promised not to, but it was hard considering her father had been discussing it in detail in front of Scott. She said it was fine, since originally no one else was meant to know she’d spilled the beans, but given both Derek and her dad knew, there was no point in hiding it.

As far as Stiles could tell, Talia still hadn’t found out, which he felt was probably a good thing. Michael had also given him that mountain ash stuff he’d talked about, and Stiles was thrilled about it, considering when he’d put it around the front door on Tuesday morning to test it out, it had kept Scott, Jackson and Kira out of his house. Lydia was the only one who could pass it, and Stiles was determined to locate every jar of the stuff he could find and surround himself with it.

He didn’t, because that would be ridiculous, but he did intend to buy a few small glass vials from the store and fill them up with the grey powder, then proceed to stash the vials into various hoodies and pairs of pants he had. He figured it was better to be safe than sorry, and even a small amount on him at all times was better than nothing at all.

Of course, the mountain ash meant explaining to the others how he’d gotten it and what it did. That
pack meeting, where he had to explain *everything*, did not go well. Scott already knew parts of it, so he’d had time to calm himself down, but Jackson was livid and insisted the Hales weren’t allowed to try and steal him from them. Stiles thought it was oddly touching to realize Jackson was terrified Stiles was going to leave them. He wouldn’t, but it was nice to be wanted.

The others mostly spoke about the pros and cons of letting everything continue to play out how it was, but Stiles only partly listened to them. At the end of the day, this wasn’t their decision to make, it was his. And Stiles wanted to tell Derek to go away and leave him alone, but he knew he wouldn’t, and that it wasn’t fair. Cora and Michael both—and even Talia, in some regards—had been insistent that it wasn’t his fault. That he was trying. Derek himself had said he was trying, but that it was hard.

Stiles knew if he hadn’t been sneaking around and breaking into his car and room, he’d probably have given him a bit more of a chance, and that made him bitter over how things were playing out. He wasn’t stupid enough to think being a dick to him would have Derek disappear, but he wasn’t comfortable being anywhere near him, either.

And finals were coming up. Stiles didn’t have time to focus on crazy Werewolf things right now, not with finals looming. He was already thrilled at the fact that there was another, larger pack in town who could deal with all the crazy shit that always came knocking, he just wanted to spend the next three weeks focussing on school and hopefully not fail his classes.

He didn’t feel like that was too much to ask, and honestly, when he drove the Mustang to class alone on Wednesday, he felt much better. Not having to worry about Werewolves and any other things was actually really comforting.

He didn’t see Cora, and she didn’t text him to ask how he was doing. She left him alone, like she promised she would. He occasionally saw Derek, but mostly in passing, like when he was heading to the store and would see the man parked in his cruiser at the end of the block. It was disconcerting, but at least he hadn’t come into his room again, which made sense considering the mountain ash.

Stiles loved that stuff. Had no idea it existed since he’d mostly been finding things that could hurt Werewolves in an attempt to keep Scott and Jackson safe, so learning there was something he could use against Weres that didn’t *hurt* them was kind of a relief. He wanted to buy out the world of the stuff, but so far he’d only been able to procure the one jar from Michael Hale. He wanted to find more, but there wasn’t exactly a website he could use to buy it.

‘Werewolves’R’Us’ wasn’t a thing, much as he’d love for it to be.

Stiles went almost all three weeks leading up to the end of his exams without anything happening. Scott and the rest of the pack were around more often, like they were trying to shield him from the Hales, and he got his Jeep back in the first week after he and Cora had stopped speaking. The only time he saw her was when he drove it back to her place with Jackson following in his Porsche.

Stiles had knocked on the door to return the keys, and Eric had been the one to answer, baring his teeth angrily at Jackson because he was apparently ‘too close’ to Stiles. It had been an uncomfortable conversation but he’d handed the keys back and returned to the Porsche with Jackson, who’d flashed angry eyes at Eric before kicking up gravel and flying away from the house. Stiles spent the whole drive back gripping the handle above the door, honestly a little terrified he was about to die.

Jackson spent the night again, grumbling angrily and actually cuddling with Stiles, insisting the Hales couldn’t have him and fuck them for trying to steal the only human in their pack. Stiles was
both pleased and confused, because he’d never really experienced this level of protectiveness from Werewolves before.

He could only assume it was a territorial thing, and the pack had never had another pack to contend with in town. Not that they’d known about, anyway.

When exams were finally over three weeks later, Stiles knew he should find himself a job, but every place he looked at felt too close to the precinct, and he didn’t want to be that close to where Derek was. He ended up spending more time lounging on the couch than anything else, but having that much free time made him think too much. Thinking was dangerous for someone like Stiles, and he found his mind wandering into places he’d rather it not go.

Eventually, halfway through June, he decided he’d had enough. He called the station, putting his cell to his ear, and waited for whoever was manning the front to answer.

“Beacon Hills Sheriff’s Department.”

“Hey Val, it’s Stiles.”

“Stiles, hey!” He could hear the smile in her voice. “How are you doing? You looking for your dad? He’s in his office, I can’t see him on the phone.”

“No, uh, I’m actually—is Parrish there?”

“Parrish? Yup, he should be, give me a second and I’ll patch you through.”

“Thanks Val.”

He waited, listening to the elevator music playing, and after a few moments, the line clicked.

“Deputy Parrish.”

“Hey Parrish, it’s Stiles.”

“Stiles. Hey.” He sounded surprised, like Stiles was the last person he expected to hear from. “Is everything okay? What’s going on? Are you hurt?”

“No,” he said with a frown, wondering why that was Parrish’s first thought. Then again, he was part of the Hale pack, so he was probably just concerned for the future Alpha’s mate. His involvement in the Hale pack was actually why he was speaking to him. “I was calling because I was hoping we could talk.”

“Sure. Everything okay?”

“Um, in private. I don’t—have your cell.”

It took a second for him to understand, but then he said he’d call him back on the number he saw on his phone and hung up. Stiles did as well, waiting while staring down at his phone. He knew the lines at work were recorded and he definitely didn’t want anyone to overhear their discussion. Especially his dad, considering everything that was happening in his life right now.

An unknown number called him two minutes later, and Stiles knew it was Parrish, so he answered with a, “Hey Parrish.”

“Stiles. What’s going on?” Parrish asked. There was a lot of background noise, cars passing by, and he figured the deputy had headed outside to walk around the station so as not to be overheard.
Stiles appreciated that.

“You’re in the Hale pack, right? Like, you’ve been part of their pack for a long time?”

“I have,” Parrish replied easily. It seemed the Hale pack members had all been informed that Stiles and the McCall pack were all well aware of their existence.

“So, what are you?” It wasn’t why Stiles was calling, but if Parrish was going to be more open now, he wasn’t going to pull his punches.

“A Hellhound. We’re very rare, not a lot is known about us. Even Talia doesn’t know much, but she was there for me when I needed her, so I follow her no matter what.”

“Hm.” Stiles was going to look into Hellhounds. He didn’t know those were a thing. To be fair, he and his pack were still relatively new to all this. Sure, they’d been fighting monsters and most of them were Supernatural creatures, but they’d really only been into this sort of thing for the past five years, so really, it made sense they’d missed out on a lot of knowledge.

“What’s it like? Being in the Hale pack, I mean.”

“I’d imagine no different than being in Scott’s,” Parrish said honestly. “We’re a pack, Stiles. We spend time together, we look out for each other. Talia keeps us safe, and in return, we watch her back and do as she asks. It’s a good pack. We’ve got good people in it.”

“Right.” Stiles rubbed the back of his head for a few seconds, tugging at his hair. “Can I ask you about him? Derek, I mean.”

“What do you want to know?”

Stiles shrugged, fully aware Parrish couldn’t see him. “Just—what’s he like? What do you think about him?”

“Why don’t you come down and find out for yourself?”

“Because he might attack me?” Stiles argued.

“You need to give him more credit. Being away from you hasn’t been easy for him. Having you here, within reach, but unable to touch you has been even harder. He saved your life, you know. I think the least you could do is buy him a coffee.”

“He trashed my Jeep and almost killed me!” Stiles argued.

“He panicked and overestimated how hard to hit the car to get you off the road. You try it sometime, it’s not like he was thinking straight in the heat of the moment.”

“You’re a dick.”

“Just talk to him.” Parrish sounded exhausted all of a sudden. It occurred to Stiles he probably got barked at all the time by Derek. “He just wants a chance. Just give him one.”

“I’ll think about it,” Stiles muttered, and hung up.

He hadn’t known what he was expecting, calling Parrish. He felt like calling anyone from the Hale pack was going to be pointless, but he did acknowledge Parrish was right. He didn’t want to give Derek a chance because he creeped him out, but if he never even tried, how was he ever going to know if Derek was actually the nicest guy on the planet? Sure, Stiles kept referencing the fact that
he’d totalled his Jeep, but it wasn’t like it had escaped his notice Derek had saved him from an oncoming semi. His seatbelt had been jammed, his steering column had been disconnected. If Derek hadn’t shoved the car out of the road, Stiles would’ve died for certain.

Sure the fall over the side and down the ravine that followed wasn’t appreciated, but he at least acknowledged that Derek had been trying to help him. And he’d looked so panicked when he’d ripped the door off, screaming his name and seconds away from losing his shit.

All Stiles had right now was a protective pack who wanted him to stay away from the Hales, and his own anxieties over what he thought he knew and understood. But the truth was, none of them knew or understood anything. They hadn’t even known a pack shouldn’t exist without an Alpha, hadn’t realized mountain ash was a thing, didn’t understand that there was a hierarchy and a Council or anything. They literally had no understanding whatsoever of what they were dealing with, and it made Stiles feel woefully inadequate. He didn’t do well with not knowing things.

“Fuck.”

Pushing himself off the couch, he headed for the door, patting his pockets for his keys. He felt them, along with one of the vials of mountain ash he had in there. He sometimes forgot he’d been shoving vials of the stuff in all his clothes. He debated taking it out before leaving the house, then shrugged and figured it was a non-issue so long as he didn’t use it. He turned and double-checked the place was decent for his dad’s return before exiting the house. He locked the door, then went to the Jeep, climbing into it and starting it up.

His car had returned in much better shape than it had ever been. A part of him was pleased—things like the muffler, and the radio, and the seats had been replaced—but another part of him was a little sad. It was still Roscoe, but it wasn’t the same. He wanted the loud engine, and the broken radio, and the heavy steering wheel. Most of the things he used to hate about the Jeep had been fixed, and he found himself missing them. Nostalgia, he supposed.

Stiles passed by the station on his way to his destination, squinting out the passenger window to check the parking lot. When he saw the black Camaro parked in the lot, he continued on his way towards the Hale house.

It was strange heading over in the summer, without actually needing to be there, but he had to talk to someone before he went crazy. So he drove up the long dirt road until it turned to gravel beneath his tires, and he saw all the various vehicles parked out front. As he already knew, Derek’s Camaro was gone, but Laura’s Audi was, as well. He didn’t care, neither of them were who he was here to see.

Climbing out of the car, he slammed the door and stared up at the house, feeling a little uncomfortable. But, he wasn’t about to back down now so he strode up the steps and rang the doorbell.

Merrak was the one who answered the door, and he looked unimpressed by his presence.

“Finally grow a spine?” he asked, blunt as ever.

Stiles really liked him, he reminded him of him.

“I need to talk to your mom.”

Merrak stared at him for a few seconds longer, then opened his mouth and shouted, “Mom, Derek’s mate is here to see you.”
Stiles winced, both at the words and the volume, but Merrak just turned on his heel and trudged back into the house. It was strange to realize Merrak was still a teenager, he was so tall and built, much like his brothers. But the simple act of being annoying enough to shout something like that through the house reminded Stiles that he really was only sixteen years old.

Stepping into the foyer, Stiles shut the door behind him and toed off his shoes, following after Merrak whether he was meant to or not.

He’d never been inside the Hale house before, and it was fucking stunning. He didn’t know what he’d expected, but it somehow still managed to surpass all his expectations. The walls were painted in soft colours just a touch darker than white, with a multitude of paintings of all varieties. There were rugs spread out along the floor in various rooms he passed with intricate patterns, and everything looked modern and fresh. He could tell based on what he could see that the Hales were well travelled.

“You look surprised.”

Stiles jumped, turning to see Talia exiting one of the rooms he’d been passing while following Merrak.

“It’s not what I expected,” Stiles admitted.

“What were you expecting?”

“I don’t know, just not this.” He supposed a part of him thought maybe the inside would be covered in dirt and blood, dead animals lying in the hallway and the wolves not picking up after themselves. Born wolves just seemed so different from bitten ones, but to be fair, he didn’t know much about either, clearly.

“It’s nice to see you, Stiles.” Talia reached out, wrapping one arm around his shoulders. “Walk with me.”

He didn’t have much of a choice, with her arm around him, but he moved through the house with her, passing the living room where Merrak had slouched on the couch, watching TV. He didn’t know where Cora and Eric were, but suspected Michael was off working on his next book somewhere.

She noticed he wasn’t wearing any shoes and called for Merrak to fetch them from the front of the house. He shouted back that he was busy, but the way she said his name after that statement had him stomping through the house again. He met them in the corridor and almost hurled the shoes at Stiles, but thankfully aimed for the floor so that they landed by his feet.

Talia led him through the kitchen, motioning for him to sit and put them back on, then they went out the back door into the yard. It wasn’t so much a yard as it was a patch of greenery that turned into the forest beyond. It was very foreboding, in Stiles’ opinion, but he didn’t say anything and just walked outside with her.

Her head was turned towards the trees, and he heard her mutter something under her breath before facing him once more and smiling.

“Your injuries healed very well,” she commented. “I can’t even see a scar where your stitches were on your face.”

“Yeah, I’m really glad that didn’t stick,” he admitted, reaching up with one hand to poke at the raised skin in his hair. “There’s one here, though. It was worse, so it makes sense. My hair grew
back, at least, so I think it hides it fairly well.”

“You can’t even see it,” she confirmed, still smiling. “How did your exams go, by the way?” Talia asked pleasantly while they slowly began to walk around the side of the house.

“Fine, I guess. Passed everything, so that’s nice,” he commented.

“I’m proud of you,” she said with a kind smile. “University isn’t easy, but you’ve done exceptionally well, as I understand it.”

He wasn’t sure what else to say, so he just went with, “Thanks.”

They made idle chit chat while doing a loop around the house, moving slowly in a large circle until they were in the backyard again. He figured she, like Michael, thought Stiles did better when he was moving around. To be fair, he wasn’t exactly one to stand still.

They mostly spoke about school and Stiles’ future plans of working for his dad, then they talked about his classes for next year, his upcoming birthday, plans for the rest of the summer. They talked a bit about his Jeep when they did another lap around the house and it was in sight, Talia asking him if the shop did a good job, if he needed anything else fixed, if he maybe wanted to get it repainted a different colour.

It was all very normal, and he figured she was just trying to get to know him, since they hadn’t really spoken much in the grand scheme of things. He asked his own questions about her work, how she liked being back in Beacon Hills, if it was actually true her family owned most of the town—which apparently they did.

She also commented that she wanted to invite his dad over for dinner. She implied Stiles would be invited, but the way she said it made it clear he was allowed to decline. He appreciated that, because he didn’t know if he could handle a house full of Werewolves right now.

He’d lost count of how many laps around the house they’d made before he heard a car approach. They came around the side of the house in time to see and hear Laura and Cora exiting the Audi. They were laughing with one another, arms laden with bags, and they both looked really happy.

Stiles noticed they were staring at his Jeep, but he hoped their happiness wasn’t about his presence and just that they had been out having a good day.

Cora was the first to catch them coming around the side of the house and she beamed at them, offering a wave, but didn’t move closer. She and Laura headed for the porch to disappear inside the house, and by the time he and Talia reached the front, they were both out of sight, the door firmly shut behind them.

“She misses you,” Talia admitted softly. “She understands, but she was rather fond of the time you both spent together. She’s respecting your decision for space.”

“It’s just weird,” he admitted. “I’ve never—this is all really new. Jackson and Scott have never been like this before. Protective, territorial. It’s not something I’m used to. I’m just... trying to figure out how all the pieces fit together.”

“I was sad to hear they weren’t interested in coming around,” Talia admitted. “I respect them wanting their independence, but there is a lot they don’t know about being a Werewolf.”

“I know,” Stiles admitted. “I kind of wish they would. I didn’t even know about mountain ash until Mr. Hale told me about it.”
“You can call him Michael, Stiles,” she insisted with a smile. “And you may call me Talia, if you’re comfortable with that.”

He nodded once, a little awkwardly, and said, “Thanks.”

“I was surprised about the mountain ash,” she admitted while they went back around the next corner. “I’d have thought you would know about that. It concerns me that you have all been out fighting beasts without full knowledge of your abilities. Does Scott know how to control his healing?”

“He can control it?” Stiles asked, because he thought it just sort of... happened.

“Of course. How do you think we’ve remained hidden from humans for so long?” She winked at him. “I would imagine if he is not aware of that, he likely isn’t aware of his ability to lessen pain for others.”

“What?” Stiles asked with a frown.

Talia explained about how Werewolves could essentially suck the pain out of people, give someone who was suffering the smallest of reprieves. It made Stiles think about the hand on his forehead in the hospital, followed by the easing of all his injuries. He’d also noticed that he felt better whenever Laura checked in on him, and figured both she and Derek had done the pain sucking thing.

She also explained that Alphas could delve into other people’s memories, see things in their heads. They also had the ability to control the members of their pack. Not in a mindless zombies kind of way, but more in an authoritative way. Stiles asked about Scott’s reaction to Michael, and she confirmed that the claimed mate of an Alpha had the same authority. Even though Scott wasn’t part of their pack, he recognized the tone of an Alpha in Michael’s voice, and it was why he’d obeyed him, albeit grudgingly.

They spoke a bit more openly about Werewolves while continuing to lap the house, and Stiles found out who a few members of the pack were, people he’d known and seen around, but hadn’t ever given much thought to.

Vernon Boyd, Isaac Lahey and Erica Reyes were all apparently part of the Hale pack. He’d gone to school with them, and they’d always been really nice to him. It made sense, when he thought about it, because wherever Derek went at school, Boyd wasn’t far behind. Erica and Isaac tended to stick close, as well, but Boyd and Derek were almost inseparable, if memory served.

He knew Boyd and Erica had gone off to university elsewhere and Isaac was taking time off from school and working in one of the stores at the mall the next town over, but he hadn’t given them much thought since they graduated high school. He supposed they’d all be around now that it was summer, though Isaac hadn’t technically left.

Parrish, of course, was also in their pack, as was Valerie Clark, which Stiles had been extremely surprised to find out. The old lady who owned the apothecary in town, Satomi Ito, was also part of Talia’s pack, as were a number of other people who worked in her shop.

The biggest shock came when Stiles discovered that Kira’s mother, Noshiko, was actually part of the Hale pack. She and her husband had been part of the pack years before, when they were all younger. Noshiko had moved away, but had remained tied to the Hales. Upon her return to Beacon Hills, when she’d found out about Stiles, she was the one who’d encouraged her daughter to make friendly with his pack.
It worked out that Kira ended up falling for Scott, but of course now there was a bit of a problem since no one had realized that Scott would create his own little pack. And now Kira and Noshiko were on two sides of the fence.

“Does Kira know?”

“Noshiko hasn’t said, but I would imagine she suspects,” Talia admitted. “Our return has caused quite a stir in many lives here, as I understand it. I’m sorry it’s put you in such an uncomfortable position.”

Stiles just shrugged. He was used to things not going according to plan. He figured if anything, he would like Scott to at least speak to Talia. She really could teach him a lot about being a Werewolf, and it wouldn’t be a bad thing to be part of a full, more experienced pack. One with an actual Alpha at the head of it.

When his phone buzzed in his pocket, he pulled it out to check who it was, startled at the time before answering it.

“Hey kiddo, just heading home with dinner now. Wanted to know how you felt about catching a movie later. I can grab some tickets on my way by.”

Stiles’ stomach bottomed out, because if his dad was finished work, it meant Derek was, too.

“Sure,” he forced out. “Yeah, sounds good. I’m, uh, I’m not home right now but I’ll head back in a second. Grab whatever, I’m sure it’ll be fine.”

“Sounds good. See you in a bit.”

Stiles hung up and looked up at Talia. She smiled at him in understanding and they moved back around the house. She walked him right up to the Jeep and he climbed in, feeling relieved at leaving before catching sight of Derek. It wasn’t a long drive from the station to his house, but maybe just long enough.

“It was very nice seeing you today, Stiles,” Talia said. “Please feel free to drop by any time. I know Cora would love to see you, and Merrak is rather fond of there being another human around.”

“Thank you,” he said honestly. “I appreciate you taking the time to spend the afternoon with me. I’m sure you had better things to do.”

“Nothing more important than you,” she said with another kind smile.

She shut his door for him and raised one hand in farewell. He backed out of the long drive, turned when he could, and headed back down the dirt road to the main one leading through the Preserve.

Stiles was halfway out of it when he saw the Camaro coming towards him from the opposite direction. When they passed each other, Derek was staring right at him, a startled look on his face. Stiles watched the Camaro in his rearview mirror, wanting to make sure he didn’t turn around, but Derek’s car didn’t slow and continued on its way home.

With everything he knew about Derek’s need, he couldn’t imagine the fortitude that must’ve taken him, forcing himself to continue onward after knowing Stiles was right there. He probably knew Stiles could only have been at his house given the direction he’d been coming from, and it made him wonder what Derek thought of that.
His life was extremely complicated right now, he was so glad it was summer. He didn’t know how much more weirdness he could take.

“Do I seriously have to wear this?” Stiles demanded, rolling his sleeves up for what felt like the millionth time. “I feel stupid.”

“Yes,” Jackson informed him shortly, moving up into his space and slapping his hands away, unrolling the sleeves so he could fold them back in a way he was happier with. “I’m tired of always going clubbing with someone who dresses like a farmer who got lost on the way to the country.”

“What has plaid ever done to you?” Stiles demanded, but obediently allowed Jackson to fix him up to his liking. He did frown when Jackson’s fingers started combing through his hair, trying to take it, though.

He felt very exposed. Usually when he and Jackson went to Jungle, Stiles went to drink and Jackson went for a good time. That meant Stiles sat at the bar in jeans and a graphic tee. Sometimes he had an overshirt, sometimes he didn’t, depended on his mood. Also on what he’d been wearing when Jackson called to demand they go out.

Today was different only insofar as Jackson had arrived at his house with a bag of newly bought clothes and proceeded to wrestle Stiles into them, even though he insisted he didn’t feel like going out.

The only reason he’d agreed in the end was because Jackson said he’d pay for all his drinks, and after the past two months he’d had, alcohol was definitely warranted.

That was how he found himself standing in his bedroom wearing too tight black jeans and a white, long-sleeved button-down with most of the top buttons undone. He was concerned the pants were going to permanently damage his baby-making bits, but he had to admit, they made his ass look great.

So, he stood obediently and allowed Jackson to roll the sleeves up like he wanted, which seemed no different than how Stiles had been doing it but he wasn’t interested in arguing with him. Once Jackson seemed satisfied, he nodded once, fixed something he didn’t like about Stiles’ hair again, and then stepped back.

“Do I pass?” Stiles asked, holding his arms out.

“It’ll do.”

Stiles rolled his eyes and moved to lead the way out, heading down the stairs in the only pair of combat boots he owned. He felt weird. Very not himself, which he supposed was what Jackson was going for. Things had been confusing and a little messed up lately, so going out with Jackson and feeling different was probably a good thing.

Climbing into Jackson’s Porsche re-ignited his concerns about the downstairs region and he had to lever himself into it very slowly to avoid permanent damage. Once he was seated and buckled in, they headed out towards Jungle where copious amounts of alcohol awaited him.

The radio was playing some soft music that was very Jackson, Stiles staring out the window and trying to turn his thoughts off.

“Stop it.”
He turned back to Jackson. “Stop what?”
“Brooding.”
“I’m not brooding,” he insisted.
“You’re thinking about Hale. Stop it.”

It was hard to deny something that was true. Stiles often thought about Derek. The Hales in general, really, but mostly Derek. He was still trying to wrap his head around all the stuff he’d been told. It just seemed so surreal. So fake. Werewolves were not penguins.

“What is it, anyway?” Jackson asked, easing to a stop at a red light.

“What?” How Jackson thought he was supposed to follow his line of thought, he had no idea.

“What’s what?”

“You know, the mate thing. It’s permanent for the wolf, happens like love at first sight, that garbage. What, did Derek imprint on you?”

Stiles’ eyebrows shot up. “You know Twilight?”

The look he got in response was annoyed. “I dated Lydia, of course I know Twilight.” He faced forward once more. “Besides, Kellan Lutz is hot.”

Laughing and shaking his head, Stiles stared back out the window while he thought on how to respond. He didn’t think it was like imprinting in the books. That sounded instant and life-changing. Derek hadn’t fallen for him the second he’d seen him, he’d just been interested and things had progressed from there. It was entirely possible someone else would’ve caught his eye before Stiles if he hadn’t happened to protect Eric in middle school.

He’d actually argued that with Talia, that Derek couldn’t possibly choose him, he didn’t even know him, but as it turned out, Derek did.

He’d been getting information on Stiles for years, first from Cora who was in the same class, and later from Parrish and other members of the pack. Secondhand, but still relevant.

“I don’t know,” he admitted. “I’m sure Derek wishes he’d fallen for someone else.”

Stiles let out an over-exaggerated shout at the hard smack to the back of his head, turning to glare at Jackson while rubbing at the injury.

“Shut up, Stilinski, before I get you too drunk to think better of making out with me.”

Stiles rolled his eyes, because that was the worst threat he’d ever heard. Jackson had too much of a reputation to be seen sucking face with someone like Stiles, even if Stiles secretly thought Jackson was good looking. Not that he would ever tell him that though, considering Jackson’s ego was big enough, thank you.

Not to mention: Werewolves couldn’t get drunk.

Stiles had almost laughed himself unconscious when he found that out. Perks of being human.

They parked in the lot out back of Jungle, Jackson taking up two spaces like an asshole to avoid anyone parking beside him and potentially dinging his ride. Stiles had warned him many times that he could get ticketed for that, but Jackson’s family had so much money that he never paid Stiles
any attention when he told him these things.

Going around the front, they bypassed the short line and went straight to the bouncer, who let them in without any trouble. Again, advantages of money. Jackson always got in without trouble, but the times Stiles came without him, he had to wait in line like everyone else. Bullshit and completely unfair.

Sometimes Stiles wondered if Jackson did that on purpose so that Stiles wouldn’t go without him. He was a dick like that, so it wouldn’t surprise him.

Once inside, Stiles made a beeline for the bar, slapping his hands down on it in a short, random rhythm and grinning toothily at the man behind the counter. He had to shout to be heard over the music pounding loud enough for him to feel it in his bones, but the man nodded and went to make him his drink. Jackson appeared at his elbow, shoving a wad of cash into his hand, just as promised.

“I feel like you’re paying me for my services,” Stiles said to him with a grin, not having to be as loud since Jackson could hear him over the music. How Jackson’s ears weren’t dying from the loud bass, he had no idea, but the wolves never seemed too horribly affected by it.

“I am, don’t forget why you’re here.”

“Yeah, yeah.” Stiles waved him away and watched Jackson disappear into the crowd in search of someone interesting.

He turned back to the bar, leaning forward on it while he waited. The bartender returned with his drink, and when Stiles handed over a bill from the wad provided by Jackson, the man shook his head and motioned down the bar. Stiles leaned forward and looked over, and saw an older guy smiling at him, lifting his beer to his lips while keeping eye contact.

Stiles grinned and gave a nod of thanks before grabbing his drink and turning around so he could lean back against the counter. Apparently his new look had perks, because he didn’t usually get hit on right away, only once he was sufficiently smashed.

He shoved the money Jackson had given him into his pocket with some difficulty, displacing the small vial of mountain ash he’d managed to shove in there once he’d gotten the pants on, and knocked back his drink in record time.

When he set it back on the counter and asked for another one, the bartender already had one ready, sliding it over to him. This one had come from someone else, a little younger, and more Stiles’ taste. It was going to be a good night for him, apparently. He got hit on a lot when they came to Jungle, sure, but this was fast even for him. He really owed Jackson for the new outfit.

He drank this one a bit slower, since his stomach was relatively empty and he didn’t want to get drunk too fast or Jackson would be annoyed with him. He sipped at it while watching the crowd of bodies jumping and grinding against each other. It was hard to find Jackson in the sea of people, but he eventually caught sight of him. He seemed to be having a good time, if the face-sucking going on was any indication, so Stiles figured his services as wingman were no longer needed and he faced the counter again.

Trying to make small talk with the bartender, that proved to be futile given the guy was so busy and Stiles sighed explosively, finishing off his second drink and thinking about maybe going out to dance on his own. Before he’d made up his mind, someone sidled up beside him, setting an open bottle of beer in front of him and offering him a kind smile.
Stiles smiled back, but made no move to grab the beer. He was fine with people buying him drinks, as long as they came to him from the bartender. When they came to him from someone else specifically setting it down in front of him, well, his dad had taught him better than that.

“Hey,” the guy said loudly in his ear, leaning close enough for his body heat to leech into Stiles. “I’m Craig.”

“Stiles,” he called back.

“You look like someone who knows how to have a good time.”

“I have the best times,” Stiles informed him, picking up the beer, but not drinking it.

“Wanna dance?”

“Give me five minutes, I need to take a leak.” Stiles gave him an exaggerated wink and then turned to disappear into the crowd. Before committing to dancing with someone, he was going to make sure they were a safe bet.

It took a minute to find Jackson, grinding up against some other guy and looking exceptionally pleased with himself. His eyes skirted to Stiles when he saw him approach and before he could go all protective on him, Stiles just thrust the beer into his hand.

“Is it safe?”

Jackson took it, still dancing with his new friend, and took a swig. He waited for a few seconds, made a face, then handed it back.

“It’s fine, but cheap.” Stiles had to read Jackson’s lips, since he couldn’t get right in his face to hear him considering the body between them.

Raising his beer in silent toast, Stiles took a swig and wandered back towards the bar, where his new friend Craig was waiting for him. It was extremely convenient having Werewolves around, not much affected them outside of wolfsbane and no one spiking a drink for Stiles would be using wolfsbane. It worked out: Stiles could find out if someone was trying to drug him, and Jackson got to be judgmental, which was his favourite pastime.

Craig was leaning back against the counter with his beer in hand, watching Stiles approach him. He gave him a slow once-over, smirking behind his bottle before taking another sip. Stiles grinned back, figuring Craig liked what he saw and leaned against the bar beside him, downing half of his own beer. The goal was to get drunk tonight, and while he was trying to pace himself, he would let loose a lot faster once he was tipsy. And he was getting there now, thankfully.

The two of them shouted at one another over the music, asking a few questions while they nursed their drinks. When they were done, and Stiles was suitably buzzed, they ordered another round and then headed out to the floor.

Stiles held his bottle loosely in one hand, the other wrapped around Craig’s neck while they grinded together. Not his usual dancing when he came to Jungle, but he didn’t want to think for a little while, and Craig’s hands on his waist were warm and distracting.

By the time he finished this new bottle of beer, Stiles was sufficiently buzzed, the world tilting slightly and his lips beginning to go numb, a telltale sign that he was at that stage right before drunk. Too inebriated to be tipsy, but not quite over that last hurdle into drunk.
Another beer found its way to his hand, and Stiles’ eyes caught Jackson’s through the crowd. He didn’t drink what he had, still smart enough not to risk it, but Jackson ended up close to him by then and he snatched the drink from his hand, taking a much larger swallow than necessary before putting it back.

Deeming it safe, Stiles danced with Craig and drank the new beer, *definitely* drunk by the time he was finished. The lights were making it harder for him to focus, everything was spinning, and he honestly wasn’t sure his feet were firmly planted on the floor anymore.

He was also hot. Really hot. He wanted to take a break, go outside, get some air. When he leaned in closer to Craig to tell him this, he almost tipped forward into him when another body plastered itself to his back. That wasn’t helping him with the heat any.

Craig’s hands hadn’t moved, still a firm weight on his hips, but the other party’s hands felt like they were everywhere. One of them wrapped around his waist, holding him tightly while grinding a very clear erection into his backside. The other hand had moved down to cup Stiles through his jeans, squeezing hard, and warm, moist breath exhaled against his neck.

“Get off,” Stiles snapped, elbowing back into the guy behind him, but all the man did was grunt and hold on tighter. Craig didn’t seem to mind much, either because he was too drunk himself, or because he knew the guy.

Stiles felt discomfort rising, and he tried to clear the drunken fog overriding his brain functions, but he couldn’t manage it. He pushed at Craig, but his grip tightened on his hips and Stiles grit his teeth.

Elbowing back into the guy behind him as hard as he could, he stomped on Craig’s closest foot with the heel of his own. Both of them cursed in unison, and while Craig let him go and took a step back, the guy behind him held on tighter. There were teeth at his ear now, biting hard at the shell, and the hand at his crotch disappeared, only to slide up under Stiles’ shirt, and then down past his hem.

Oh *hell* no!

Stiles stomped down on this guy’s foot, too. It earned him a growl and a shift, but the teeth in his ear bit down harder. This guy was *not* letting go.

Fuck.

It chaffed, but he had no choice. He was way too drunk to deal with this, he should’ve known better than to let himself get this wasted at a club. People were assholes.

“Jackson,” Stiles said loudly, eyes scanning the crowd in an attempt to locate him as Craig moved forward again. Fucking shit. “Jackson!”

Stiles’ perception of time was a little skewed given how drunk he was, with the lights flashing and the world tilting at a horrible angle, but seconds or minutes later, he wasn’t sure, Jackson was there, shoving Craig away from him with a threatening growl and grabbing Stiles’ arm, wrenching him free from the second man rather painfully.

He stumbled, practically falling into Jackson, who yanked him forcefully behind him and growled low in his throat at the guy who’d been grinding into his ass and trying to get a hand into Stiles’ pants.

It was the older dude who’d bought Stiles his first drink. He probably assumed that his generosity
deserved some kind of reward. Stiles was annoyed he was too drunk to swing at him, but he knew he’d probably just trip over his own feet. He was barely keeping his balance even now, Jackson was the only thing holding him up.

Stiles saw the guy’s lips move, but he couldn’t hear him over the music. Jackson evidently could, and he snarled something rude. When the guy took a step forward, getting into Jackson’s face, Jackson shoved him back hard with one hand. He’d probably used a bit too much of his super strength, because the guy fell into a bunch of people behind him, a few of them crashing to the ground with him on top of them.

He looked livid when he got to his feet again, and Stiles wasn’t sure what was happening anymore. Everything was moving too fast, the world was spinning, and he saw a glint of metal before Jackson shoved Stiles back hard and he crashed into a few people. They managed to keep their footing, catching Stiles before he fell over, but someone screamed and the crowd backed away.

When Stiles could focus again, two girls clutching at him and dragging him back and away from his friend, he noticed that the guy had a knife out with blood on the blade.

“Jackson!”

He knew it was ridiculous to be worried about him, Jackson was a Werewolf, he was fine. Except now he was obviously pissed, because he launched himself at the guy and they both crashed to the floor. They struggled for a little while—well, the guy struggled, Jackson just held him down and ripped the blade from his hand—but by then the lights had turned on and the music had cut off. Two bouncers were there, trying to wrench them apart, but Jackson had the guy’s shirt in one hand and was punching repeatedly at his face. The bouncers couldn’t get him off.

“Jackson, stop,” Stiles insisted, voice slurred to his own ears, but knowing it was loud enough for him to hear. “Stop, stop!”

Jackson’s fist paused and he whipped around, breathing hard and staring right at Stiles.

His eyes were gold. Fuck.

When the bouncers yanked at him again, he let them pull him up but wrenched free the second he was on his feet. He had a long slice along the front of his shirt, stained red, but Stiles knew the wound beneath it had already healed. That was bad. That was very, very bad.

Jackson was in front of him instantly, eyes returned to their usual pale green colour, one hand grabbing at his wrist and snarling at the two girls who’d been pulling him back to safety. They scuttled away urgently, Stiles leaning heavily into Jackson in his drunken state.

“Are you okay?” Stiles managed to get out, poking at his chest. “You got an ouchie.”

“Stiles,” Jackson snarled, hand tightening on his wrist and other arm moving around his shoulders. “Did he touch you?”

That meant Jackson hadn’t seen the guy’s hand wiggling into his pants. He’d probably been more focussed on getting him away. It wouldn’t do any good to tell him the guy had, it would only have Jackson turning to attack him once more, and he didn’t want the bouncers hurt.

“I’m fine,” he slurred. “Let’s go.”

“No one is going anywhere,” one of the bouncers said, appearing beside them and scowling. “The police are on their way.”
“Good, they can arrest him,” Jackson snapped, jerking his head towards the other guy without moving or looking away from Stiles.

“You assaulted him.”

“He tried to *stab* me!” Jackson spat angrily and Stiles had to pinch hard at whatever part of Jackson he could manage to keep him calm. The edge of his irises were turning gold again, and Stiles didn’t want him to lose control right now. Not when Stiles’ brain wouldn’t be able to come up with a good lie to cover up the fact that Jackson was a Werewolf.

“Over there,” the bouncer ordered, motioning a door in the back wall. The other bouncer had already dragged the guy off the floor and over towards it. Stiles’ brain sluggishly assumed it was offices, but it took him almost the entire trek to the door to figure that out.

He was practically dragging his feet, the world tilting horribly and his stomach twisting. Oh man, if he had to puke, he was going to be *super* unhappy. Puking was the worst.

“Can you get him some water or something?” Jackson muttered while he practically dragged Stiles through the door. “I don’t want him throwing up on me.”

He didn’t hear the bouncer’s answer, but he and Jackson were led down a long corridor, offices on both side, all the way to the end where an open room sat. It looked like some kind of staff lounge.

The other guy was in one corner with his head tilted back and his fingers pinching his nose while one of the waitresses tried to help staunch the bleeding. He was a mess, and Stiles patted Jackson’s chest lightly with one hand, smiling up at him drunkenly.

“Good wolfie,” he said. Not that Stiles condoned violence, but the guy *did* shove his hand down his pants, so fair was fair.

Jackson stiffened at that, and for a second Stiles thought it was because of what he’d said, but then he realized it was because of what it implied. Jackson’s gaze had risen, looking over at the guy on the other side of the room. His expression was murderous and Stiles had to pat his chest a few more times to get him to look back at him.

“No grr. Bad.” He booped his nose, and a part of him knew Jackson would’ve bitten his hand off if he weren’t totally drunk. Another part of him felt like he’d only done it because he knew being drunk meant he could get away with it.

“Water?” Jackson bit out, eyes still on Stiles.

“Sit down over there,” the bouncer insisted, Jackson pulling Stiles to the opposite side of the room and shoving him into a chair. The man left and returned hours later with water for Stiles. Or maybe it was minutes, Stiles wasn’t sure, he was a little out of it.

Jackson held the water out for him to take, and didn’t let go until he was sure Stiles’ fingers had wrapped around the glass properly. He drank it down, the liquid cold against his throat, and then licked his lips, setting it down on the closest table.

Everyone was silent for a long while, both bouncers still in the room, one on either side with their respective charges, and the waitress still helping the guy mop up the mess that was his face.

When the door finally opened at the end of the corridor, Stiles felt Jackson stiffen beside him, a low growl emanating from his chest. He leaned more heavily into him, trying to get him to stop, his head still fuzzy but clearing slightly. Everything was still spinning and he felt like he was
moving around even though his ass was firmly planted on his seat, but he was coming back to himself enough to know that Jackson being outed as a Werewolf was a bad thing.

It wasn’t until he saw Parrish walk in that his stomach dropped and he knew why Jackson was reacting the way he was. Parrish froze when his eyes found Stiles and, sure enough, Deputy Derek fucking Hale walked in right behind him.

The look on his face was unreadable, but the tense set of his shoulders and his clenched fists was enough for Stiles to know this could only end badly for everyone.

Shit.

When Derek made to approach them, Parrish forcibly shoved him back and motioned the other guy. Derek scowled at him, but whatever silent conversation they were having with their eyes, Parrish seemed to win, because the Werewolf obediently went to speak to the other guy.

Parrish watched to make sure he did as he was told before moving over to Jackson and Stiles. Jackson was still growling, shifting slightly on the seat he was in so that he was in front of Stiles. Which was ridiculous because, whether or not Parrish was in someone else’s pack, he was still Parrish.

“Stiles.” He nodded to him, then glanced at Jackson. “Whittemore.”

“Parrish,” Jackson snarled.

Parrish gave the bouncer near them a pointed look, but that didn’t deter Jackson. He just kept growling low in his throat, half in front of Stiles and gripping one of Stiles’ wrists tight enough to bruise. He couldn’t feel it much in his drunken state but would probably bitch him out in the morning when he was sober again.

And hungover. Dammit.

“What happened?” Parrish asked.

“The asshole over there was touching Stiles. I decided to touch him back with my fist,” Jackson informed him coldly.

Parrish’s eyes skirted down to the ripped shirt, and asked about it. Jackson gave him clipped and sarcastic responses, but Stiles could piece together what he was saying even in his drunken state, so he figured Parrish could, too. He was writing things down in his little notebook, and Stiles cast a glance over at the other guy with Derek.

He looked like he wanted to wet himself, staring up at Derek with a terrified look on his face. Stiles focussed back on Parrish when he asked another question, then decided this was taking too much energy and just leaned forward to press his forehead against Jackson’s shoulder, closing his eyes. The world kept spinning behind his closed lids, and his lips were still numb, but he felt like he was thinking a little more clearly now than he had been even a moment ago.

“He’s agreed not to press charges,” Derek’s voice said, cutting through Stiles’ sleepy haze and making him lift his head. Derek was looking anywhere but at him, and it occurred to Stiles what he and Jackson must’ve looked like.

He didn’t correct him, but figured there was nothing for him to say anyway.

“Can I press charges?” Jackson demanded.
“No,” Parrish told him.

“He sliced into me!” Jackson spat furiously, motioning his front with the hand not still grinding Stiles’ bones together.

“And because you can’t control your healing, no one will believe you,” Parrish said, voice lowering and turning cold. “You could have exposed us all. Everyone can see the shirt was cut and blood staining the edges, but where’s the wound, Jackson?”

Stiles couldn’t see his face, but he knew Jackson enough to know he was pissed. His free hand clenched into a fist and Stiles pressed his forehead against his shoulder again.

“Jackson, let’s just go,” he insisted, feeling his friend relax ever so slightly. “I need to lie down. Let’s go.”

It took a few seconds, but Jackson finally bit out a, “Fine,” and twisted to look over at Stiles. Lifting his head, Stiles got to his feet, Jackson moving with him. Stiles fully expected Derek to stop them, or say something, or even just glare at Jackson, but he did none of those things. He just glared at the far side of the room where the other guy was sitting, shell-shocked and terrified, and let the two of them walk out.

Stiles let Jackson lead the way back out to the car, sitting down heavily and struggling to get his seatbelt buckled in while his friend moved around the car and climbed in on the other side. They peeled out of the lot fast enough to burn rubber, shooting past the cruiser that was still parked near the front of the club.

“I should’ve ripped his throat out,” Jackson hissed vehemently, hands clenching on the steering wheel. “I should’ve gone for the throat while he was on the ground, should’ve ripped his balls off!”

Stiles turned to him, confused, and almost asked when Derek had been on the ground before realizing he wasn’t pissed at Derek, he was pissed at the guy. Which made sense, Derek had been surprisingly civil. Actually, Derek had acted professional the entire time he’d been in the room. He’d barely even looked at Stiles, and while he acknowledged it was likely because Derek thought maybe he and Jackson were together, he actually would’ve expected more hostility from him towards the person who’d ‘stolen’ Stiles from him.

The fact that he’d just done his job and said nothing else was actually... Well, it earned him a few points in Stiles’ book.

When they got back to Stiles’ house, Jackson helped him get back up to his room. They tried to get his pants off, but Stiles was too unsteady, and Jackson didn’t want to hurt him, so he just got Stiles’ shirt off and then shoved him into bed. After making sure everything was locked up, Jackson left him and Stiles heard the front door slam a moment later.

Rolling onto his side and burying his face in his pillow, Stiles closed his eyes, trying to ignore the world spinning around him, and begged for sleep to take him.

Thankfully, for once in his life, it actually complied.

“IT’s fine. You can do this. No big deal. Just walk in, and walk out. No problem.”

Stiles stared up at the precinct, trying to convince himself that walking in there wasn’t going to be a terrible, horrible, awful idea. It wasn’t that he had to do this, he just... he felt bad. He felt like he
needed to set the record straight.

Parrish and Derek both hadn’t told his dad about the incident at Jungle, and Derek had stopped sneaking into his room—the mountain ash helped, but still! And he’d been perfectly civil when he’d seen him last, hadn’t even tried to rip off Jackson’s head or anything.

And on top of that, it had been three days since the incident, and Jackson had been bitching at Scott about going to see Talia to get some training. He was still pissed about the fact that he’d healed his injury and thus couldn’t press charges, and the pack as a whole had been pissed when they’d found out what had happened to Stiles.

It was getting annoying, having the split pack, but he knew that as long as he had a problem with Derek, it meant there was a problem for the whole pack. He felt like he was the reason there was a divide. Sure, he knew Scott was also against it because he liked how things were right now, but he was starting to get worn down. Jackson was pushing at him pretty hard, Kira was feeling pressure because of her mother, and Lydia was on board with the boys getting training, not to mention she felt like she would be able to get a bit of insight herself for her own abilities.

The only person who could tip the balance now was Stiles, and he damn well knew it. But, he couldn’t do that until he was okay with Derek.

Which was why he’d been standing outside the precinct for a good twenty minutes trying to psych himself up into going inside.

“Okay. Okay.” He jumped a bit on the spot and wiggled, trying to loosen his limbs. “Okay, you can do this. No big deal.”

The longer he stood there, the more likely he was to leave, so Stiles sucked it up like a big boy and walked into the precinct before he could change his mind. He bypassed the front counter, the deputy there not even giving him a second glance since it was Stiles. They probably figured he was going to see his dad.

His heart was pounding something fierce in his chest, threatening to beat right out of it, but he forced himself to keep walking, heading towards the back where he knew Derek sat. Parrish was on the phone a few desks away, but he was watching Stiles while he approached, as was Val. He resolutely didn’t look at them and walked right up to Derek’s desk.

He had his head down, working on a report, and seemed to be resolutely looking anywhere but at Stiles. He probably figured he was there to see his dad, or someone else, or even to bitch him out and tell him to fuck off.

Stiles waited a few seconds to see if he’d look up, but when it became clear he was content to ignore Stiles’ existence, he let out a small sigh.

“Deputy Hale?”

It took another few seconds for Derek to finally raise his head, like he was contemplating pretending he hadn’t heard him. He eventually did lift his head though, and Stiles offered him an awkward smile.

“Hey. Hi. Um, sorry to—bother you. I was just hoping—no, more thinking, you know, like... Had a random thought. Recently. And I was thinking, you know, that maybe we could uh, you and me, go out to like, I don’t know, somewhere closeby for like—” Stiles cut himself off, keenly aware of the fact that everyone in the vicinity was staring at him. He could feel a flush rising up his cheeks
and forced himself to finish one fucking sentence. “Would you like to go for coffee?”

Derek straightened instantly, looking startled. He deflated quickly, like he’d originally thought something positive and was now thinking something negative, but he nodded anyway and got to his feet, putting his pen down.

“Sure. I’d really like that.”

“Cool.” Stiles rocked on the balls of his feet, hands shoved into his pockets and playing with a small glass vial absently while he waited for Derek to tug on his jacket. Once he had it on, Derek turned to tell Parrish he was taking an early lunch. There wasn’t really a need to tell anyone, it was pretty obvious, but Stiles supposed Derek wasn’t willing to risk it.

Once he was ready, he motioned for Stiles to lead the way, so he did, turning to head for the door. That was when he noticed his father standing in the doorway of his office, arms crossed and watching them both approach as they had to pass by his door to reach the exit.

“Do I want to know?” he asked, eying them both.

“We’re just going for coffee,” Stiles muttered.

“Mm hm,” the sheriff responded, looking suspicious, but he didn’t stop them when they went to walk past him. Stiles held the door open for Derek, then followed him out, the two of them walking silently down the sidewalk. There was a small coffeeshop down the road, but there was also a diner and he honestly wasn’t sure if Derek was treating this as an early lunch or not, so he just steered them in that direction.

Derek didn’t say anything when he noticed the change, he just walked alongside Stiles, hands shoved in his pockets. It was very awkward, and uncomfortable, and Stiles didn’t like how quiet it was. He’d have filled the silence, if only he knew what to say.

Reaching the diner was almost a mercy. Derek grabbed the door first and held it open this time, Stiles walking in. It was a little after eleven, so the place was mostly empty since the rush wouldn’t start until noon, but that meant they had tons of seating choices.

“Hey Stiles.”

“Oh, hey Heather.” He offered her a small smile, trying to ignore the awkwardness of this entire situation.

“Hey Deputy Hale,” she offered with a winning smile. “How are you today?”

Stiles turned to Derek, surprised, but he supposed it made sense. The diner and station were close to one another, and he knew a lot of the officers came there to eat. He supposed he just hadn’t thought Derek was one of them. Which was stupid because why wouldn’t he be one of them?

“Heather,” Derek replied, polite but dismissive. “Can we get a booth in the back?” He paused briefly, then glanced at Stiles. “If you’re okay with that.”

“Sure.” He turned back to Heather, who was actually twirling her hair around one finger. It was fucking weird.

She motioned for them to follow and led them to the far back of the mostly empty diner, seating them and holding out menus. Stiles took it mostly for something to hide behind, though he was also a garburator so it was entirely possible he would end up ordering something.
When Heather walked away to give them a few minutes to check out the drinks and food, Derek set his menu aside and stared at Stiles. It made him a little uncomfortable in its intensity, but he tolerated it, checking out the drinks he could order before finally having nothing left to procrastinate with. This was his idea, so it wasn’t fair to just... hide behind his menu. Despite how badly he wanted to.

It was just a lot! Having a stalker was creepy, having a mate was terrifying, and having one person be both of those things was just a therapy session waiting to happen.

Letting out a breath, he put the menu down and folded his hands on top of it, looking up at Derek, who was staring right back. He tried to think of what to say, how to start this conversation, but Derek beat him to it.

“Just get it over with.”

Stiles frowned. “It?” he asked, not sure he understood.

Derek had crossed his arms, jacket hiding how muscled Stiles knew those arms were, and scowled at him. His expression was closed-off, but the tenseness of his shoulders suggested he was bracing himself for bad news.

“You invited me out. Brought me to a public setting in the middle of the day. You’re acting like a skittish kitten. And your heart’s beating so fast I’m surprised it’s still functioning.” Derek’s expression hardened. “It doesn’t take a genius to figure out what’s happening.”

“What’s happening?” Stiles asked, honestly unsure.

Derek’s jaw tightened, and he bit out, “I think your exact words to Cora were ‘thanks, but no thanks.’”

Stiles stared at him for a long while, and it suddenly occurred to him what he was implying. Derek thought he’d brought him all the way out here to have the whole ‘it’s not you, it’s me’ talk. He thought Stiles was about to reject him, let him know he wasn’t interested, possibly even inform him that he was dating Jackson. Which he wasn’t.

Definitely not.

“That’s—not why I’m here.”

Derek’s expression didn’t change, but his hands had released their death grip on his own arms, some colour returning to his previously white-knuckled fingers. He didn’t say anything further, seemingly content to stare Stiles down, and before Stiles could open his mouth and try again, Heather was beside them, staring at Derek with practical hearts in her eyes. Stiles frowned, because it looked like she was wearing lipstick, which she definitely hadn’t been when they’d walked in.

“Coffee. Black.” Derek’s response was clipped again, eyes never leaving Stiles.

“What can I get you?” she asked, tapping her pen against her pad and staring adoringly at Derek. Actually, it seemed extremely out of character for her. Stiles had known her since they were kids, and while they’d grown apart during high school due to going to different ones, she seemed a little... he didn’t know. It was weird. He wondered if something was in town that needed to be looked into making people act weird.

“Coffee. Black.” Derek’s response was clipped again, eyes never leaving Stiles.

“Uh, can I get a chocolate milkshake, please?” Stiles shifted his gaze back to Heather, who cast him a glance, but ultimately kept her eyes locked on Derek. “Extra whip?”
“I’ll see what I can do.” She wrote their orders down and walked away, Stiles frowning at the slight bounce in her step.

Definitely something weird going on.

“She’s trying to make you jealous.”

Stiles’ gaze shifted back to Derek when he spoke and he frowned, unsure of what that was supposed to mean. “What?” he asked, confused.

Derek looked annoyed at having to explain himself. “The waitress.” He motioned over his shoulder with a roll of his head, eyes never leaving him. “She has a crush on you. She’s trying to show interest in me because she likes you and wants you to get jealous.”

“Oh, pretty sure you’re wrong.”

“Pretty sure I come in here daily and she barely says two words to me,” Derek retorted, looking annoyed again.

“Whatever.” Stiles wasn’t here to fight with him, he was here so they could have a discussion. Like adults. Just normal, not at all mated adults. “Look, the reason I wanted us to come out here was because I wanted to talk to you. Try and, I don’t know, fix this mess.” He motioned between them absently.

Derek had gone tense again. “Mess?”

“You stalking me and making me basically uninterested in you in every way imaginable?” Stiles offered. Derek didn’t look happy to hear that, but he said nothing, so Stiles continued. “This divide between our packs is causing a lot of problems. And honestly, I miss Cora. She was fun to hang out with, and I kind of want to go back to that. And your mom is really cool, and I think she’d be good for Jackson and Scott. This thing between you and me is mostly Scott’s issue with talking to your mom, so we need to fix it.”

“It’s not broken,” Derek said coldly.

Stiles gave him a look but said nothing, since Heather was coming back. She set Derek’s coffee down in front of him, and then the most whipped cream covered milkshake Stiles had ever seen in his life. She offered him a small smile, then turned her attention back to Derek.

He was starting to wonder if Derek hadn’t been right. Maybe Heather was trying to make him jealous. That just seemed really insane, had he gotten attractive overnight? She’d never shown an interest in him before.

Or maybe he just hadn’t noticed. Apparently he wasn’t very observant.

She asked if they were ready to order, but neither of them had looked at their menus yet so she said she’d give them a few minutes and walked away. Stiles took advantage of the opportunity to regroup and promptly lifted his menu, hiding behind it. It was hard to focus on the food, and he honestly wasn’t that hungry, so he decided to just grab a side of curly fries and a piece of apple pie and call it a day. Then he spent the rest of his time behind the menu trying to figure out how to explain to Derek that he was creepy as fuck.

Eventually, he had no choice but to lower it, and he found Derek staring at him intently once more. It occurred to him that maybe Derek was taking advantage of the opportunity presented to him. Stiles was right there, within touching distance. He probably didn’t get this very often barring
when he broke into Stiles’ room, so he was likely drinking him in like a man starved of oxygen.

“Look, I know you can’t help it, but you’re freaking me out with the staring. Can you like, look down for a few minutes or something?”

Derek scowled, arms crossing slowly once more after releasing his menu, and then pointedly looked down at the table. Stiles nodded once, glad Derek was playing nice.

“If you’re not here to get things over with, what do you want?” Derek demanded.

“For someone who’s apparently head over heels for me, you’re kind of an asshole to me.”

“Being close to you is hard,” Derek said, baring his teeth. It had Stiles’ heart stutter in his chest, but he didn’t react otherwise. Not that it mattered, Derek was a Werewolf, he’d heard it.

Stiles just didn’t understand. He didn’t get the whole mates thing, no matter how many times he heard it explained. Real life didn’t work that way, people didn’t bond themselves to another person forever.

Then again, real life didn’t have Werewolves, and Kanimas, and Banshees, and Kitsunes either. Except it totally did. Because he was in a pack of them.

“Can I ask you a question?” Stiles asked.

“Can I stop you?”

Stiles rolled his eyes. Derek sure didn’t make it easy to like him. “Probably not.”

“Then I don’t know why you’re bothering to ask if you can,” Derek informed him, still staring down at the table.

Stiles leaned forward while he thought of how to word his next question, arms crossed on the plastic, and he saw Derek’s eyes lift slightly, like he was calculating the exact distance between them. Stiles had to applaud his control, because he made no move to uncross his arms. Considering everything he’d heard about Derek and his problems around Stiles, he’d been remarkably good the past two times he’d seen him.

“Why me?” Stiles finally settled on. “You could’ve found anyone else, had anyone else, but you settled on me. Why?”

“We’re compatible,” Derek said immediately.

Stiles stared at him. “That’s it?” he asked dryly, then rolled his eyes and leaned back in his booth, crossing his arms. “Wow, way to make me feel wanted.”

He didn’t know what he’d been expecting, but it wasn’t that. He was pretty disappointed, if he was honest. They were compatible? He was sure Derek was compatible with many people, given his cheekbones and general appearance.

“That’s not—” Derek cut off, let out a frustrated grunt, and then raked a hand through his hair, scowling down harder at the table. “Being compatible means something different to wolves. To me.”

“Enlighten me,” Stiles said, a little bored now. This was not going well for Derek, that much was obvious. Stiles wasn’t feeling any more comfortable with him now than he did before. If anything,
he was more uncomfortable and, on top of that, insulted.

Derek seemed to recognize that because he chose his next words carefully, weighing each one before he let it escape his mouth.

“You’re right that I could have had anyone. I am Derek Hale, I can literally have my pick in the Supernatural community, and in the non-Supernatural one.” He motioned his face almost dismissively when he added the second part, evidently referencing his good looks. And he was good looking, the dickface. Stiles hated that he was so good looking. “But when you choose a mate, it’s not about appearances and what they do for you or what they offer you. It’s more—what fits. If their morals are similar to yours, their beliefs are similar, their general state of being. But they have to complement you, as well. They can’t be exactly like you, they have to fit and make up for the things you lack. Like being loud where you’re quiet, rambunctious where you’re calm, analytical where you’re reactive. Mates are more than just looking at someone and falling for them, there’s a lot of analysis and watching involved. Once someone is interesting, it means there’s something about them that the wolf likes, and if that thing the wolf likes appeals to the human, it solidifies and you can’t take it back.”

Okay, so maybe Derek’s points were slowly increasing, but not by a lot! He had to do a lot more than sprout out some romantic bullshit to get Stiles to stop thinking of him as a creepy dudebro in his head.

“Everyone keeps saying protecting Eric is what did it for you,” Stiles offered cautiously. “Is that true?”

“Yes.” Derek was still scowling at the table, like he hated having this conversation, but knew he had no choice. “I knew I was going to be the Alpha one day. That my family, my brothers and sisters, would be my pack. As an Alpha, you protect your own. When I got to the school and waited for Cora and Eric so we could walk home together, I noticed Cora racing to help someone. I thought it was Eric at first, but it was you. Because you’d helped Eric, you’d stood up to people twice your size, had let them knock you down, mouthed off at them and let them punch you while Eric ran to meet Cora. You let yourself be hurt for someone you didn’t know. Protecting someone important to me made me recognize that you had a strong sense of justice. Good morals. You were kind, and thoughtful, and the wolf approved of someone protecting one of mine.”

“You know anyone else could’ve stepped in, right?” Stiles asked him. “Literally anyone else could have helped Eric.”

“True,” Derek offered, then glanced up at him. “But they didn’t, did they? You did.”

Derek had him there. Stiles didn’t know what to say to that, so he just shrugged and changed train of thought.

“You don’t even really know me.”

“I’ve been watching you for a long time. Even after I’d gone, I had people here watching you. I know more about you than you think.”

“Now you’re just being creepy again,” Stiles informed him as Heather approached them once more. She asked if they’d decided yet and Stiles gave her his order. Derek actually got a meal, complete with soup for an appetizer, a hearty chicken entre, and a dessert. He’d ordered a chocolate brownie sundae and Stiles realized he should’ve gotten that instead of the pie, but Heather was already walking away so he just resigned himself to pie. He had a chocolate milkshake, it would have to be good enough.
“You made it pretty clear you wanted nothing to do with me,” Derek said once they were alone again. “I wasn’t going to push my way into your life.”

“You realize you showed up and started stalking me, right?” Stiles asked dryly. “At least Cora pretended to bash into me to start a conversation. You work with my dad, you had so many opportunities to meet me without being a creeper about it. I actually thought you were cool in high school, this could’ve gone very differently if you hadn’t come back and started stalking me like a creeperwolf.”

“Being close to you is hard,” Derek snapped.

“Well, absence makes the heart grow fonder, or whatever. Maybe it’s so hard because you’re staying away from me, which I recognize,” Stiles continued quickly, Derek opening his mouth likely to say it was what Stiles wanted, “was for my benefit when I told you to fuck off, but maybe we can—be normal? Like, stop sneaking into my room, dude. Not cool.”

“I just want you to be safe.”

“I live with the sheriff, I couldn’t possibly be any safer.” Stiles rolled his eyes. “Just—stop being creepy. You want to spend time around me, then tell me. We can—go for coffee. I can come by your house and hang out with you and Cora. We can, I don’t know, do things. In public, with other people.” He wanted to make it clear he wasn’t ready for any one-on-ones with Derek in a private setting. But for now, he was willing to get to know him, to at least see if they truly were compatible. Everyone kept saying Derek was amazing and awesome, and if he was going to be the Hale pack’s next Alpha, he was likely going to be sticking around so they’d have to get used to his presence.

“If you’re allowed to spend time with me,” Derek said, which had Stiles frowning.

“What do you mean?”

“Just—depending on how he feels about having me in your space.” Derek was looking down into his coffee, hands wrapped around the mug, like he was trying to warm them despite the temperature outside being in the ‘hot’ spectrum. “I didn’t realize you and Whittemore had... overcome your differences.”

Ah, so Stiles was right, and Derek had gotten the wrong impression. To be fair, he and Jackson did have a weird relationship. They’d hated one another for a long time, but things had changed when Jackson became part of the Supernatural community. Stiles didn’t even really know when things had become what they were, he just knew Jackson was important to him and he’d fuck up anyone who tried to lay a hand on him.

“Yeah, Jackson’s a really good friend,” he offered with a small smile, using the spoon wrapped in his napkin to dig into his whipped cream. “Protective, obviously.” He sucked the spoon into his mouth when Derek’s head snapped up.

“Friend?”

No point in making the poor guy suffer. “Yeah. We’re just friends.”

“Oh. I thought—”

“No,” Stiles cut off, because he didn’t need to hear what Derek thought. “We’re friends. That’s it.” Dereks smile was small but fierce and he looked back down into his coffee, picking it up and
looking marginally pleased when he brought it to his lips for a sip. When he set it back down, his next words made Stiles bristle.

“Good thing he was there to protect you.”

“Hey, I can take care of myself,” Stiles insisted, stabbing his forefinger into the table. “I was drunk. If I’d been sober, I’d have been completely fine. Not my fault you assholes can’t get drunk.”

“Whatever you say.”

Stiles narrowed his eyes at him. “I don’t think I like you,” he informed him.

“Tragic.” Derek smirked, taking another sip of his coffee. Stiles figured he was only saying that because he could tell Stiles wasn’t serious.

Heather appeared beside them before they said anything else. She set Derek’s soup down, and then Stiles’ curly fries, the two of them thanking her and waiting until she walked away before continuing their conversation.

“I can take care of myself,” Stiles repeated, wanting to make sure the point stuck. “I’m not a helpless damsel in distress, you know. I am no Bella Swan, that’s for sure.”

Derek cocked an eyebrow, spoon halfway to his mouth. “Who?”

“Bella Swan? You know, Twilight?”

He shook his head, denoting he did not, in fact, know about Twilight, and his points skyrocketed. He’d probably been horrendously confused when Stiles had sprouted out his line before falling unconscious in the Jeep after it was totalled.

Speaking of...

“Um, thanks, by the way. About the—you know, with the semi. Thanks.”

Derek winced, setting his spoon down. “Sorry about the damage. I panicked and overestimated how hard I needed to hit the Jeep. I was just trying to get it onto the shoulder.”

Stiles shrugged. “It worked out, in the end. Didn’t die. Jeep’s fixed. All good.”

“Still.” Derek gave him an intense look and Stiles just repeated that it was fine, because he didn’t like it when Derek looked at him like that. Eventually he got the message and went back to his soup while Stiles picked at his fries.

When Derek’s entre came out, Stiles was almost done with his plate and he asked Heather for another one just because he wanted something to munch on while he waited on Derek to finish his food. He’d just popped a particularly crunchy fry into his mouth when Derek spoke again.

“Why didn’t you tell him?”

“Hm?” Stiles asked absently, watching two men at the front who kept casting glances their way, looking nervous. He frowned slightly, wondering what that was about, but the second they noticed him looking they booked it out of there.

“Stiles?” Derek turned, as if to see what he was looking at, but Stiles just cleared his throat since the men were gone.
It was probably nothing.

“Sorry, what?”

“Why didn’t you tell him? Your dad, I mean. That day he caught you in my car. Why didn’t you tell him I’d been following you around?”

Stiles’ chewing halted at those words and he stared at Derek for a long while, weighing his answer carefully. He didn’t really want to admit the truth to Derek, not with their weird, rocky relationship right now. When he was fairly certain he knew what he wanted to say, Derek spoke before he could get the words out and he froze.

“You were scared he wouldn’t believe you,” he said quietly, eying Stiles. “That’s why you didn’t say anything. Because you thought he wouldn’t believe you.”

It was like a punch to the chest, having someone he didn’t know realize he’d been worried his father would think he was lying about having an officer of the law stalking him. It wasn’t that he didn’t think his dad would believe it was possible, given his reaction in the office, it was just that... it was Derek Hale. Looking at him, and then at Stiles, who would ever believe that Derek Hale would willingly stalk someone like him?

“He would have, you know,” Derek offered, popping a roasted potato into his mouth. “Your dad cares about you a lot. If you’d told him I was stalking you, he would’ve believed you.”

Stiles didn’t really want to touch that statement, so he deflected and said instead, “Oh, so now you admit it was stalking? Did you finally look it up?”

Derek rolled his eyes. “I was just keeping an eye on you, that’s all.”

“Well, you’re going to stop now. We’re going to do this properly, with you actually ringing the doorbell when you want to come into my house, and us hanging out together without you following me a few paces behind like a creeper.”

The way Derek paused made Stiles feel like he’d said something dangerous. “So I can court you?”

“No.” Stiles pointed a finger at Derek, ignoring how guilty it made him feel to see him deflate a little. “No courting. Just—friendship first. Getting to know each other. Being friends. Then we can talk about the uh, wolf aspect of your...” Stiles trailed off and motioned Derek as a whole.

He could tell it wasn’t what Derek wanted to hear, but he seemed to understand it. They sat in silence for a few minutes until Heather came back with his second plate of curly fries and asked if they wanted dessert served at the same time.

Derek seemed to think that was a stupid question, but Stiles politely asked if that would be all right, and Heather smiled at him and left them to get that started. He gave Derek an annoyed look for his rudeness, but he didn’t seem to have any concerns with how he’d behaved.

“Are you always like this?”

“Yes.” Derek shoved the last piece of steak into his mouth and slid his plate away from himself. Before Stiles could protest, he then reached across the table to grab a handful of fries, Stiles sputtering and yanking his plate closer to avoid any further theft.

“Excuse me, these are my fries.”
“You can order more, if you’re that offended,” Derek said with a small smirk, shoving a few into his mouth and chewing.

“I really don’t like you,” he informed the Werewolf.

Derek just kept smirking, clearly knowing Stiles wasn’t serious. Though hopefully he would quickly learn Stiles did not share food, because food was precious and sacred and belonged to him.

They continued eating in a relatively comfortable silence, but Stiles noticed Derek frowning every few seconds before schooling his features, casting concerned looks up at Stiles. Eventually, he got tired of it.

“What?”

“Why are you still so nervous?”

“I’m not nervous.” Stiles cocked an eyebrow. “Do I look nervous to you?”

“You sound nervous. Your heart.”

Oh. So Derek didn’t know. That was strange, considering. “You’ve been stalking me since before I knew anything about Werewolves, and you’ve never noticed?” Stiles cocked an eyebrow.

“noticed what?”

“I have Tachycardia.”

Stiles was about to explain what that was, but apparently Derek already knew because he straightened, eying Stiles with renewed interest. Like he could figure things out more easily now that he knew what Stiles’ baseline heart rate was.

“Your heart beats too quickly.”

“Yup.” Stiles picked up another fry. “Surprised you never noticed.”

“I had no reason to focus on your heart before. We never spoke, and we were never close enough for it to make itself known. Usually when I was near you in the past, you were always stressed so it made sense for your heart to be beating that quickly.”

“Oh. Well, I’m not nervous. My heart just wants you to think I am.”

Derek smiled slightly. “Duly noted.”

They didn’t have much more time before Derek would have to head back, and Stiles was just about done his plate of fries when Heather returned with their desserts. Derek asked for the bill and Stiles tried to argue that he would pay since he was the one to invite Derek out, but he lost that battle fairly quickly.

It irked him, because that was not part of the plan, but at least it made him less grumpy about the stolen fries, since he wasn’t the one paying for them.

They ate their desserts in relative silence, because starting a more in-depth conversation now when Derek had to head back to work soon was going to be problematic, so it was easier to just keep their thoughts and questions to themselves for now.

Derek evidently caught Stiles eying his brownie sundae a few times because he slid it closer to him
and motioned for him to help himself. Which Stiles did, with gusto. He also reluctantly offered up some of his pie, and Derek snagged himself a bite of that, as well.

It was weirdly comfortable. Considering Stiles’ thoughts about Derek when he’d walked into the precinct, actually talking to him made him seem like a normal dude. Just a Werewolf with an insatiable urge to stalk someone he considered his own, that was all. Now that they were face to face, he was almost normal. It was weird.

When Heather came back with the bill, Derek dropped money on top of it and checked the time while Stiles finished up his pie.

“I need to head back, this went on longer than my usual lunch hour.”

“Don’t worry, I know the sheriff,” Stiles teased, but he spooned a last bite of ice cream into his mouth, sucked obnoxiously at the straw of his empty milkshake while getting to his feet, and then hurried to follow Derek back out of the diner.

The walk back was far less awkward than the one to the diner, and Stiles was glad for it. Derek looked more relaxed than Stiles had ever seen him, and he also felt a little less concerned about getting jumped in a dark alley.

Or his bedroom.

“Jackson wants to take your mom up on her offer,” he said, just for something to talk about as they walked. “Scott’s against it, but I’m trying to close the gap between our packs.”

“It’s hard to maintain a pack without a solid base,” Derek agreed. “Scott’s done well, I won’t deny it, but leadership isn’t something that comes naturally to Werewolves. If you aren’t born with it, it’s hard to be good enough to keep those you care about safe.”

“Yeah.” Stiles didn’t know if he believed that, given Scott had done a great job, but he could see the differences between the born wolves with their Alpha mother, and the bitten ones who didn’t even know all of their own abilities.

“They’re welcome to come by whenever they like,” Derek said. “We’ll help them learn. We have nothing against them. The grudge seems to be on their side.”

“They’re just protective.” Stiles shrugged. “We’ve been together a long time. I guess they don’t like the thought of being bullied into something because your pack is bigger.”

“We don’t have a problem with them doing as they please, as long as it doesn’t endanger lives or interfere with the proper order of things.”

Stiles wasn’t touching that one. He just walked the last block back to the precinct in silence, thinking on how best to get Scott to stop being a butthead about all of this. Everyone was on board with at least meeting Talia, Scott was the one putting his foot down. If he wasn’t careful, he was going to lose his whole pack, since the others were interested in being around someone who could tell them more about what they were and what it meant.

Once they were back at the precinct, Stiles figured avoiding his dad right now would be a good idea, since he could smell bullshit from a mile away, and Stiles was reeking of it. So he stopped at the bottom of the stairs leading up to the door, and Derek turned to him, walking up two steps backwards before pausing.

“Thank you. For lunch.”
“You’re the one who paid,” Stiles reminded him.

“But you let me have a moment with you,” Derek argued. “I appreciate that. And I’ll—try harder. Not to suffocate you.”

“Oh show up in my bedroom.”

Derek winced, but inclined his head slightly. “That too. I look forward to our next encounter.”

“Yeah, I’ll uh—text you. Or something.”

Nodding once, Derek turned to head up the stairs. Stiles shoved his hands in his pockets and was about to leave when the other man spoke and he paused.

“To be clear,” Derek said hesitantly, half-turned from where he was standing on the steps leading up to the precinct, “you’re not rejecting being my mate.”

“I’m not accepting,” Stiles emphasized, to be sure he understood, “but uh, no. I’m not rejecting, either.”

An honest to God genuine smile formed on Derek’s face at those words, and he nodded once. “I understand. Thank you again for lunch.”

“Yeah, anytime.” Stiles froze. “I mean, not anytime, but you know, no problem and all that. Whenever—I mean whatever! Just—yeah. I’m gonna stop talking now.”

“Probably for the best.”

“Shut up. Get back to work before dad fires you.”

Derek laughed but disappeared up the stairs and through the door. Stiles let out a slow breath, then shook his head and turned back to the lot where he’d parked the Jeep. He climbed in once he reached it, sitting behind the wheel and thinking about what had just happened.

It had gone well. Things were okay. Derek was normal. If he spent more time with him, maybe he could get over the fact that Derek’s desperation to be close to him had turned him into some creepy stalker. He wasn’t forgiving him for being creepy, but he at least understood now. After all the conversations he’d had with various members of the Hale family, it was hard not to understand.

“This is fine,” he said to himself, nodding and reaching forward to start the car. “This is all fine.”

His phone went off before he could actually turn the key in the ignition. He hesitated, wondering if it was his dad, but decided it would be safer to check now than at home. At least now he could storm into the precinct and insist it wasn’t what it looked like.

Pulling his phone out, his eyebrows shot up at the name staring back at him.

[Cora]
D says you went to lunch together yay or nay?

“Wow, news travels fast,” Stiles muttered, typing out a response. He figured it made sense, since the Hale family seemed particularly close, and he’d often seen Cora and Derek texting one another while they were in the car together.

[Stiles]
Yay

[Stiles]
I just wanted to talk

[Cora]
does this mean we can hang out again?
[Cora]
i miss your stupid face

[Stiles]
Gee thanks -.-
[Stiles]
Yeah, we can hang :)
[Stiles]
I’ll drop by tomorrow?

[Cora]
can’t wait! \o/

Stiles let out a small huff of laughter, then put his phone away, starting the car.

When he pulled out, he frowned at the sight of the two men from the diner parked on the curb, watching him leave. They didn’t follow, so he tried not to think on it too much, but he bypassed his house and headed to Scott’s instead.

Just in case.

The conversation with Scott the next day did not go well. He was still the only one in the pack uninterested in hearing what the Hales had to say, and it was causing a bit of a divide between him and everyone else. Jackson ended up saying he didn’t care what Scott wanted and that he would do what he thought was best for the people he cared about.

That hadn’t gone over well, and fists had started flying before long. Eventually, Stiles told Jackson to leave and do as he pleased in an attempt to avoid further conflict, but Lydia and Kira ended up walking out with him. That put Scott in a foul mood and Stiles had to push back his plans with Cora to calm him down.

It wasn’t that Stiles didn’t understand where Scott was coming from, because he did. He honestly did. He knew that Scott was looking at it as a betrayal. Almost him being usurped of his position. But the truth of the matter was that he was never meant to be in this position to begin with. He was almost like a placeholder, keeping the new Supernaturals safe while the true Alpha was unavailable and across the country.

Talia wasn’t stealing his pack away from him, she was just offering a place in a real pack to those who wanted it. Jackson seemed interested only because he wanted to learn more about himself and his abilities so he could protect those who mattered to him. He was still furious over the fact that he couldn’t do anything about the guy from the club, and kept insisting if he’d been able to stop his wound from closing, he’d have been able to press charges and would’ve ensured the man paid for touching Stiles.

Lydia knew virtually nothing about being a Banshee barring what she and Stiles had found about Banshees and the little Allison and the Argents had provided. Someone like Talia, from an old
Werewolf family, who didn’t dedicate their lives to killing the Supernatural like the Argents had, probably had a lot more information on Banshees. They probably knew how to help Lydia control her abilities, understand what she saw and how she reacted to things. She just wanted to be able to live a normal life with the pack as a side thing, not an all-encompassing aspect of who she was.

And Kira, well... family. Stiles could appreciate how hard this was for her, having to choose between her boyfriend and her mom, but it wasn’t fair to ask her to. Her going to see Talia was fair, because she just wanted to bring the packs together, same as Stiles.

Also, Talia was an adult. Like, a real adult. They’d all been running around town since high school, trying to keep everyone safe from the things that went bump in the night, and were stupid enough to believe they were succeeding. Stiles didn’t want to insist that they were helpless and useless and hadn’t made a difference, but knowing that the Hale pack had been keeping an eye on them and helping them in the background without their knowledge was a bit of a blow if he was completely honest.

Not that he wasn’t appreciative! He just—would’ve appreciated it more had they made their presence known so that Stiles could’ve actually gotten some sleep. He’d spent years constantly tired and was annoyed to learn that it could’ve been avoided. One thing he wished was that the Hale pack had made themselves known once Scott had become a Werewolf. It would’ve saved everyone a whole lot of grief.

It probably would’ve helped in this situation as a whole itself. If they’d approached them the moment Scott had become a Werewolf, pulled him into the pack even with their Alpha across the country, he wouldn’t have gotten used to being the leader of their little pack. Wouldn’t feel so usurped, and like someone was trying to bully him into submission.

Stiles couldn’t help but feel like a majority of the reason they hadn’t been approached was his fault. Derek’s uncontrollable obsession had likely made Talia decide it was best if Scott wasn’t introduced just yet, because it meant Stiles would be closer. It was a problem now, but he understood her reasoning and where she was coming from.

It took him the better part of the afternoon to calm Scott down, playing video games with him to get him to let out some aggression on something that wouldn’t cause bodily harm to anyone. Jackson texted a few times to ask if Scott’s head was out of his ass yet, but Stiles never had good news for him. All he knew was that Jackson, Lydia and Kira respected him enough not to go and see Talia immediately, because Jackson told him they’d left and gone to a movie to try and calm down. That was about as much of an admission of guilt as he knew he’d ever get from someone like Jackson.

When it was late evening and Stiles was starting to get hungry, Scott finally called it a night, thanked Stiles with a grunt, and then left to pick up his mother from the hospital. Stiles actually wondered if Scott would’ve left at all if he hadn’t had the errand to run.

Checking the time himself, he ho-hummed for a few moments before deciding he should check in on his dad. If he was lucky, the man wouldn’t have eaten yet and he could go grab a bite of food with him.

Maybe Parrish and Derek could come. He hadn’t decided yet.

Getting himself organized, and patting at his pockets to make sure he had everything, he frowned when he felt something hard in the same pocket as his keys, but marked it as unimportant in his brain and promptly ignored it. He made his way down the stairs, heavy footfalls landing on each
step before he skipped the last three and started for the front door. He’d just reached it, ready to unlock it, when he froze.

There was a car parked in his driveway.

Dusk had fallen, so it was hard for him to see, but he felt like he wasn’t wrong when he thought it was the same two men he’d seen in the diner the day before. The ones watching him while he’d been eating lunch with Derek.

He felt cold all over at the sight of them. Derek stalkling him had been bad enough, but at least he got a pass, even though it was creepy as fuck. This, though? This was something else, and he wasn’t happy about it.

There was only so much he could take in one year, and he’d gotten more than enough shocks to his system so far. It was barely June! He couldn’t deal with more stalkers, nevermind he had no idea why he’d have more stalkers.

A part of him wondered if either man was the one from Jungle who’d been groping him, but he didn’t think so. Not only had Jackson made a mess of his face to make him recognizable, but neither of these men seemed that imposing. They were large, definitely, but not as large or even as old as the man from Jungle.

Stiles tensed when the doors opened, both of them stepping out and hastily retreated from the door. Then he looked down and hurried forward again, brushing the mountain ash line back into place. He kept forgetting to close it since Kira, Scott and Jackson couldn’t pass it and they were around a lot. Now, he hastily pushed the powder back into place, creating a barrier, and glanced up in time for the doorbell to ring.

He stayed crouched in front of the door for a few seconds, heart beginning to beat faster in his chest, and sweat beading on his forehead. It was probably nothing, just an overreaction, but he couldn’t help the uneasy feeling that washed over him. Knowing they’d followed him home from the diner was really messing with his head.

Letting out a slow breath, he forced himself to stand, squaring his shoulders. Reaching out, he unlocked the door and pulled it open, leaning against it with one arm in the most casual stance he could muster, even as his heartbeat kicked up a notch.

They were Werewolves. He could tell just by the way they held themselves. The Hales might have thrown him for a loop, being all regal and human-like, but these ones screamed Werewolves and that made him uneasy.

One of them was standing a few steps back from the door, hands folded behind himself so that if he was holding a weapon, Stiles couldn’t see it.

That wasn’t comforting.

“Can I help you?” he asked, still trying for casual.

It didn’t escape his notice that both men looked nervous. Really nervous. Seeing that made him feel a little less anxious, but only because it kind of confused him. He frowned while the two men shared a look, then the closest one cleared his throat and glanced back at him.

“We’re looking for Stiles Stilinski,” he said, though his sweeping gaze up and down Stiles’ body suggested he already knew he was Stiles.
It took everything he had not to cross his arms over his chest. “That’s me, can I help you with something?”

There was another pause, and then the guy at the front turned and held his hand out. The other man hesitated, then shook his head with a sigh before bringing his hands forward. Stiles stiffened, waiting for something dangerous, but he frowned when an almost perfectly wrapped present was placed into the closest man’s hand. He turned back to Stiles with it, holding it out almost reverently and bowing his head ever so slightly. He couldn’t move his hands past the mountain ash barrier, but he got a majority of the flat item across the line.

“A gift from the Talbot pack,” he said simply, Stiles’ eyebrows slowly creeping upwards. “I am Alpha Talbot. I hold the territory closest to the north. I wanted to be the first to pay my respects.”

“Respects,” Stiles repeated slowly, uncertainly. “For what?”

Talbot hesitated, raising his gaze once more. “You are the Hale heir’s mate, are you not?”

“He hasn’t been claimed yet,” the other man said softly from behind him. “He doesn’t understand. We shouldn’t have come before we were summoned.”

Talbot turned back to him, hissing something too low for Stiles to catch. The way the other man backed up and bowed his head slightly in submission made Stiles think he was the guy’s second in command. Someone high enough in rank to be here with him, but not to question his authority.

And definitely not this Alpha’s mate.

Talbot turned back to Stiles, offering a small smile. “We might be early, but the sentiment remains. A gift for the future bonding.”

Stiles felt uncomfortable taking it, since it suggested he was definitely going to go through with the whole Derek being his mate thing, but he also thought rejecting it would be a huge faux pas. If an Alpha’s mate rejected them, did that bring into question that Alpha’s worth? Did it make him less formidable, not being able to hold down a mate? This Alpha had said he was from the north, and while Stiles knew Talia was amazing, she wasn’t going to be Alpha forever. He didn’t think it would be a good idea to tell these Werewolves he wasn’t actually Derek’s mate, not really. Sure, Derek had chosen him, but he wasn’t exactly on board.

Still, he weighed the pros and cons of rejecting the gift in a split second, and then slowly reached out to take the offered item, inclining his head in the same fashion as the Alpha since he didn’t know what else to do. What kind of Werewolf etiquette was there for this kind of thing?

“Thank you,” he said. “I uh, I appreciate it. I’ll be sure to let Derek know you dropped by.”

Talbot was smiling brightly at those words, and even the man behind him straightened slightly, seeming pleased to hear that.

“We look forward to seeing you again,” Talbot said kindly, backing away from him and offering him a polite farewell before heading back down the porch with his second behind him.

Stiles watched them go, confused, but he made sure to just smile and wave when they climbed back into the car and glanced over at him. He waited for them to back out of the drive and start down the street before closing the door.

Then he stared down at the package in his hand. It was so perfectly wrapped he kind of didn’t want to open it. The paper was plain, just a soft beige colour with shaded patterns, but every corner was
tucked perfectly and he really didn’t want to unwrap it.

Still, he had no idea what it was. It was fairly thin, and seemed to be some kind of book.

“If this is *Twilight*, I’m murdering someone,” he muttered, even while knowing it couldn’t be. It was much too thin. Still, he’d heard there was a comic version of it, so who knew?

Moving to the kitchen so he could unwrap it, he sat down at the table and hesitated, wondering if he shouldn’t call Derek. What if this was for both of them? But then, Talbot had specifically said it was a gift for him. Maybe he’d met Derek and knew what kind of person he was and this was a sympathy “I’m so sorry you’re stuck with him” gift.

Shaking the thought off, and deciding Derek didn’t need to be here, he peeled the tape off, feeling almost criminal for ruining such a perfect wrap job, and then folded open the paper. He frowned when he saw a plastic sheet covering what was evidently a comic book, and then carefully flipped it over so he could see the front. He realized it was actually three comics, all in their individual plastic sleeves.

He didn’t know how these men knew he liked comic books, but he was actually quite pleased. He didn’t collect them anymore, they were too expensive, but he was thrilled to get some as a gift. The first one looked like the newest *Superman*, in pristine condition. The second was an *Iron Man*, and the third had him balk.

“What?!”

It was *Batman*, volume one by Bob Kane. The original edition from the nineteen-forties. It wasn’t in pristine condition like the other two newer ones, but it was evidently well preserved and the plastic sheet over it only further kept it safe from the oil on his fingers.

Dropping it back onto the table, he pulled out his phone and hastily typed it in to check the sale value—not because he was going to sell it, but because he had to know! He needed to put a dollar sign beside this gift, and he almost let out a hysterical laugh when he found the most recent price for this particular comic.

Five hundred and thirty-four thousand dollars. That was more than his dad had paid for the house. It was more than Stiles was sure his dad had ever accumulated in his entire life!

“What the fuck?” he breathed, staring down at his phone.

Why the hell was another territory’s Alpha coming to his house and giving him a gift that cost five times more than Stiles’ tuition?

He was still staring at the number on his screen when it blinked for a second, and then the website disappeared, his screen taken over by a large picture of his dad, a call coming through. It took him a few seconds to calm himself down enough that he felt like he could answer it without giving away how thoroughly overwhelmed he was.

What was going on?

*What was going on?*!

“Hey dad,” he managed, voice tight and breathless.

*“Stiles? Are you okay?”*
“Mm hm. Yup.” He popped his ‘p’ and cleared his throat. “Peachy. What can I do you for?”

A short pause, then a sigh like his dad would rather not know. “Was going to head out to dinner. Thought maybe you’d like to come keep your old man company. Haven’t seen you much the past few days.”


In all the excitement and borderline fear, he’d forgotten that he’d originally been heading out to bully his dad into having dinner with him.

“I was actually heading over now,” he admitted, getting to his feet and eying the comics on the table. He hesitated, then grabbed them up and headed for the stairs, deciding it would be best to hide the half a million dollar comic. “I’ll be there in a few minutes.”

“Sounds good. I’ll be waiting.”

“See you in a bit.” Stiles hung up, then started looking around his room for a safe place to hide the comics. Or, the valuable one, anyway.

He settled with sliding it between the pages of one of his textbooks and slotting it onto his shelf where there was an open spot from another book he’d removed previously and hadn’t bothered to return.

It was a challenge leaving the house, knowing he had something that valuable behind just a door with a deadbolt. He wondered how rich people like the Hales and Whittemores walked out the door every day. Didn’t they worry about their belongings being stolen? Then again, they were rich, so they could probably afford to replace anything that was stolen without too much thought. Maybe watching his dad struggle to scrape by a majority of his life made him more aware of what they owned.

By the time he reached the station, his thoughts had strayed from money to how rainfall affected the growth of broccoli. He wasn’t sure how it ended up there, but he didn’t dwell on it, because it was helping him stop panicking about the comic book. He climbed out once he’d parked and flipping his keys in his hand. He nodded a greeting to one of the officers exiting the precinct, the man slapping him lightly on the back and then headed through the door.

The person at the front desk was one of the newbies he hadn’t made friendly with yet so he just smiled to them and walked past them. They were at least smart enough to recognize who he was and not try and stop him.

He was halfway to his dad’s office when he froze, frowning, and looked around. It took him a few seconds to figure it out and he pulled his phone from his pocket, grinning slightly before putting it to his ear.

“Hello gorgeous, how are you today?”

“And here I thought you getting a new phone meant no more butt-dials.”

“Crotch-dials, Jackson. Crotch-dials.”

“Whatever. You need to get that checked out, it’s annoying.”

“And miss out on hearing your lovely voice randomly throughout the day?”
“Fuck you, Stilinski. Fix your phone.” Jackson hung up and Stiles laughed, making sure the call ended before locking his screen and putting it back in his pocket while continuing forward to where his dad was.

He’d been doing so well with the new phone, too. Clearly fate did not want him and Jackson to ever be apart given he was the one Stiles crotch-dialled the most often.

Reaching his father’s office, he knocked on the doorframe and poked his head in. “Ready to go?”

His father grunted, squinting at something on his screen, which was kind of comical considering he had his glasses perched on top of his head. Stiles rolled his eyes and leaned against the frame, turning to look across the precinct at the deputies.

He hadn’t expected Derek to be working right now, but he appeared to be on duty. To his credit, he wasn’t staring right at Stiles, though he might’ve been before Stiles had turned. To be fair, if he didn’t catch him staring, it made him less uncomfortable. Parrish, on the other hand, was not so subtly casting glances between them. He seemed a little pleased, like Stiles’ lunch date with Derek the day before meant things were going well.

“Ready?”

Stiles jumped when his father appeared at his back, straightening the collar of his coat and watching him. He followed Stiles’ gaze and pressed his lips together, letting out a small sigh. He kind of looked defeated, like he thought Stiles and Derek were skirting around each other and it was only a matter of time before they became a thing.

His dad was very observant, even if he wasn’t observant enough to know Scott was a Werewolf. To be fair, if he didn’t know Werewolves existed, he had no reason to suspect that.

“Something interesting over there?” he asked, and Stiles figured he was thinking of both when he’d caught Stiles in Derek’s car, as well as their impromptu lunch date.

“Just Parrish,” Stiles hastened to say. “You’re overworking the guy. You should give him breaks more often.”

“Parrish works the same amount of hours as everyone else,” his dad insisted, but he looked over at him and called out.

Parrish’s head lifted and the sheriff motioned for him to get his coat on and join them. Parrish’s eyes skirted to Derek while he got to his feet, and even Stiles could see how tense he was. Clearly he was unhappy Parrish was being invited and he wasn’t, but to be fair, Parrish had been working with his dad for almost five years by now.

When a huge sigh left his father’s lips, Stiles turned to him and saw him staring at the ceiling, as if praying for patience, then said, “Hale, you too. Let’s go.”

The way Derek perked up was actually almost adorable. Puppy-like, even. He was on his feet instantly, pulling his jacket off the back of his chair and hastily pulling it on while following behind Parrish, the two of them moving to join Stiles and his father.

When they were close enough, his dad grabbed his shoulder and steered him towards the door, squeezing once before letting his hand fall. Stiles led the way out, holding the door for his dad to grab before moving down the stairs quickly, shoving his hands in his pockets and playing with the various items in them. They walked to the diner down the street in comfortable chatter, Parrish and Derek discussing the case they were both working on in low tones so as not to be overheard by
passer-bys, and Stiles and his dad arguing, as they often did, about the food the sheriff was about to put into his body.

They were still at it by the time they hit the diner, and the waitress that greeted them had to wait for a pause before she could lead them to a table. They were in a booth near the back again, and Stiles was grateful when his dad slid in beside him. He didn’t know that having Derek right beside him, in his space, would be a good thing. The Werewolf did slide in across from him though, but that was fine, it was where he’d been the day before, too. As long as he kept the staring to a minimum, it’d be fine.

Menus in hand, Stiles perused it for the differences between the lunch and dinner menus, feeling like he shouldn’t be an asshole and order something his dad couldn’t have while he was right beside him. He settled for a chicken wrap with a soup as his side, then set his menu down, the other three not even looking at their menus since they came by all the time due to its proximity to the station.

They were in the middle of discussing something he couldn’t keep track of, having come in too late in the game, but he listened while they spoke up until the waitress came for their drink orders. Since they were all ready, they got their dinners in, as well, Stiles managing not to be too annoyed that his dad had ordered a burger. It was a Veggie burger, but still. It came with fries.

“You keep an eye on him, right?” Stiles asked Parrish, thumbing at his dad. “You watch what he eats?”

“I try, but he’s my boss so, you know...” Parrish let himself trail off, trusting Stiles to get the message.

Rolling his eyes, Stiles just sighed and decided he should come by more often now that it was summer. Keep his dad’s diet on track while he had the time to do so.

Their drinks came by quickly thereafter, and Parrish asked Stiles about school and the coming year. They hadn’t spoken in a while, mostly because Parrish had been avoiding him and his prying questions before it came out he was in the Hale back, and also because Stiles had started avoiding him because he was in the Hale pack. They had a lot to catch up on.

It lasted them up until the food arrived, Derek staying fairly quiet for a majority of it. Stiles thought it might’ve been because he was trying to make Stiles forget he was there, but his dad made a comment about it a few minutes before the waitress came with their food and he realized Derek was just a quiet person.

It had probably drained him the day before when he’d had to be social, but Stiles wondered if it was different for him when it was with his mate.

Once the waitress was setting their food down, Stiles balked at his dad’s plate because he’d missed that he’d ordered his veggie burger with bacon. He tried to reprimand him for it, but his dad just ignored him and told Stiles to eat his food while stuffing the burger into his mouth, as if trying to eat it as fast as possible before Stiles tried to yank the bacon right out of it.

“You know you have to watch what you eat,” Stiles insisted, a little on the frustrated side. “Do you want to miss out on my thirtieth birthday?”

“Stiles,” he insisted with a sigh. “I don’t do this all the time. Just every now and then, you need to give a little leeway.”
“You always seem to do it ‘every now and then’ when I’m around,” he accused, narrowing his eyes and still not having touched his food.

“It’s not as often as you seem to think,” he promised, and then followed up with, “What did you end up doing today?” He sounded genuinely interested, and not like he was trying to divert the conversation. Stiles squinted to determine how much he believed that, then decided he’d been invited to dinner so his dad obviously missed him enough to mean it.

Deflating and deciding to let the bacon go for now, he said, “Nothing much. Hung out with the usual crowd, then when Kira, Lydia and Jackson left, Scott stuck around so we could play video games.”

“I thought you were going to see your friend today,” his dad said with a frown, then glanced briefly at Derek. “Sorry, your sister. I always forget which is which.”

“Cora,” Derek offered. “She was bummed about the reschedule, but she understands.” He shrugged, muscled arms crossed over his chest. He’d shucked his jacket when he’d sat down, so Stiles was getting an eyeful of thick cords or muscle.

“Unavoidable,” Stiles insisted with a wince. “Scott was having a crisis.”

“Don’t worry about it, she’s just as happy seeing you tomorrow, provided she does see you.”

“She will,” Stiles promised, popping a fry into his mouth and chewing thoughtfully. Silence fell for a moment while they all ate their food, but speaking about friends reminded him of the half a million dollar comic book tucked between the pages of his first year Criminology textbook. He watched Derek for a moment, debating, then decided to address it. He felt like it would be best that he advise him of the fact that another Alpha was in his family’s territory.

“So I actually met someone today,” Stiles said, Parrish pausing at the words. It didn’t occur to Stiles how dangerous they might sound in a romantic sense, but Derek was calm and relaxed, chewing the bite of BLT he had in his mouth. “Said he was a friend of yours.”

“Oh?” Derek arched an eyebrow. “Who was it?”

“I didn’t catch his first name, but he said his last name was Talbot.”

Parrish choked on the sip of Coke he’d been in the middle of and Derek’s hands froze with his sandwich almost at his lips. The reaction was telling, but Stiles wasn’t sure if it was in a good or a bad way.

“You okay, Parrish?” the sheriff asked, concerned, while he continued to cough.

He waved the man off while getting to his feet, still coughing, and pulled his phone out. Derek set his sandwich back down on his plate, and for a few seconds, no one spoke. Stiles’ father looked between them, then glanced at the door, evidently concerned about Parrish hacking up a lung.

“I’m going to make sure he isn’t choking,” he finally said, getting to his feet and hurrying to the door.

The moment he was gone, Derek leaned forward. “What did he say? Was it Alpha Talbot himself, or did he send someone else?”

“I—don’t know,” Stiles said slowly. “I mean, it’s not like I know the guy, but he said he was Alpha Talbot and he came with some other dude who didn’t introduce himself.”
“What did he want?”

Stiles shrugged. “He gave me a present. Said he wanted to be the first to uh, ‘pay his respects.’” He raised both hands to do air quotes around the words.

The way Derek’s face went carefully blank was a little concerning, but Stiles knew he hadn’t told anyone anything about him and Stiles being an item. It was very clear to anyone who looked at them that they weren’t, and besides, the Werewolves had been in the diner when they’d been speaking. They knew that Stiles was mostly telling Derek to stop being creepy.

“He didn’t say anything else? About me? Or my family?”

“No?” Stiles asked hesitantly. “Should he have?”

“No,” Derek said sharply. He pulled his own phone out, evidently aware that whatever Parrish had gone off to do wouldn’t happen with the sheriff following after him. He texted for a few seconds, a scowl on his face, and Stiles just sat there uncomfortably, wondering if he’d just gotten someone in trouble.

“Everything okay?” he finally asked when Derek slid his phone back into his pocket.

“The offering of gifts is required for situations such as this, but no one is meant to approach until the claim’s been made,” Derek grumbled. “They’re breaking tradition.”

“Oh.” Stiles figured it was a Werewolf thing he didn’t want to know about and just went back to his food. Parrish and his dad came back moments later, the two packmates sharing a look before Derek nodded and things calmed slightly.

Stiles hoped he hadn’t gotten that Alpha guy in trouble. He’d been really nice, and super excited to meet him and give him a present. He hoped Talia would just call him up and say not to do anything like that again and leave it at that. He didn’t know if this warranted like, an arrest. Did the Werewolf community have a separate police force? He knew they kind of had their own set of laws and like, rulebooks about what they could and couldn’t do, but did they get arrested when they broke one? Clearly they had traditions and things that had to happen, like this gift-giving, and the whole claiming thing, but did they have actual laws? He wasn’t really sure how that Council in New York worked. He’d like to talk to Talia about it, learn a little bit about the Werewolves. The last time had been all physical aspects, so maybe tomorrow he could try for a bit of theoretical knowledge.

They finished up dinner, with Derek insisting he pay again. The sheriff fought him on it pretty hard, but Derek won in the end and everyone thanked him for the meal. The walk back to the station was conducted in relative silence, the sheriff letting out a deep sigh and shifting to wrap one arm around his son, pulling him into his side for a brief hug before releasing him. It made Stiles’ chest ache, because he hadn’t been seeing much of his dad lately. It was summer, he should try harder.

Back at the station, Derek and Parrish bid him good night before heading back inside, and his dad stopped outside the front doors, waiting for them to disappear before turning to Stiles, crossing his arms.

“You and Derek seem to have resolved your differences.”

“Not really,” Stiles said cautiously, unsure of what his father meant. “We just—had a good conversation yesterday. He’s Cora’s brother, we can’t hate each other, it’ll make things awkward.”
“Mm hm.” His dad eyed him critically before shaking his head. “Well for now, he’s not allowed over without at least one other person in the house.”

Stiles sputtered, shocked and appalled his father’s brain had gone there. “Dad! No! He’s not—we’re not like that.”

“Yet,” he insisted with a sigh. “I’ve got eyes, Stiles. It’s only a matter of time.”

“I don’t even know him, are you saying I’m shallow?” Stiles demanded, mildly offended.

“I’m saying I know my own son, and it’s only a matter of time.” He reached up to lightly pat his cheek, offering him a small smile. “For now, he’s not allowed over without someone else present.”

“Dad!” Stiles insisted, but the man had already turned and disappeared into the precinct with a wave over his shoulder.

Stiles pouted the whole way home.

TBC...

Chapter End Notes

WARNINGS: Stiles goes out clubbing and gets super wasted. Some guy tries to get his hands down his pants; he doesn't succeed but he tries and Stiles is too drunk to stop him.

Obligatory Copyright Crap:
- Teen Wolf (c) Jeff Davis
- Twilight (c) Stephenie Meyer
- Superman ; Batman (c) DC
- Iron Man (c) Marvel
Bent over while sitting on his bed, Stiles had just finished yanking on his shoes when the doorbell rang. He sat up, staring towards his bedroom door, thoughts of the previous day hitting him like a freight train. He wondered if it would be Alpha Talbot again, back to apologize for his presence the day before. Or maybe even pissed off at having been reprimanded—if he even was reprimanded.

When the doorbell rang again, twice in succession, denoting the visitor’s impatience, Stiles rolled his eyes and got to his feet.

“I’m coming,” he insisted loudly, knowing Jackson could hear him through the house and front door. He jumped the last two steps and moved quickly to the door, pulling it open and staring out at Jackson’s annoyed face.

“Your house is the worst, I can’t get in,” he snapped, baring his teeth.

“Yeah, that’s the point. Keep Werewolves out,” Stiles informed him, but he used one foot to break the line by the door before moving back into the house and towards the kitchen. Jackson followed, shutting the front door behind him. When he entered the kitchen and grabbed a Coke from the fridge, Jackson snatched it from his hand when he went to open it and Stiles just rolled his eyes again before grabbing his own.

“What’re you doing here? I’m going to Cora’s today.” He took a sip of his drink before pointing a finger at Jackson, lowering the can. “I cancelled on her once for our pack issues, I’m not gonna be that guy. We’re hanging out.”

“I’m not here to stop you,” Jackson said, baring his teeth again. He was evidently in a bad mood. Then again, when wasn’t he? “I’m going with you.”

Stiles let out the most dramatically loud sigh he could muster. “Jackson, I’ll be fine.”

“I’m not going for you,” Jackson snapped. “I’m going for me. To talk to this Alpha woman. To get—better.”

Jackson cut himself off abruptly after that sentence, gritting his teeth, but Stiles knew what he wasn’t saying. He was only going to better himself so that he could protect his pack in the future. He wasn’t able to stop the man who’d touched Stiles, and even though he’d been injured, he wasn’t able to press charges as punishment for what he’d done to Stiles because his injuries had healed.

Stiles wasn’t dumb enough to think this was all about him, Jackson was obviously also thinking about Lydia, Kira and Scott, but the person who’d most recently been in danger was Stiles, so it
was hitting him hard. Besides, Stiles knew Jackson wanted to get an idea of what a real Werewolf was like, even if he’d never admit it, not to mention he never even used his Kanima abilities since he didn’t understand them. Scott did his best, and he was amazing, but he was also virtually a baby by comparison. Jackson and Scott had only been Werewolves since they were sixteen, which was five years. Even Eric had been a Werewolf longer.

Shit, Merrak probably knew more about Werewolves than Scott and Jackson did, and Merrak was human.

Stiles watched Jackson for a moment, sipping at his Coke and then shrugged. “Sure. As long as you behave. I don’t think mouthing off at an Alpha is a good idea.”

“Depends on how she treats me.”

There was no point in touching that, so Stiles waved him off with one hand, then turned to find something to eat for breakfast. Upon returning with nothing of interest, he said he’d grab something on the way and headed out. Jackson insisted on driving, because there was no point in taking two vehicles, but he was horrified at having to stop at one of the coffeshop drive-thrus in town, because it was almost criminal for anyone to see his Porsche somewhere so... common.

Stiles ignored his grumblings and ordered himself a coffee, a breakfast sandwich and some hashbrowns, and was then threatened with bodily harm if anything hit Jackson’s leather interior. Stiles didn’t worry about it and just ate his food while they drove, noting his friend was becoming more and more tense the closer they got to the Hale house.

It wasn’t his first time there, since he’d joined Stiles when he’d returned the Mustang, but Stiles hadn’t been in the car with him at the time so he didn’t know if this was how Jackson had reacted then, as well.

They made good time reaching the Hale house, and Stiles noticed Derek’s Camaro and Laura’s Audi were both gone when they pulled up. Jackson parked in a free space and the second Stiles was out of the car, the Werewolf was instantly beside him, making him jump.

“Okay, you need to chill,” Stiles insisted, elbowing him out of his personal space. “I’m not into Edward and Jacob fighting over Bella.”

Jackson said nothing, but he still crowded Stiles all the way to the door. Ringing the bell, Stiles listened for sounds of someone approaching, but Jackson’s growling was the only indicator he had as to when someone was close to the door.

When it opened, Cora was there, but her eyes shot to Jackson and a snarl escaped her, eyes flashing gold. Jackson’s hand grabbed at Stiles’ arm, almost like he was going to wrench him behind him, and he snarled louder, baring his teeth and shifting into his Beta form.

Cora crouched, as if ready to attack, but a sharp voice had both of their growls cut off instantly.

“Cora, that’s enough.”

Talia appeared behind her daughter, looking angry, and Cora straightened and backed away a step, head tilted like she was baring her throat in submission. Jackson’s hand loosened ever so slightly on Stiles’ arm, but he held on. The growling had ceased from him as well, but he looked almost confused, as if not even knowing why he’d relented to begin with.

“I apologize,” Talia said, speaking mostly to Jackson. “He is in your pack, you have a right to be cautious around unfamiliar Werewolves. Cora was out of line.” She turned to give her daughter a
sharp look. “Stiles is in his pack. Do not challenge him again.”

“Sorry,” she said softly, eyes skirting to Jackson before lowering again. “My bad.”

Talia seemed satisfied with that and moved aside, motioning them in. Stiles moved first, Jackson following mostly because he was still gripping his arm. They followed Talia through the house to the kitchen, passing Eric who was halfway down the stairs. He bared his teeth at Jackson, eyes flashing gold for a brief moment, but pulled himself back when Talia turned to him and flashed her own red eyes.

Stiles was honestly curious to know if they’d still be reacting to Jackson like this if he was part of the Hale pack. Was it just because of the divide right now? Or would they always react negatively to any Werewolf who wasn’t their brother touching Stiles? He doubted it, they all seemed fine with each other touching him. Cora was a particularly touchy-feely person, and Derek had never reacted badly to her scent being on him, so he figured it was a pack thing.

“Have you eaten?” Talia asked, motioning the table. Stiles sat obediently, and Jackson followed much slower, back straight and defences obviously on high alert. He was in foreign territory, after all, so it made sense he felt unsafe.

“Yeah, grabbed something on the way, thanks.”

“All right.” She smiled and moved away from the fridge, where she’d evidently been about to pull some items out. She moved to the table, sitting down across from Jackson and Stiles, smiling at them. “Stiles, I’m sure you’re only here to spend time with Cora, and I can see how eager she is to get started on that, however I don’t believe your packmate will feel comfortable leaving your side until we’ve had a chat.” She folded her hands on the table and glanced over at Jackson, smiling pleasantly. “You must be Jackson Whittemore. It’s been a long time since I’ve seen you, you grew up very handsome.”

Jackson seemed to preen slightly at that, but as expected, something rude came out of his mouth. Stiles would’ve groaned if he hadn’t known it was coming.

“I was attractive last time you saw me, too. It’s a blessing and a curse.”

“Indeed.” Talia just seemed amused. Cora made a face behind her back where she was leaning against the kitchen doorway. Jackson’s eyes shot to her and they both had a glare-down. “Cora, why don’t you wait for Stiles in the living room?” Talia said without taking her eyes off Jackson.

“But—”

“Now.”

Cora stomped her way out of the kitchen, and a moment later, Stiles heard the TV cut on. He didn’t say anything, just waited to be excused. He didn’t feel like he needed to wait, but Talia was right that Jackson wasn’t going to let him out of his sight, so if the day was going to move forward, they needed to hash things out now.

“Did you come for Stiles?” Talia asked him curiously. “Or did you come for some other reason?”

“You can’t have him,” Jackson snarled, and his hand was back to Stiles’ arm, squeezing tight enough to make him wince. “He was ours first.”

“We are not attempting to take him from you,” Talia promised. “We understand the bond formed in your pack, as unconventional as it is given your lack of Alpha. We aren’t here to take what is
yours, but you must understand that you and your pack are currently living on Hale land. This is our territory.”

Jackson instantly bristled and Stiles winced, knowing this was about to go south, but Talia held up one hand and flashed her eyes briefly, asking for silence, which Jackson surprisingly gave her.

“I am not saying this as a challenge, I am stating a fact. This land belongs to us, we are the Hales, this is our territory. We may not have been here since you and Scott became Werewolves, but this land has never ceased being ours. An Alphaless pack such as yours wouldn’t be able to hold it, and you have no right or claim to it. We would never force you out, but you must also understand that our right to remain far outweighs yours. We are allowing you to stay as a courtesy, because it is not in my nature to chase out those who call this place home, but I must make something very clear to you.” She shifted closer, and Jackson shifted back, almost unintentionally. “I am the Alpha of this territory. I am not going to take what you deem to be yours, but I will not allow you to believe you have any claim over the land your feet stand on. Am I clear?”

It was slow coming, but Jackson eventually nodded, the slightest inclination of his head. Talia nodded back, seeming satisfied, then leaned back once more and offered a kind smile. “So, what can I do for you, Mr. Whittemore? I don’t imagine you came all this way to babysit Stiles.”

When Jackson didn’t speak, Stiles piped in, ignoring the sharp look he got from his friend for interfering. “Jackson wants to learn more. About being a Werewolf.”

“Easy enough to accomplish,” Talia responded kindly. “Shall we head outside and walk the perimeter? You can explain what you know of your abilities so far and what areas you seek to improve.” Talia stood then, and motioned the door. Jackson’s gaze shot to Stiles, and for a second, it was hard to figure out if he looked terrified for himself, or of leaving Stiles behind. Stiles just slapped his shoulder lightly and stood up.

“See you later, buddy. Don’t worry, you’ll come back in one piece.” He didn’t want to add, as long as you don’t piss her off, but Jackson knew him well enough to know it was implied.

Stiles waited for Jackson to climb awkwardly to his feet, some of his usual bravado lost. Stiles assumed it was because he was in the presence of someone so powerful. After all, Michael had snapped Scott’s mouth shut with only a few words, and he was a human. Stiles couldn’t begin to imagine how it would feel for Werewolves to be around an Alpha Werewolf.

Jackson cast him one last look before heading out the door with Talia. She smiled at Stiles, then shut it. He moved to stand by the back door, looking out the window, and saw her motion the side of the house, evidently about to walk around it in circles like she’d done with Stiles not so long ago. He assumed it was a comfort thing for both of them. Jackson wasn’t far from Stiles, and could come back if he deemed it necessary, and Talia was close to her pack if something went wrong.

He waited for them to move around the side of the house, then turned to go and find Cora. She perked up when he walked into the living room, grinning at him fiercely and punching at his shoulder when he fell down beside her.

“I hear you got your first wedding present,” she teased, winking at him.

He made a face. “Is that what that was?”

“Mom was pissed,” she insisted with a cackle. “Went off on Talbot for breaking the rules. They’re not supposed to approach you until after you’ve consented to being with Derek, and even then, they have to wait until the claim’s happened to ensure it’s official. She was not happy.”
“He’s not in trouble, is he?” Stiles asked uncertainly.

“Nah, she just reamed him out, but he apologized and said that he had high hopes for things working out, so it mollified her a bit. Everyone’s kind of relieved you’re talking to Derek, at least.”

Stiles shrugged, because he hardly counted two meals as anything to be overly excited about, but he supposed it was better than his previous total avoidance. He expected her to be all over him about it, asking questions and insisting he see him again, but she was surprisingly chill. Either her mother had told her to drop it, or Cora recognized she’d done more harm than good the last time she’d opened her mouth, but she didn’t bring it up at all aside from the brief comment she’d made.

They chatted a bit about their summers, and the fact that Cora’s mother wanted her to get a job. Stiles knew he should, as well, but it was hard to get a summer job in Beacon Hills and his Jeep wouldn’t survive driving back and forth every day of the week. He barely managed the few days a week he had to drive it to school, forcing it to do the same amount of work during the summer was asking for it to die on him for good.

After too long, they popped in a movie and proceeded to talk over it. Eric ended up joining them, Stiles boxed in between the two Hale siblings, and he asked where Merrak was. He honestly had a soft spot for the youngest Hale, because he was so blunt and human. It reminded Stiles of himself. Sarcasm was his only defence against all the evils of the world in light of being the only human in his pack. Merrak seemed to have opted for bluntness, and Stiles could respect that.


“Dad’s supposed to pick him up later,” Eric said, checking the time on his phone. “Should be home around four. Are you staying for dinner?”

“If Jackson does, I guess,” Stiles shrugged. “He’s my ride.”

“I’m sure we can get you home without him,” Cora insisted, smiling widely. Stiles gave her a look, clearly catching on to her attempts to separate him and Jackson, and she deflated, slouching in her seat and crossing her arms. “How did that even happen, anyway? Jackson used to be horrible to you.”

Stiles shrugged. “He became a Werewolf. Well, actually, he became a Kanima first. We saved his life, and he didn’t like owing us a debt, so he said he’d stick around until he repaid the favour. Then he kind of... never left. I don’t know, we get along. He’s really important to me.”

Eric made a face at that, but Stiles figured the Hales didn’t like the implication that maybe Stiles was in love with Jackson. Which he definitely wasn’t, even if he could admit his friend was gorgeous as hell. Jackson was definitely one of those people who could go far in life with his looks alone, and Stiles had no shame admitting that.

They managed to get through the entire movie without actually watching it before the front door opened and Talia walked in. Jackson followed her, and Stiles wasn’t sure what to make of the look on his face. It was guarded, but his shoulders were relaxed and he seemed... calm. It was a strange contrast and he immediately got protective, getting to his feet and startling both Cora and Eric.

“Jackson?”

He turned to look at Stiles, and then strode over to him. When he grabbed the back of his neck, Stiles stiffened, but Jackson just pulled him in and hugged him, which was weird in and of itself.
Cora and Eric both grumbled low in their throats, but Talia must’ve done something he couldn’t see because they stopped almost as quickly as they’d started.

Jackson was rubbing his cheek against Stiles’, one hand still behind his neck and the other around his back, splaying between his shoulder blades. Stiles hugged him back awkwardly, patting him a few times.

“You okay, buddy?”

Jackson squeezed him once, almost tight enough to hurt, then let go, pulling back and looking the same he always did. Haughty and holier than thou. That was a relief, at least.

“I’m starving,” he said, turning back to Talia. “Lunch?”

“Of course.” She smiled graciously and motioned the kitchen. “I was about to get started. Cora, Eric, would you like to help?”

“No,” Cora informed her even as Eric stood and yanked her to her feet. She sighed explosively but allowed herself to be dragged from the room. Talia nodded once to Stiles and then moved to follow her children, leaving Stiles alone with Jackson.

He focussed back on him, eying him cautiously and wondering what they’d been speaking about to make him react that way.

“What happened?” he asked, not entirely certain he wanted to know.

Jackson shook his head and rubbed his face, letting out a short laugh before dropping his hands.

“Scott’s gonna be so pissed.”

“You saved me,” Jackson said. “Us. All of us. Maybe less for Kira and Lydia, since they’re not predisposed to being in a pack, but Scott and I—we’re wolves. We need a pack. Talia said that packless Werewolves can go crazy, turn feral, become what are known as Omegas. They lose themselves and there’s no coming back from that. The only way for a Werewolf to survive is to be in a pack, but you can’t have a true pack without an Alpha.”

Stiles stared at him, because that made no sense whatsoever. “Jackson, we don’t have an Alpha.”

“No, we don’t.” Jackson was staring at him with the most interested look on his face Stiles had ever seen. It almost looked like he wanted to eat him. “But we lucked out, because you were Scott’s best friend. So when he became a Werewolf, it was only natural you’d be in his pack. And then when I came around with Lydia, you let us join you. Then Kira, though again, Lydia and Kira don’t need a pack as badly as Scott and I do. They can stay sane alone, we can’t. We need a pack.”

“Oh, so I’m in the pack, what does that have to do with you keeping your sanity? I’m not an Alpha, I—” Stiles cut himself off and he felt something click into place.

Michael wasn’t an Alpha, but he was an Alpha’s mate, and he’d managed to shut Scott up with a sentence. Alpha mates had some pull, even as humans, so was it really so strange that his pack had
been formed around him, even when he’d thought this entire time that it was Scott who was in charge? It made sense, in the grand scheme of things. Scott always looked to him for advice—even if he didn’t always take it. They were always far more protective of him than anyone else in the pack, but he’d always attributed that to being the only human. But when he really thought about it, they all rallied around him, relied on him, protected him. He wasn’t the token human in the pack, he was their Alpha substitute until they could join a real pack with a real Alpha.

Being Derek’s mate was the only thing that had saved Scott and Jackson from going feral.

Jackson knew he’d put it together, because he didn’t say anything else. He just patted Stiles’ shoulder and fell onto the couch, lounging slightly and staring at the television without really looking at it.

Stiles sat down slowly beside him, mind racing. There was really only so much he could handle in such a short period of time, and he felt like he might honestly go crazy with all the information being forced into his brain.

“Bella never had to deal with this shit,” he muttered absently.

“What’s your hangup with the whole Twilight thing, anyway?” Jackson demanded, giving him a look. “It was about Vampires, and the most ridiculous love story in existence. Edward was in love with Bella because she smelled good and he wanted to eat her. Derek fell for you because your dumb ass doesn’t know how to back away from a fight. Pretty big contrast, in my opinion.”

“We’re basically Werewolf married,” Stiles muttered.

Jackson snorted. “You’re not even close to being Werewolf married. His scent isn’t on you at all. You smell more like me than you do anyone else, so if anything, you’re Werewolf married to me.”

Stiles half-smiled. “No thanks.”

Jackson punched him, hard, and he winced, rubbing at his arm. “Fuck you, Stilinski, I’d be the best husband.”

“Tal had out a sound of interest, like he was impressed Derek hadn’t growled. Stiles wondered if that control was because of the Alpha gene. After all, Talia had controlled herself, and he was Derek’s mate, so it wasn’t like it could be easy to see another Werewolf that close to him, especially one not in his pack.

“I still don’t like him,” Jackson muttered.

“He can hear you,” Stiles reminded him.
“I look like I care?” Jackson stood and moved towards the corridor. Stiles didn’t know what he was doing, but it was safer to follow and ensure he didn’t start a fight unnecessarily.

They moved into the kitchen, where Talia and Cora were busy making something at the stove while Eric chopped vegetables on the island. Derek was leaning forward on it, eyes on the blade in his brother’s hand, seemingly mesmerized by it.

“Don’t you have work?” Jackson asked in his usual rude fashion, moving right up beside Derek. Stiles just hung back by the door, figuring they would need to sort their own shit out and he was pretty okay with not being in the middle of it.

“My shift started at four,” Derek informed him coldly, not looking at him. “I’m off the clock.”

“Sure you didn’t rush home early because mommy told you your boyfriend was here?”

“Jackson,” Talia said, a slight reprimand in her voice. “Remember our conversation.”

Stiles so wished he knew what conversations they had, but considering how long they’d been outside, and the fact that Jackson wasn’t exactly a heart to heart person, he doubted he’d learn about them.

Jackson seemed annoyed at being censored, but he just gave Derek a brief once-over, like he was weighing his chances against him, then said, “You touch him without his consent, I guess we’ll find out if an Alpha spark can be stolen before someone’s officially an Alpha.”

Stiles jumped when Eric slammed the knife point-first into the counter an inch from Jackson’s hand, baring his teeth and flashing his eyes angrily. It was the most aggressive thing he’d ever seen from the least aggressive person Stiles had ever met.

Apparently Eric had only one thing he didn’t tolerate.

“Do not threaten my Alpha,” he snarled.

Stiles rubbed his face with one hand, feeling like things weren’t going to go as smoothly as he was hoping to get both packs on the same page. If it was true, and Stiles really was the reason Jackson and Scott hadn’t gone crazy, then shouldn’t they be more understanding and respectful of Derek? After all, he was the mate tied to him, didn’t it stand to reason that he should have some level of control over them?

He fully expected Talia to reprimand Eric, but surprisingly it was Derek. He gave his brother a sharp look and flashed blue eyes at him. Eric’s features softened and he lowered his gaze, pulling the blade from the counter and keeping his eyes down while he went back to chopping vegetables. Cora had turned, shoulders stiff, but she hadn’t said anything and she went back to what she was doing once it became clear Derek wasn’t going to pursue this.

“I have no intention of doing anything to Stiles,” Derek informed Jackson, calmly but relatively coldly. “I respect his decision, and if he were to choose someone else,” he gave Jackson a once-over, as if understanding the appeal—despite Stiles not being interested—and offered a tight smile, “then I would accept that.”

Jackson eyed him for a long moment, then let out a grunt, which was about as close to acknowledgement as Derek was going to get. Jackson shifted so he could sit on the stool beside Derek at the counter, and the two of them watched Eric in silence while he worked.

“Werewolves are so weird,” Stiles said before he could help himself.
Nobody looked at him, so he just stood there and watched them.

He didn’t think the Hales were all okay with Jackson, and he knew Jackson was not okay with the Hales, but this was a step forward. It was an improvement.

Slowly, one by one, he could get the others to come around, they could try and make this work, and maybe, by the time senior year started, they’d be one pack.

Stiles would really like to have more opportunities to sleep in senior year.

---

[Stiles]
Hey, can I get Derek’s number?

He set his phone down, waited a second, then picked it back up, tapping the home button as if it had gone to sleep before realizing all it did was pull him out of his messages. When he tapped on them again, the response returned.

Cora didn’t ask why he wanted it, or tease him about it. She just sent it to him, and seeing that made him feel like she was jumping up and down in her room screaming with joy.

It’d been almost two weeks since he and Jackson had gone over, and since then, things had smoothed out quite a bit, if he was honest. No one growled anymore when Jackson was too close to Stiles, and Jackson himself seemed to be particularly fond of Eric in an older brother kind of way.

He probably admired him for having threatened to cut off his hand for insulting Derek. Jackson was weird like that, Stiles tried not to think on it too much.

Lydia had started coming along as well, though she spent more time with Michael than anyone else. Talia was busy with Jackson, but the patriarch knew a lot about the Supernatural world, so he tended to stay in his office with her for hours, occasionally with Laura showing up because she thought Banshees were fascinating and, apparently, the two women had the same taste in fashion so that was an immediate bond.

Kira had gone over once or twice, but nothing more since she knew the Hales because of her mother, and she was still trying to be Switzerland in the war between Scott and the others.

Stiles had asked Jackson not to tell Scott about the fact that he was the real reason their pack existed. He felt like they needed a bit more time to smooth things over before introducing more hostility. Stiles just wanted everyone to get along, and so far, Scott was the odd man out.

Talia said, over and over, that she was more than happy to meet with Scott. It was Scott who kept insisting he didn’t need the Hales, didn’t need anyone, that the others were stupid for trusting people they didn’t even know.

It had caused more than a few fights over the weeks, and had also succeeded in driving home to Lydia and Jackson that they were more interested in being in a pack that respected each individual’s voice than one where Scott acted butthurt for not being the centre of attention.

Stiles knew it wasn’t like that, that Scott was just struggling to maintain his found family, but by trying so hard he was pushing everyone away. He knew they’d have another talk soon, probably another fight, but Stiles would have to drive home that he wasn’t being replaced, he was being invited into something larger than just himself.

Sighing, Stiles rubbed at his face, frustrated and annoyed. This wasn’t what he’d been planning on
doing with his summer, but it was how it ended up. He just kept hoping things would calm down before the start of the new year.

Including how things were between him and Derek.

He still didn’t know much about him, if he was honest. They saw one another off and on when Stiles visited the station, or when he went over to the Hale house, but Derek had been—surprisingly good about giving him his space. Stiles was surprised, and impressed, considering how he’d been before. He felt like he was right about his earlier assumption, that Derek needed him close, and now that Stiles was around more, and not avoiding him or having Derek creep on him, the wolf side of him was calming down.

Stiles wasn’t his, but he wasn’t not his, either. Evidently it was helping keep his wolf calm.

But now he needed to know him. He wasn’t willing to just jump into anything because Derek was attractive—Stiles wasn’t blind, he could see how attractive Derek was—and because they were mates, but he wasn’t willing to write it off without trying, either. Michael had said it was a choice, and like any other choice, it needed research. A weighing of pros and cons. He didn’t know Derek, so it wasn’t fair to just cut him off at the knees. If he made friendly with him, and they hung out and did things together more often, even as a group where they spoke to each other, it would make it more fair.

That was his thought process, anyway. He wanted to give him a chance, instead of just immediately putting a stop to whatever this was. He might not fully understand what being a mate meant, but he knew he could opt out, so that was good enough for him.

He debated whether or not to act on the number he had, but figured Cora would’ve texted Derek immediately to say Stiles had asked for his number, and he didn’t want him distracted and obsessing about it at work. Besides, he may as well rip the bandaid off now.

Adding Derek’s number to his contacts, he opened his messages, about to send one, when the doorbell rang.

Letting out a slow sigh and trying to find patience, he eased out of his desk chair and headed for the stairs. It was a struggle making his way to the first floor, because he knew that if it wasn’t Jackson or Scott, it was another stupid Alpha with a gift.

Apparently, Alpha Talbot’s arrival was only foreshadowing what was to come, because even though he’d been reprimanded for his appearance before Stiles and Derek were official, Alphas had been showing up from all over the past two weeks, bringing him all kinds of gifts. They ranged from things he liked—comic books, movies, tickets to baseball games—to things they evidently thought were beneficial for him—one group had brought him special types of wolfsbane, given to him by one of their human members, while another had provided a spellbook to protect himself against harm. Just—weird things. One group had brought him an entire set of China. It was nice, but he’d had a hell of a time hiding it from his dad, because there was no way his father wouldn’t pick up on that.

He hadn’t told the Hales, either. He didn’t want to get anyone in trouble, but he was really starting to wonder about why he was getting all these gifts. It was weird for other Alphas to shower an Alpha’s mate with congratulatory items, and the one time Derek had mentioned it, in the diner two weeks ago, he’d asked if Talbot had said anything about his family.

Stiles wasn’t an idiot, he knew something was happening, even if he didn’t know what.
Reaching the door, he let out a deep, annoyed sigh, then pulled it open, forcing a smile. It promptly fell off his face.

“Merrak! Holy shit!” He grabbed at the youngest Hale’s arm and pulled him into the house, having to steady him when he stumbled slightly. He wrapped one arm around his shoulders, slammed the door behind himself, and then pulled him quickly towards the living room.

Merrak practically fell onto the couch, wincing slightly, and Stiles kind of hovered over him, unsure of what to do. He had a split lip, a rapidly darkening eye, and blood streaming from his nose. He was holding himself like he’d hurt his arm, hugging it to his chest, and his limp suggested an injury to either his ankle or his knee.

He looked like shit, and Stiles’ mind went through a million different scenarios. Enemy attack, new big bad in town, another Alpha trying to show his family who was boss. His mind was going a mile a minute, and then screeched to a halt when Merrak spoke.

“I can’t go home.”

His stomach bottomed out and he gaped, because what? What?! This had happened at home?! But who would’ve done this? Who in that house would’ve dared do this?! It must’ve shown on his face, because Merrak gave him an annoyed look. “Don’t be a fucking idiot, Stilinski, they didn’t do this. But if I go home like this, there’ll be hell to pay.”

“Who did this?” Stiles managed to get out, still standing in front of him and staring uselessly.

“Assholes at school. Said rich pretty boys didn’t know how to fight. Proved them wrong.” He sniffed loudly, when winced, clearly having snorted back up a glob of blood. “If I went to my friends’ place, there’d be question. If mom showed up all Alpha mad, it’d be trouble. You’re safer.”

Stiles shook his head, knowing it wasn’t a good idea to keep where Merrak was a secret, but a conversation to have with him after he was cleaned up. So he turned and hurried into the kitchen, opening the freezer and digging out a bag of peas, then wetting a bunch of paper towels. He brought both back out to Merrak, handing him the bag of peas to press against his darkening eye, and then wiping gently at his face. He could see Merrak’s hand twitching, like he wanted to do it himself, but Stiles wasn’t good at being idle, so if he was left to watch Merrak clean himself up, he’d probably start pacing.

When he’d cleared most of the blood from Merrak’s face, he didn’t look too bad. His split lip was bruised around the edges, and his nose was swollen, but it wasn’t broken. Stiles had broken his nose enough times to know what it looked like.

Not too bad, just a normal schoolyard scuffle. The problem lay in the protectiveness of wolves, and he knew that as well as Merrak did.

“We should call your dad,” Stiles said, folding the paper towel over itself and hiding the blood.

“He’ll tell mom, no,” Merrak snapped.

“You can’t just not go home,” Stiles insisted, annoyed. “They’re going to worry about you.”

“I’ll just tell them I’m bonding with Derek’s boyfriend, they won’t question it.”

“And how long do you plan on sticking around here?” Stiles asked with a scoff. “You really think
my dad’s going to take one look at you and not tell your parents? He’s a cop, and you’re an idiot. Call your dad,” he ordered, with feeling.

Something flashed in Merrak’s gaze at those words, his shoulders tensing and back straightening slightly, but he said nothing. He probably knew Stiles was right, and despite how angry he looked about it, he reached into his pocket and pulled out his phone. His grip was so tight his knuckles were turning white and he clenched his jaw, still glaring at Stiles.

“So that’s your decision, then?” he asked, voice calm and not at all matching his murderous expression. “You’ve made your choice?”

“Between panicking your parents and having you pissed at me? Yeah,” Stiles informed him.

“That’s not what I meant,” he said, but before Stiles could ask what he was talking about, Merrak stabbed at his phone and brought it to his ear. It rang, and when the other end answered, Stiles heard the buzzing of a voice, but not the words. “I need to talk to you,” he said in way of greeting. “I’m at Derek’s fuckhole’s house.”

A loud reprimand, but Stiles felt that was more a jab at him for making him call his father than anything else.

“You can yell at me when you get here, don’t bring mom.” He hung up.

They sat in silence for a minute, Merrak pressing the peas harder against his face and slouching on the couch. He was glaring up at the ceiling, Stiles watching him, and then he sighed, raking a hand through his hair.

“You know,” Stiles said, “you don’t have to act like that around me.”

“Like what?” Merrak demanded.

“Like you’re the toughest person in the room. I get it, you know. I’m around Werewolves all the time, too.”

“Try growing up with them,” he muttered angrily. “You’re always the fragile one. ‘No, Merrak, you can’t jump off the roof into the pool, what if you hurt yourself?’ ‘No, Merrak, you can’t go out hunting with the others, it’s not safe.’ ‘No, Merrak, you’re only human.’ As if being human makes me lesser than them,” he spat. “Mom is going to see my face and go all Alpha on the kid’s parents, because she can’t trust that I showed them not to mess with me. She has to be sure they know not to mess with me.”

Stiles cocked an eyebrow at him. “Dude, are you serious?”

“What?” Merrak snapped, cutting a sharp eye in his direction.

The laugh slid up his throat without his consent and he shook his head, slapping Merrak on the shoulder. “Dude, that has nothing to do with you being human, you know that, right? That’s your mom being a mom. It’s what moms do. They worry, they protect. She doesn’t say no to you or go after people who hurt you because she’s an Alpha Werewolf, she does it because she’s your mom, and she’s pissed. I mean, my mom—” Stiles couldn’t help but cut himself off, even now, after years, feeling the stab of pain slice through him at the mere mention.

To his credit, Merrak didn’t say anything. He just waited to see if Stiles would continue, and he forced himself to.
“My mom was like that, too.” Deciding it would be safer to move on to another mom, he added, “And Scott’s mom is still like that. Scott’s twenty-one, and a Werewolf, and she still freaks at him or wants to start a fight with anyone who hurts him.”

“Does she know he’s a Werewolf?” Merrak asked with a slight frown.

“Yeah, it was—well, things happened, and it was getting harder and harder to explain why he kept coming home with ripped, bloody clothes but no injuries. In the end, we kind of ran out of options. We don’t keep her in the loop as much as I’m sure she’d like, but she knows about the pack and that everyone is something.”

Merrak watched him for a moment. “But not you.”

“Not me,” Stiles agreed.

“She thinks you are,” Merrak said, reading between the lines, “because if she knew you weren’t, she would tell your dad.”

He nodded once, smiling a little at Merrak. “You’re pretty smart. You know, for a human.”

The look he got for that could’ve curdled milk, but Stiles just laughed and was saved from bodily harm by a car pulling up. He got to his feet so he could open the door, even though Michael was halfway up the drive by the time he did so.

He didn’t seem worried. Maybe tired, like he was anticipating bad news, and wasn’t sure how much trouble it was going to bring him in the near future. Stiles moved aside so he could enter the house, then motioned the living room while shutting the door.

Michael entered before Stiles did and let out a sharp breath, then moved quickly to the couch.

“What happened?” he demanded, voice hard in contrast to the gentle fingers pulling the peas away from Merrak’s eye.

“Guess rich pretty boys can fight after all,” was Merrak’s response.

The sigh that elicited from Michael suggested this wasn’t the first time Merrak had started fights.

“Merrak, we talked about this.”

“That was New York. You didn’t say anything when we got here.”

“It was implied,” Michael insisted, cradling his son’s face and inspecting the injuries. “Your mother will not be happy.”

“Must suck having a human for a kid.”

“Merrak,” Michael started, sighing again, but Stiles rolled his eyes and piped in.

“You really think you being human bothers her?” Stiles asked, feeling like Merrak probably had a bigger chip on his shoulder than Jackson did. “She married your dad, and he’s human. Her heir’s mate is human. Why are you acting like her having a human son is an abomination?” He raised his eyebrows. “Did it occur to you at all that she had five kids, and only stopped after you? I mean, she could’ve stopped at Derek. He’s the Alpha heir, right? Boom, done, no need for more kids. But she still had three more, and the last one she stopped on happened to be human. You think it makes you less in her eyes because you’re human? Because from where I’m standing, you seem like her favourite, and that’s saying a lot considering Derek’s her heir.”
“The Hale line has never had a human before,” Merrak said dryly. “Don’t act like you have any idea what you’re talking about.”

“So what?” Stiles demanded. “Just makes you special. Dude, do you realize how badass you are? You’re a human living in a house of Werewolves. And half the time, you can get them to do what you want. I’ve seen how you and Cora interact, she’d basically murder a man if you asked her to. The others act like you’re the greatest gift they never asked for, even though you probably drive them crazy with that attitude. Maybe stop feeling inferior for being human and start capitalizing on the fact that you mean the world to your family because you’re human. It takes a lot to grow up with Werewolves and survive. I can attest to that, given I’ve only done it for five years, and I don’t even know how I’m still sane. You’re sixteen, and have been dealing with their Werewolf bullshit your entire life. Give yourself a bit more credit.”

Merrak stared at him for a long while, then turned to glance at his father. “He is definitely too good for Derek, can we please convince him to marry Cora?”

Michael let out a short laugh, shaking his head, then leaned forward to kiss his son’s forehead, despite the cry of disgust and Merrak’s hands shoving at his chest.

“Come on, let’s get you home and talk your mother down from suing the school.” He ruffled his son’s hair while climbing to his feet. “If you’re lucky, maybe you can convince one of your siblings to steal your pain.”

“Isn’t it more watching them fight over who gets the honour to do it?” Stiles asked jokingly. Merrak seemed a little pleased to hear that, and Stiles couldn’t help but wonder how hard it must be on his psyche to constantly feel inferior to his siblings. He probably thought he’d never live up to anyone’s expectations because he was born human, but Stiles never let that stop him. So his friends were badass, so what? They’d all be dead without him, and they all knew it. Merrak had his own badass human quality, he just hadn’t found it yet.

“Thanks for the peas,” Merrak said, dropping the bag into Stiles’ hand while passing him. “And congrats on finally getting your head out of your ass.”

“What?” Stiles asked, even as Michael sighed his name in exasperation.

Merrak just grinned, the smile all teeth, and then opened the front door, preceding his father out of the house. Michael turned to nod a thanks to him, then shut the door.

Stiles stood where he was for a few seconds, listening to the car doors open and shut outside, then drive away, the sound of the engine disappearing down the street.

He stared down at the bag of peas in his hand, some smears of blood on it—likely from Merrak’s nose—and then sighed, shaking his head.

“That family is so, so weird,” he insisted to nobody, then turned to clean the bag off so he could put it back into the freezer.

He forgot about having Derek’s phone number.

[Stiles]
Hey Derek
[Stiles]
It’s me
[Stiles]
I’m ashamed of myself for almost starting this like a bad movie.

[Stiles]
“Hey Derek, it’s me. Uh, Stiles.”

[Stiles]
Sorry

[Stiles]
It is me though >.>

[Stiles]
...

[Stiles]
Stiles

Stiles stared down at his messages, feeling like a complete idiot. He didn’t know what he was thinking, why he’d bothered to point out how cliche’d he’d started to be. This was ridiculous, Derek was probably on the phone with his mother demanding to know how to un-mate with Stiles.

Was that a thing? Could Derek do that? Probably not, considering all the conversation he’d had with the various members of the Hale family, but if it could be a thing, now was the moment Derek would do it!

Then again, he’d probably deserve it. Not only for his words, but for how long it had taken him to remember he had Derek’s number. Almost two days. Two days! Derek had probably started giving up hope Stiles was ever going to text or call him, but to be fair, it was his family’s fault.

Merrak had shown up all beaten up and broody, then once he’d left Scott had shown up to rant at Stiles some more over the injustice of everything and how he refused to bow down to someone else just because they told him that was how things were.

“What if they’re making up the rules, Stiles?!” Scott had demanded. “They could be! We don’t know! What if this is all a plan to get into your pants?!”

Really, it was sweet Scott thought a pack of Werewolves would orchestrate an entire history and explanation to things just so that Derek could get some sweet, sweet Stilinski ass, but unrealistic.

As much as his ego liked it.

After that, it’d been dinner with his dad, then he’d gone out to see a movie with Cora. The next day had been spent almost entirely with Merrak, because he’d skipped school and somehow ended up at Stiles’ house again, and Stiles had spent a majority of the day insisting he couldn’t jeopardize his education because he was mad people kept calling him a rich pretty boy.

“You are a rich pretty boy!” Stiles had argued vehemently, because all the Hales were fucking stunning and life just wasn’t damn fair.

When he’d finally managed to get Merrak out of his house before anyone found out he’d spent his entire day skipping class with Stiles, Talia had shown up and Stiles had been ready to beg for forgiveness for not getting Merrak back at school, but she didn’t even mention him. She just said the change was hard on all of them, and asked him questions about how Jackson was doing, and whether or not he thought Scott would ever come around. Not prying, just wondering, like we was trying to figure out a training regimen of some kind.

By the time Stiles remembered he had Derek’s phone number, he was almost scared to text it, it
had been so long. He didn’t want Derek to think he’d changed his mind about texting him, he just legitimately hadn’t gotten around to it.

And now, here he sat, with a few websites open to learn about various types of plants in case he ever took up horticulture—but also to see what was deadly to dogs because hey, who knew? If it hurt Fido, maybe it hurt wolves, too. Not that Stiles was looking to hurt wolves, exactly, but there had been a lot of them around lately to give him gifts, and while things seemed to be going well so far, one could never be too careful.

He was staring at the screen, eyes glazing over slightly, when his phone buzzed and he almost sent it flying off his desk in his haste to grab at it. Once he closed his hand around it, he gave himself a rough shake.

“Why are you acting weird? It’s just a text message! Might not even be from him!”

Hilarious that he thought that, because it most assuredly was from Derek.

[Derek]
cora mentioned you’d asked for it
[Derek]
sorry i... have yours...
[Derek]
i just figured i shouldn’t text you unless you wanted me to

Well, at least he was being honest. Honesty was good, given Stiles was interested in trying to make friendly. Sure, they hung out around other people now, but he still didn’t really know Derek, and this seemed like the easiest way to change that.

[Stiles]
Soooooooooooo... how’s work? How’re things? Enjoying your night?

[Derek]
not particularly
[Derek]
kind of boring
[Derek]
there was more crime in one city block of NY than all of BH

Stiles let out a small laugh, nodding in understanding and beginning to text back. He didn’t really know what he wanted to say to Derek, just that he wanted to get to know him a little bit, and considering he was bored right now, it seemed like a good opportunity to grill him for information about himself.

It was actually surprisingly easy speaking to Derek like this. When he wasn’t staring at him unnervingly, and just being a normal person, he was actually kind of adorable. He had a ridiculously terrible sense of humour, no concept of memes, and didn’t seem to watch much television.

Stiles expected them to run out of things to talk about and move inevitably into Werewolf business, but every time Stiles couldn’t think of a topic, Derek jumped in with one. It was actually really nice, being able to talk about something other than Supernatural bullshit. His entire life was overrun with Supernatural stuff, having a fairly lengthy conversation without it coming up was a bit of a relief, if he was honest.
When the time began to creep past midnight, Stiles decided he had to call it a night. He told Derek he was heading to shower and to have a good rest of his shift. By the time he was out and ready for bed, he’d gotten his second wind and was just staring at the ceiling for close to an hour before giving up and grabbing his phone again.

[Stiles]
How disastrous do you think a dinner with you and your siblings along with my pack would be?

[Derek]
i thought you were sleeping

[Stiles]
Couldn’t, so my brain started working.

[Stiles]
I was thinking maybe we could grab dinner together, as a group. Without the adults.

[Stiles]
I could probably bully Scott into it

[Stiles]
He refuses to be anywhere near you guys

[Stiles]
Just figured it might help to have a dinner together

[Derek]
i’m sure my siblings will be all for it

[Derek]
Tho getting Laura and I off at the same time is near impossible

[Stiles]
Guess you can sit out then :P

[Derek]
:(

[Stiles]
Did you seriously just do a sad face?

[Stiles]
You’re hilarious

[Stiles]
We’ll try and make it work, and if we can’t, Laura can come next time :)

[Derek]
sure :)

[Derek]
just don’t cut out merrak

[Derek]
he thinks you’re the best thing to ever have happened to our family

[Stiles]
Don’t worry, he’s my favourite :P

[Derek]
I’ll be sure to let Cora know
Stiles laughed, but didn’t comment on it, instead telling Derek he was going to try to sleep once more and bidding him goodnight for the second time before setting his phone back down. He stared up at his ceiling some more, trying to figure out how to spin this. Jackson and the Hales seemed to be on pretty good terms, now. He and Eric were getting along ever since Eric threatened to stab him for threatening Derek. It was like some weird nerd/jock solidarity or something, and Stiles had noticed both Jackson and the Hales had stopped growling whenever one or the other was too close to Stiles.

In a way, he felt like Jackson had already been sucked into the pack in all ways except officially. He was like another wolf in their pack, they barely even acknowledged that he wasn’t one of theirs. Before long, Jackson wouldn’t listen to Scott anymore, not with a real Alpha to follow.

Lydia, while around less, seemed to like them. She and Laura had similar taste in fashion, and Stiles actually saw them out and about every now and then, which meant Lydia was entirely on board with joining the Hale pack.

Kira was desperate to smooth things over between herself and her mother, while also keeping hold of her stubborn boyfriend. She didn’t care where she fit in, she just didn’t want to have to pick sides.

Scott was the problem. Convincing the others to go out for dinner and maybe some bowling would be easy, it was Scott that would be the hardest to pin down. He still bitched about Talia trying to steal his territory and his pack, even though Stiles kept telling him it didn’t work that way. This was Talia’s land first, this entire territory belonged to the Hales, not only as wolves, but as humans, too. They were on Hale land, and if Scott wasn’t careful, he might get kicked off it.

He didn’t think Talia would ever do something like that, but Cora hadn’t been subtle lately about her dislike of him and his attitude, and Laura had expressed displeasure with him a few times whenever he dropped by the hospital to visit his mother. They were the two most influential people around Derek barring his mother, and if they convinced Derek Scott was becoming a problem, well, he didn’t honestly think Talia would intervene if Derek became Alpha and chased Scott out.

After all, an Alpha’s word was law, or so he’d been told. It was very difficult for members of a pack to go against their Alpha and, most of the time, they didn’t even try. Unless an Alpha was cruel or unjust, most packs followed with an almost blind loyalty, and with what little Stiles knew of Talia, he could see why that was. She truly was a force to be reckoned with.

Rolling over and closing his eyes, he decided he’d think on it more later, when he was well-rested and had everyone’s schedules. He could do this, have a big joint-pack event. He could totally do this.

It would be great.

It was not great.

Stiles had been cautiously optimistic when he’d walked into the burger joint. Scott had been surprisingly easy to convince to come along, and maybe that should’ve been his first hint that something dangerous was forthcoming. But he’d chosen to ignore it in hopes that this meant good things! Maybe Scott was calming down, and willing to meet in the middle.

Optimism. Stiles was foolish enough to have optimism.

He, Scott and Kira arrived first, Stiles having called ahead to ensure they could accommodate such
a big group, and they were led to a table near the far back. Kira and Scott took the end of the booth while Stiles sat down in one of the chairs opposite them, leaving one seat open on either side of him.

Cora was the next to arrive with Merrak, and she looked fairly thrilled to be able to try and bring Scott over to their side. She started to take the seat on the end, beside Stiles and across from Kira, but Merrak forcefully shoved her away from both seats available on either side of Stiles and snapped that she hogged him often enough. Then he promptly sat down on Stiles’ left, slouched, crossed his arms, and scowled across the table at Scott like he smelled bad.

To her credit, Cora just slid into the booth on Scott’s other side, and Stiles winced at the way his friend shifted away like she smelled bad, arm tightening around Kira’s shoulders. Not a great start, but Cora just chattered away like she didn’t notice and Kira, bless her, helped move the conversation along so that some of the tension would ease.

It didn’t.

Scott was just getting more tense the longer he sat between the two girls, and when Jackson finally showed up, that only made things more tense because he hesitated while eying the empty chair beside Stiles, and then opted to sit on Merrak’s other side. Scott obviously knew who would end up on Stiles’ other side, and was proven right when Derek and Eric showed up moments later, Eric taking the seat across from Jackson beside his sister, and Derek pausing only for a second before catching Stiles’ eye.

When Stiles just offered him a smile, his shoulders relaxed ever so slightly and he moved to take the last seat available, putting him right across from Kira.

Scott was extremely displeased to have Derek beside his best friend and across from his girlfriend, but it was too late to shift everyone around, so he just glared angrily at Derek, who politely ignored him while leaning behind Stiles to ask his brother something.

“Where’s Lydia?” Kira asked loudly when Scott opened his mouth, likely to say something rude.

“She had a date,” Stiles blurted out quickly. “Told us to go on without her. Laura’s working, too, so we’re down two. It was the best I could do on such short notice.”

“Good enough,” Scott hissed, leaning forward and glaring at Derek. “Four out of five is more than enough.”

“Scott—” Kira started, but Derek just held a hand out to her, staring at the other Werewolf steadily.

“You’ve obviously got a lot on your mind, so why don’t you share it with us?” Derek asked, voice pleasant but expression hard.

“Could we order?” Stiles asked loudly, looking around urgently for the wait staff. “Please? Immediately?”

“You have no right coming in here and trying to take what doesn’t belong to you,” Scott snapped viciously, effectively nullifying Stiles’ attempt to avoid this blowout. “I was here first.”

“Actually, the Hales have been on this land since before your ancestors were a thought, so pretty sure that’s not true,” Cora piped in, offering Derek a shrug when he cut a sharp look her way for interfering.

“We’re not taking what doesn’t belong to us,” Derek informed Scott, looking back at him. “This is
Hale land. We have a right to be here.”

“And a right to take over my pack?” Scott bit out.

“You pack deciding to come to us is outside of our control. We offered assistance and guidance, and our Alpha was more than willing to take anyone who wanted to join us in.”

“You bullied them,” Scott snapped. “You got Stiles all worked up about that mate bullshit, your mom put stupid theories in Jackson’s head about Stiles saving us, and you tricked Lydia into joining you by claiming to know more about what she was.”

Stiles turned to give Jackson an annoyed look, since he’d specifically told him not to tell Scott about Stiles being the real leader of their pack. Jackson just shrugged, unconcerned. Asshole. He just wanted to stir the damn pot.

“I understand you’re upset—”

“Don’t fucking patronize me,” Scott snapped. “Just stay away from my things!”

Stiles opened his mouth to stop this before it got any more heated, seeing Derek tense beside him, but surprisingly it was Merrak who got to his feet and slammed one loud hand on the table right in front of Scott’s plate. The area around them went quiet, but Merrak lowered his voice so much that Stiles doubted anyone but the wolves would be able to hear him.

“First of all,” Merrak said darkly, “people aren’t things, and you treating them like they’re belongings is the main reason they’re probably rushing off to a better alternative than you. Secondly,” his voice darkened even further, “you cannot speak to Derek like that.”

“I can speak to him however I want,” Scott snapped.

“You have no idea who he is,” Merrak snarled, sounding impressively wolfish for a human.

“Merrak,” Eric warned. “Remember what mom said.”

“Fuck what mom said.” Merrak bared his teeth at Scott, the action so wolf-like that for a moment, Stiles forgot he was human. He could only assume growing up with four Werewolf siblings rubbed off. “You need to learn your place. You are either a Beta in the Hale pack, or you are a packless Omega and your mind will deteriorate. I don’t care if you believe in the ‘mate bullshit’ or not. I don’t care if you think everything we’re saying is made up. I do not care. You speak to Derek like that, and you are going to find yourself on the wrong end of a blade really fucking quickly.”

“Merrak,” Derek said sharply. “That’s enough.”

The reaction was instantaneous. Stiles saw every single person at the table snap straight, Merrak included despite being human. Scott looked murderous, but even he seemed affected by whatever control had come out in Derek’s voice, because nobody at the table said another word.

Stiles felt extremely uncomfortable, because he was the only person who hadn’t snapped to attention, still slouched in his seat and silently waving goodbye to a peaceful evening. He forced himself to sit up straighter, just so he wasn’t the odd man out, but no one was even looking at him.
All eyes were on Derek.

“Stiles went through a lot of trouble to get us all together,” Derek said, voice even but expression hard. “You don’t have to like us, and you don’t have to believe us, but you will respect that we are here and we aren’t going anywhere. You want to hate me, that’s fine, hate me all you want. But what you won’t do is treat the people around you as your things.” He bared his teeth at Scott, and Stiles could see him struggling not to tilt his head in submission. It was a near thing, but he managed to resist. “Stiles is not a thing. Jackson and Lydia and Kira are not things. They are your friends, and your pack. And if you don’t treat them with respect, your loss of them is not my fault, it’s yours.” He snatched up a menu and thrust it at Scott. “Now shut up and figure out your order. We’re going to get through this meal like adults, and once it’s over, we can go our separate ways.”

Scott looked livid, even as his hand closed around the edge of the menu pushed into his chest. His jaw worked for a few seconds, likely trying to find something scathing to say before giving up—or being forced into silence, Stiles wasn’t sure—and looking down.

The second he did, someone appeared at Derek’s elbow.

“Hi there!”

All eyes snapped to the server, who looked startled and took an unconscious step back.

“Uh, I’m... Matt?” He motioned his nametag slowly, gaze shifting between all the glares levelled at him. “I’m your server for the evening?”

“Matt! Thank you for coming by! How’s your night going? How’re you doing? Busy?” Stiles demanded, trying desperately for some sense of normalcy. He just wanted everyone to get along, it wasn’t like this was Werewolves versus Vampires, for fuck’s sake. They were all on the same damn side of the Supernatural coin, couldn’t they just get along?!

“Uh—fine?” Matt looked like he was considering asking someone to swap tables with him. “I was—drinks? Anyone want a drink?”

“Yes!” Stiles hastily grabbed a menu and flipped it over to check out the drinks on the back. “Drinks would be amazing. I’ll get a, uh, you know, the biggest of anything alcoholic you’ve got.”

“We don’t have alcohol here.”

“Then the biggest chocolate milkshake you’ve got,” he amended. “Whatever gets me high on sugar. Feel free to be super liberal with the whipped cream.”

“Okay...” Matt eyed him worriedly, jotting his order down, then hesitantly moved on to Kira, who was the only other person at the table who wasn’t glaring at him like he’d interrupted something important.

Which he hadn’t. Guy was just doing his job. And the fight was over anyway. Everything was over. Like the plans he’d had for a good night. Dust in the wind, at this point.

Once the drink orders were in, everyone went silent while perusing the menu, deciding on their food. Kira was the first to tentatively break it, asking Cora a question over Scott, who answered like the fight between the two boys hadn’t even happened. Merrak just slouched angrily in his seat, arms crossed and refusing to speak to anyone, and Jackson and Eric started up an easy banter that Stiles was relatively used to now that they spent more time together at the Hale house.

Scott was still staring angrily down at his menu, so that left Derek on Stiles’ right. Not that he had
a problem speaking to Derek, he just knew Scott would see it as a betrayal. But really, there was no ‘us versus them’ here! It was all one big happy family and Scott was the one dragging his damn heels.

Turning to Derek, Stiles asked, “How was work?”

As predicted, Scott’s head shot up, expression betrayed, but he didn’t say anything and Stiles ignored him as best he could. Derek was also polite enough not to comment, eyes on Stiles when he nodded once, setting his menu down.

“Fine. Little slow, but the days always are. More happens at night. Drunk drivers, break-ins, that sort of thing. Makes things a little bit more exciting, but still nowhere near as exciting as New York.”

“You like being a cop?” Stiles asked curiously. “Cora says you originally went to school to be an architect.”

“Yeah,” Derek said with a laugh.

Stiles decided it was a nice laugh. He would like to see that laugh on his face more often.

“I like the idea of making something. Of looking down at a blank piece of paper and creating something out of nothing. It’s... empowering. Reminds me that everything has the potential to turn into something else.”

“But you became a cop,” Stiles prompted.

Derek crossed his arms, leaning back in his chair and letting out a small sigh. “My mother thought I needed an outlet after I graduated university. Set me up at the police academy to work off some aggression. I didn’t actually think it would stick, but I’m pretty good at it.”

“Dad says he wishes he had two of you,” Stiles admitted with a grin. “But he’d rather ten of Parrish.”

“Ouch,” Derek said with a half-smile. “And here I thought your dad didn’t play favourites.”

“Hey, you’re up there,” Stiles insisted. “Second tier to Parrish ain’t half bad.”

“Probably wouldn’t be up there if the sheriff knew you were stalking his son,” Scott muttered.

Before Derek could say anything, Stiles turned to him sharply. “Do you mind? We’re trying to have a conversation, here.”

“Right, of course.” Scott glared at him. “Stockholm syndrome, is that it? Or do you just think he’s extra pretty and don’t care that you were terrified he was trying to murder you a few months ago?”

“Says the guy who dated an Argent and almost got all of us killed,” Stiles snapped back.

The words were out before he could suck them back in. The moment he said them, he wished he couldn’t take them back, because he knew the second they left his mouth what expression Scott’s face would take. And he was right.

Scott looked like he’d slapped him, and then his face immediately hardened into something unfriendly. Stiles winced, because he’d promised he wouldn’t hold Scott’s feelings for Allison against him, and he’d just done so in front of another Werewolf’s pack.
It was like the ultimate betrayal.

And it wasn’t like Scott didn’t know. He was well aware of how his actions had almost cost both of them, along with Jackson and Lydia, their lives. How he was so gone for Allison, so infatuated, that he hadn’t seen what was right in front of him. How Stiles had told him, over and over again, that Allison’s family were Hunters, that they were dangerous, and he just hadn’t cared.

In the end, it was only Chris and Victoria realizing what was happening wasn’t right that saved them. Scott’s girlfriend hadn’t played a hand in their near-deaths, but she hadn’t helped them, either. It was probably why she’d fled from Beacon Hills the second she was able to, not wanting to be reminded of how her inaction had almost cost innocent people their lives.

Stiles felt bad for bringing it up, for shoving that into Scott’s face when his friend knew he’d fucked up, but if anything, he wished it would help him understand that this wasn’t a divide. This didn’t have to be so hostile between them. They could all be one huge pack, it would be safer, more convenient, even.

They could all focus on their schoolwork, try and graduate without killing themselves from sleep deprivation and the occasional monster attack. Sure, Scott wouldn’t be in charge anymore, but honestly, did he really want to be? Everything that went wrong in town was like a heavy weight on his shoulders, threatening to crush him. Who wouldn’t jump at the chance to pass that burden off on someone else?

Scott, apparently.

Letting out a sigh, Stiles rubbed at his face and got to his feet, motioning the door. “Can we talk?”

For a second, he thought Scott was going to give him the cold shoulder, spend the rest of the evening silent, and then leave. Thankfully, he pulled his arm away from around Kira’s shoulders and she slid out of the booth so he could exit.

Scott led the way to the door, Stiles following behind him. He could feel Jackson’s eyes on them, but thankfully nobody else got up to follow. They headed outside, and Stiles let Scott lead them away until he was satisfied they wouldn’t be overheard.

“That wasn’t my fault,” Scott said immediately when they stopped. “What happened with Allison—it wasn’t my fault.”

“I’m not here to argue that with you,” Stiles insisted, because Lord knew they’d argued it to death. “I’m just out here to ask you to try.”

“They—”

“Scott,” he said pleadingly, managing to shut him up with his name alone. “This is not easy for any of us. I have had to come to terms with a lot over the past few months, it’s not like this has been a cakewalk for me. Jackson didn’t want anything to do with them, either, but now he’s over at the Hale house more often than I am. Lydia just wants to understand, and Kira wants her mom. Scott, none of us are abandoning you. None of us are choosing them over you. You have to recognize that things have changed. That he knew things had changed. “You know that, right? That things are different now?”

“I don’t want to lose you,” Scott insisted miserably, bringing out the big guns—namely, the puppy dog eyes. “Stiles, it’s always been you and me.”
“And that hasn’t changed,” he insisted, choosing not to mention that Scott had ditched him numerous times at the prospect of a new girlfriend. He wasn’t willing to start another fight, and he didn’t take it personally. Girls were great, it was why he batted for both teams. “Scott, what’s so hard about giving up control? We’re just kids, man. I’m barely legal enough to drink, and I have seen a lot of shit in my life. What’s so wrong about passing the reins to someone more experienced and just... learning? Just growing into what we are and moving forward from there?”

“Because what if something happens to you?” Scott blurted out. “Or to Kira? Or Lydia? What if I pass the power over, stand down, submit, and they turn around and betray us?” Scott looked desperate again. “Stiles, it’s always been us. We’ve always been safe. We protect each other. When did that change?”

“When we couldn’t anymore,” Stiles admitted softly.

Scott’s head snapped back at that, a wounded sound escaping him, but Stiles really needed him to understand.

“How do you know why Jackson came with me? That day where he decided he wanted to see what Talia had to say? Do you know what made him grit his teeth and admit he wasn’t good enough?” When Scott said nothing, Stiles continued unprompted. “Me. We went out, something happened, and he couldn’t protect me. He didn’t know enough about himself to protect me, and it bothered him more than trusting the Hales did. We are flying blind here, Scott. I research, and I try and find things out, but at the end of the day, I’m just a sarcastic twenty-one year old with a bat. The fact that I’m still alive is actually kind of a miracle.”

Scott winced, but didn’t argue. It was true, after all. Every day Stiles woke up not dead living in Beacon Hills was kind of a win for him.

He shifted a step forward, putting both hands on Scott’s shoulders and giving him a small shake.

“You don’t have to like them. You don’t have to join them. Just—be civil. Cora’s my friend, and Merrak and Eric are both really great. And Derek... well, I don’t know where he sits yet, but he’s trying, so I’m trying in return. It’s only fair. And Talia has been nothing but supportive. She just wants the chance to talk to you. Stop cutting her off at the knees when all she wants to do is help.”

Scott still said nothing, but he looked a little... defeated. Like he was finally starting to recognize that the rest of his pack had already accepted the Hales as their new leaders, and he was the odd one out. That if he didn’t come now, while he still had the chance, they might cut him out later and he’d be separated from everyone he cared about.

He didn’t say any of this, of course, but Stiles had known Scott for a long time. It was easy to read in the lines of his face.

“I’m hungry,” Scott said instead, nodding towards the door. “Can we go eat?”

“Sure thing, buddy.” Stiles smiled at him, wrapping an arm around his shoulders and pulling him into a sideways hug while walking them back to the door. “I’ll even pay for you. My treat tonight, for being such a good sport.”

Scott scoffed and Stiles just grinned.

“The human brother’s a little intense,” Scott commented while they approached the door.

“Yeah, he’s got a bit of an attitude problem. Comes with being the only human kid in the house, I guess.” Stiles let Scott go to open the door, but before he could, Scott stopped him, pitching his
voice lower.

“What did he mean, anyway?”

“Mean?”

“About Derek. Not to speak to him like that. ‘Knowing my place,’ or whatever.”

Stiles shrugged. “Fuck if I know.” He pulled open the door and the two of them headed back inside.

Baby steps. It was all about baby steps.

“If we miss the previews because your fat ass couldn’t decide on what it needed to expand, I’m going to force-feed you your own liver.”

“Have your insults always been this colourful, or did you start taking asshole lessons?” Stiles asked absently, still debating between the Milk Duds and the M&Ms. On the one hand, candy-coated chocolate. On the other, chocolate-coated caramel.

Decisions, decisions.

“Just hurry up and pick something,” Jackson snapped, irritated.

Stiles ignored his sour mood, mostly because he was used to it, but also because he knew Jackson was just angry and needed an outlet. Stiles was the easiest person to take his anger out on, and once he got over how pissed he was, he’d feel better.

They hadn’t had plans set for the day, but Jackson had shown up while Stiles was getting ready for a productive day working on the ass-groove in his couch while he sat around doing literally nothing. Apparently he’d gone to see Talia so he could get some more Werewolf lessons under his belt while summer was still in full swing, only to be turned away at the door by Michael with a soft smile and an apology.

She was busy, Michael had said. Jackson had taken one look at the motorbike parked by Cora’s Mustang and stomped away. He never was good at being second to Scott, but to be fair, Jackson was leagues ahead of him right now.

And Stiles doubted Scott had gone over to talk Werewolf powers. It was more likely he was trying to hash things out, make sure he didn’t lose all his friends by consistently pushing the Hales away.

Whatever worked. Stiles just wanted everyone to get along. And, if things went well with Talia today, maybe they could put all of this behind them. Jackson was pretty much part of the Hale pack already, keeping just a toe out of it out of respect for Scott—as little respect as he held for him, anyway.

They hadn’t seen much of Lydia lately, and Stiles suspected it was because she’d fully committed to being in the Hale pack and didn’t know how to face the rest of them.

Kira was hanging on by a thread for Scott’s sake, and Stiles himself was basically in the pack. If Scott finally got his head out of his ass, and allowed the adults to do all the heavy lifting, then they’d all be in the pack together. It’d be bigger than ever, they’d have less responsibility, and Stiles would probably manage to get through his final year of university with a full night’s sleep on a daily basis.
He was kind of excited.

“Stiles, I swear to God!” Jackson snarled.

Rolling his eyes and moving forward, Stiles just opted for both. He couldn’t decide, and really, it wouldn’t hurt. He didn’t often get to eat junk anyway, what with his dad and all, so having two chocolate treats was a hard-earned reward for the shit he’d been going through.

Leaning forward on the counter, he made friendly with the cashier, mostly because being polite helped brighten their day even one percent. When they went off to grab his treats, as well as a small popcorn, Stiles let out a shout when the back of his head was whacked, hard.

“Ow! What the fuck?!” he demanded angrily, rubbing at it.

Jackson just glared at him and held up his phone, where an atrocius picture of Stiles flashed back at him, showing he was currently calling him.

Fishing his own phone out of his pocket around something hard and made of glass also in there, he saw that it was, in fact, currently calling out to Jackson. He hung up and sighed, shoving it back into his pocket. He’d really have to get that looked into, he literally had no idea why his phone kept calling Jackson whenever it pleased.

“Why is it always me, anyway?” Jackson asked while Stiles pulled his wallet out, the cashier returning. “Shouldn’t it be McCall?”

Stiles shrugged. “I call and text you more. I guess you’re always at the top of the list, so when I crotch-dial, it goes for whoever’s on top.”

Jackson’s smirk had Stiles rolling his eyes, ignoring him while he paid for his food, though a little relieved Jackson seemed to be in a better mood than even five minutes ago.

They moved away from the concession, Stiles checking his ticket for the theatre number—this one didn’t have assigned seating, which made sense considering how long the movie’d been out—when someone jumped on his back and he nearly dropped his popcorn and chocolates.

“Fancy meeting you here,” Cora said, still clinging to him. “Oh, popcorn.” She grabbed a handful and shoved it into her mouth, Stiles shrugging her off with an affronted noise at the theft.

He turned to glare at her, and saw Derek standing behind her, looking uncomfortable.

“That popcorn won’t be enough for all of us. Come on, Jack. Let’s buy some popcorn.”

“Don’t call me Jack!” Jackson snapped at her, but followed after her anyway while she practically skipped to the concession. Stiles would’ve asked how she knew they were even going to the same movie, but considering what was currently out, this was pretty much the only one worth seeing.

“I didn’t follow you,” Derek blurted out before Stiles could open his mouth to ask how his day was going.

“What?” he asked instead.

“I didn’t follow you,” he repeated. “I had no idea you were here. Mom told us all to make ourselves scarce, and Cora wanted to see a movie. We only just got here, I didn’t know you were here.”
Stiles couldn’t help but smile at how alarmed Derek looked, like he worried that Stiles thought he’d gone back to stalking him from the shadows. He reached out to lightly punch him in the arm, hand still closed around the M&Ms and Milk Duds.

“I know. You’ve been doing really good lately. Haven’t seen you hanging around. Or you’ve been better at hiding,” Stiles insisted with a small laugh.

Derek shook his head, clearly uninterested in joking around. “I haven’t followed you in a while. Not since we had lunch that one time, actually. I think—you’re right. Having you around more has been... comforting.” Derek winced, like it wasn’t what he’d meant to say, exactly, but it was what came out. “I guess I just needed to be near you to stop obsessing.”

“Makes sense,” Stiles argued, nodding his head towards their theatre. “Should we get seats? When Cora and Jackson tear the place apart, I don’t want to be caught up in that and get escorted out.”

“Agreed.” Derek smiled and moved to walk beside him while they headed for the theatre.

It was mostly empty, a few scattered groups here and there. Derek motioned for Stiles to take his pick and he went up halfway then down to the centre of the aisle, plopping down in the exact perfect spot. Derek took the seat beside him without a word, and Stiles couldn’t help but laugh to himself over the battle between Jackson and Cora on his other side.

Thankfully, when the other two finally showed up—Jackson with his own popcorn now, for some reason—Jackson snarled at Cora that she hadn’t been invited and she conceded Stiles’ other side to him, falling down beside her brother with an annoyed sigh.

“Stiles, you really are the Bella of this Twilight movie,” she commented.

“Screw you, I am a solid Jacob!” Stiles insisted heatedly.

“Why do you guys keep referencing Twilight?” Derek asked, grabbing a handful of popcorn from Cora’s bag and using his other hand to pop one piece into his mouth at a time. Stiles assumed they generally shared, because she didn’t look angered or surprised by the theft.

“Apparently Stilinski thinks his life is a Twilight movie,” Jackson informed him. “Keeps comparing things about it with the series.”

“Huh. Is it any good?” Derek asked.

“No,” Stiles insisted heatedly, Cora laughing and patting her brother’s shoulder.

“Oh honey. No. Don’t do that to yourself. Love yourself a little.”

Derek just shrugged. “You all know it, I just figured it’d be good.”

“Lydia,” Stiles said, defeated.

“Ditto,” Jackson admitted.

“Honestly, morbid curiosity.” Cora shrugged. “The first book was okay, but the second totally put me off when Bella just shut down and went into a depressive state because her boyfriend dumped her.” She rolled her eyes. “What a good, solid message to send to young, impressionable girls everywhere. ‘If your boyfriend leaves you, completely shut down.’ What a load of shit.” She shoved some popcorn in her mouth. “If your boyfriend leaves you, date his hot sister.”
Stiles couldn’t help the sharp laugh that escaped him at that and Cora grinned, waggling her eyebrows. Derek was forced to listen to the two of them discuss the merits of bisexuality while they spoke over him, their words coming out so fast he didn’t even have the opportunity to provide any input. When the lights dimmed, the pre-show ending so the commercials and trailers could start, Stiles heard him mutter a quiet thanks to the movie Gods for sparing him listening to them.

The movie was good, if a little long, and halfway through Stiles ended up sharing his Milk Duds with Derek. He hadn’t planned on it, but when he’d opened the box, Derek had held out his hand. Stiles had just stared at him, Derek staring back, and when the Werewolf raised his eyebrows expectantly, he gave up and dumped half the box into his hand.

To be fair, he also had the M&Ms, though Derek helped himself to those, as well.

Stiles found he liked this Derek. The one he’d been seeing the past few weeks. The one he texted. The one who wasn’t out of control and following him around, breaking into his room, sitting in his Jeep inhaling his scent.

He still hadn’t asked if Derek jerked off in his Jeep, but it was so tempting.

Stiles actually felt like maybe everything was slowly falling into place. Scott was speaking to Talia, Jackson liked the Hales, Derek wasn’t being creepy anymore. Now if only he could stop the Alphas from showing up unexpectedly, that would be awesome.

They’d slowed down the past few days, but there were still enough of them for it to be annoying and concerning. Sure, Derek was nice and he liked him, but Stiles was still getting to know him. There would be no claiming of the Stiles in the near future.

Once the movie was over, the four of them walked out together, comparing favourite scenes and commenting on what they liked and didn’t like about the movie as a whole. When they reached the more crowded part of the mall, Cora grabbed at Jackson’s arm and tugged.

“Come on, let’s go shopping.”

“What makes you think I want to go shopping with you?” he demanded, even as he let himself get dragged off.

“Don’t wait up,” Cora called over her shoulder. “Jackson can drive me home.”

“Who says I’m agreeing to that, maybe I’ll just abandon you here,” was Jackson’s response, but they were quickly swallowed up by the summer crowd and out of sight.

“They’re not subtle,” Derek muttered.

Stiles just laughed and punched his shoulder lightly, then motioned towards the food court. He wasn’t hungry enough for a meal, but he kind of wanted some frozen yogurt, so he led the way to his favourite frozen desserts place and waited in line. He ended up buying one for Derek, too, and the two of them headed back towards the atrium with their treats, eating them out of their little cups in comfortable silence for a few minutes.

They made a huge loop around the atrium’s centre, around the large open space that allowed them to overlook the two bottom floors of the mall, and on their second time around, Stiles let out a soft hum.

“What?” Derek asked, sucking frozen raspberries off his plastic spoon.
“Nothing. I just noticed you and your mom do the same thing.”

“Meaning?”

“Walk in circles.”

“Oh.” Derek shrugged one shoulder. “I guess it’s kind of a wolf thing,” he admitted. “We like to patrol our perimeter, make sure everything’s safe. Not that I need to patrol in the mall, but I guess making a wide loop around its centre makes me feel more in control.”

“That’s fair.” Stiles scratched at the bottom of his empty cup with his spoon, sad his frozen treat was gone. “How do you think things are going with Scott and your mom?”

“Hopefully well,” Derek admitted, which kind of surprised Stiles. “Scott’s a good person, I have no trouble seeing that in him. He’s just scared of being replaced. Honestly, if I could switch with him, I would.”

Stiles’ eyebrows shot up. “You don’t want to be the Alpha?”

“There’s a lot of... pressure.” Derek winced. “Being who I am. Our family. It’s one thing being in this family, but being the next Alpha... I don’t know, it’s a lot to put on a person. Makes me kind of glad the next Alpha won’t be my own kid.”

“Why?” Stiles asked, confused.

He got a look for that and realized what Derek meant. Well, if nothing else, at least it answered Stiles’ terrified concern that he could get Werewolf pregnant or something. Knowing that wasn’t possible alleviated a lot of stress.

“But if you’re the next Alpha for the Hale line, and you don’t have kids, what does that mean for the line itself?”

“It’s never been a guarantee that the Alpha Hale would have the next Alpha. My mom was born from a regular Beta, it’s her aunt who was the Alpha of the pack.”

“What if her aunt had her own kid who had the Alpha gene?” Stiles asked.

“Doesn’t work that way,” Derek explained. “One per line.”

“So is it possible for it to die out?” Stiles said slowly, a little nervously. If he was Derek’s mate, and clearly unable to reproduce given his lack of specific body parts, what if Derek was the one who was meant to have an Alpha kid? What if the next Hale Alpha never came to be because Derek fell in love with a dude?

“No,” Derek said, squashing his irrational fears. “It’s... hard to explain. It’s a gene, of course, but I think the idea is that it has the potential to manifest in any of the descendants of the Hale line. The second I chose my mate, if the next Alpha was meant to be one of mine, the spark would recognize the bond with a human male and... migrate over to one of my siblings.” Derek frowned. “It’s kind of hard to explain. The spark is a bit like its own living, breathing organism, governed by magic instead of actual science.”

“Because Werewolves are so scientific,” Stiles teased.

Derek let out a small chuckle, taking Stiles’ empty cup and tossing it out along with his own when they passed a nearby trashcan. “Alpha sparks can transfer. It’s why I can become an Alpha while
my mother’s still alive. The potential for it exists in everyone, and in my generation, it chose me. A piece of it imbedded itself into me, making my eyes blue and choosing me as the next Alpha. When my siblings start having kids, once I have the spark, a piece of it will break off and choose the next worthy heir.”

“Do Merrak’s kids apply?” Stiles asked curiously. After all, Merrak was human, but born to a Werewolf mother. In theory, it should be possible, but he didn’t know enough about Werewolves to be sure.

“Potentially, but it would be rare. Humans born of Werewolves don’t often have their own Werewolf children. If he married a Werewolf himself, the chances would go up, but it’s not a guarantee. The fact that mom had four out of five Werewolves is actually impressive. Most people thought she’d only have, maximum, two.”

“Did she stop at Merrak because five was enough, or because she wanted a human kid?”

“I never asked,” Derek admitted. “But I think she wanted to have at least one human child. We’ve never had one in the Hale line before, and mom’s nothing if not unconventional. And it’s easier to stay attuned to the needs of humans when you have to care for one yourself. Dad doesn’t really qualify, given he’s a few years older than mom.”

“Your mom wants to stay attuned to the needs of humans?” Stiles frowned. “Why?”

“Because it’s who we are.” Derek shrugged. “We keep the balance. We’re the bridge between wolves and humans.”

“Because you’re Werewolves?”

Derek turned to him, and for a second, it looked like he was going to say something, but he stopped himself and shook his head. “A conversation for another time. You’ve had enough dropped on your shoulders, this can wait a bit longer.”

Stiles’ stomach dropped. “Oh man, is there more coming? I gotta tell you dude, I’m starting to get anxiety over all the shit I don’t know.”

“We’ll tell you,” Derek promised. “We will, it’s just... a lot. Mom wants us to be okay before that conversation happens.” He motioned between the two of them. Stiles didn’t necessarily like it, but he supposed he could understand. Depending on what the new piece of information was, having Stiles firmly planted within the pack as opposed to one foot out the door was probably a good idea.

“So what’s your favourite thing to do, anyway?” Stiles asked, deciding to move things out of the Supernatural and more into Derek. Hey, if he was going to be the guy’s mate, he had to know about him. Sure, they’d been exchanging texts and they saw one another more often than they used to, but any information was good information.

“What?” Derek raised an eyebrow.

“You know, for fun. What do you like doing?”

“Reading.”

“Really?” Stiles had a plethora of ideas as to what Derek liked to do in his free time. Reading wasn’t one of them.

“Something wrong with reading?”
“No, it just seems... I don’t know. You’re a cop. I figured you’d like all the manly man stuff. Hunting, football, barbecuing in the yard, that kind of thing.”

“I like those, too,” Derek admitted, beginning to steer them away from the atrium and towards a specific destination. “But reading is relaxing. I like being able to lose myself in a world that’s different from my own.”

Stiles hummed, feeling like that was fair. He recognized the direction they were going in a few seconds later, and figured Jackson really would have to drive Cora home. It worked out, Cora wasn’t allowed to drive, and Stiles hadn’t wanted to risk the Jeep, so they’d come in Jackson’s Porsche. Not that Jackson would be caught dead in Stiles’ Jeep anyway.

When they reached the underground lot, Derek led the way to the Camaro, sliding into the driver’s seat while Stiles hesitated a moment. It wasn’t about getting into the car with Derek, it was more guilt at ditching Jackson. Then again, Jackson had wandered away from him first, so he figured it was an open invitation for him to do the same.

Climbing in, Derek started the arduous process of trying to get them out of the overcrowded lot. He asked where Stiles wanted to have dinner, and given he had no preference, they both decided to just see what they passed on the way home and go from there.

They ended up stopping for Chinese twenty minutes out from Beacon Hills, continuing an almost hour-long argument they’d started in the car about whether or not Brooklyn-nine-nine or The Good Place was the better comedy.

Stiles was strictly a nine-nine fan, but Derek insisted that a comedy about a points system getting someone into a neutral equivalent of heaven or hell had its merits. Stiles just argued that Derek was jealous the nine-nine precinct had more fun at work than he did.

They eventually moved on to other topics of discussion, and Stiles really, really liked it when Derek laughed. His face scrunched up around his nose and he usually brought one of his hands up to press against his forehead, like he was trying to hide himself. Stiles felt like Derek didn’t laugh very often, so it was kind of nice to see him relax and let loose when they were alone together.

By the time they got back to Stiles’ place, Jackson had texted to make sure he was still alive since he and Cora had returned home almost an hour before. He promised he wasn’t dead, and let Derek walk him to his door. It was an expectant thing to do, but he could tell Derek just wanted to spend those few extra seconds close to him. He wasn’t doing it with the expectation that he’d be invited in or even get a kiss out of it.

Stopping outside the door, Stiles turned to grin at him.

“Today was fun. I’m glad you and Cora ended up at the theatre.”

“Me too.” Derek smiled, hands in his pockets. “Thanks for letting me hijack you from Jackson.”

“Eh,” Stiles waved a dismissive hand. “He ditched me anyway.”

“I guess he kind of did.” Derek moved back a step, turning to set one foot on the top step leading back down from the porch. “If Jackson ever feels the need to ditch you again, give me a call.”

“Sure. Sounds fun.”

Derek nodded once, opened his mouth—likely to say goodnight—and then instantly stiffened. Stiles frowned, wondering about the shift, but then jumped a mile high when the door behind him
opened.

His dad was wearing jeans and a loose shirt, clearly having gotten off shift hours ago from the looks of things. He had what looked like pizza sauce on the collar of his shirt and Stiles narrowed his eyes at him suspiciously. The sheriff just met his gaze, crossing his arms and leaning lightly against the jamb, eyes skirting past Stiles to Derek.

“Derek,” he said in greeting.

“Sheriff,” was the almost uncomfortable response.

“You two have a good time today?”

“We did, actually,” Stiles informed his father. “Went to see a movie with Cora and Jackson. Then we grabbed dinner. Derek was just giving me a ride home.”

“Mm hm.” How could his dad make sounds so sarcastic? It had to be a gift. One Stiles had yet to master. “I was gonna pop one of the Harry Potter movies in, if you’re interested.”

“Oh, yes!” Stiles grinned. “Which one?”

“Haven’t decided. You have a preference?”

Stiles stared at his father, because he wasn’t looking at him when he asked the question. He was looking at Derek.

Derek actually turned around, as if checking for someone behind him, then looked back at the sheriff, seeming a little lost. “I’m sorry?”

“Harry Potter, Hale. Keep up.” He nodded his head into the house. “Get comfortable in the living room, Stiles can get the movie started while I grab a couple beers.”

Derek glanced at Stiles, as if asking for permission to join them. Stiles just shrugged, because he honestly didn’t mind either way. With a slow nod, Derek stepped back up onto the porch, and when he made his intentions to stay clear, the sheriff turned and headed back into the house. Derek gave Stiles a confused but somewhat excited look, then followed him.

Stiles watched him go, thought about what his dad was playing at, then decided it didn’t matter. He shrugged expansively to himself, then walked into the house, shutting the door behind him.

“So you and Derek seem to be getting along.”

Stiles glanced up at his dad, chewing slowly with his fork held slightly above his plate. He couldn’t tell if this was a trick question or not, his father’s face carefully blank while he moved a Brussel sprout aside before spearing a carrot on the end of his fork.

“We’re just friends,” Stiles said in answer, deciding that was the safest option. Explaining their weird and complicated relationship meant explaining Werewolves and Stiles liked having one normal thing in his life. That being his relationship with his dad.

No Supernatural garbage, no monsters, no weird Werewolf marriage. Just normal life.

Besides, his dad wasn’t wrong. He and Derek had been getting along. Sure, they’d been doing well since the lunch they’d had, but lately things felt—good. They hung out every now and then, always
in public, but it never failed to be interesting. Derek was a quiet guy, but once Stiles got him talking, he had a lot of really engaging things to say. And he seemed to really appreciate that Stiles was trying to look past his earlier, uncontrollable behaviour.

To be fair, it was easy to ignore Derek’s creepiness now that he’d stopped doing it and Stiles understood, at least to a degree, why he’d been doing it in the first place.

“Mm hm,” was his father’s response, moving the same Brussel sprout aside and continuing to eat the stuff around it.

Stiles narrowed his eyes at him. “You’ve been ‘mm hm’ing me a lot lately. Why are you mm hm’ing me?”

“Just been noticing some things.” The sheriff shrugged. “About you and him. Interesting turn of events, considering you were yelling at him in his car a few months ago.”

“I had a valid reason for that,” Stiles insisted, pointing his fork at him. “And eat your vegetables, they’re good for you.”

“I don’t like Brussel sprouts,” his father informed him, continuing to roll the lone sprout across his plate.

“Who’s the parent here?” Stiles asked, raising his eyebrows, but his father was saved by the waitress coming to check in on them.

She poured them water while his dad made small talk, Stiles looking down into his plate and stabbing at a kernel of corn. By the time he looked back up, his dad had handed over his mostly empty plate, and Stiles narrowed his eyes at him.

His dad looked smug, and Stiles promised himself he would buy a huge bag of Brussel sprouts and make the next few dinners with them. His dad had made him eat his vegetables as a child, it was only fair Stiles return the favour.

“I’m just saying,” the sheriff said, as if they hadn’t moved on from the Derek topic already, “I’m glad things are working out. I think it’s nice.”

“You think it’s nice,” Stiles repeated, taking another bite of his food.

“Derek’s under a lot of pressure at home. He’s a good kid, great cop, but I think he doesn’t allow himself much time to do things he wants to do. You encourage him to come out of his shell, to go out and enjoy life.” The sheriff shrugged, leaning back in his seat and crossing his arms. “I think it’s nice. The two of you getting along.”

Stiles felt like his dad wasn’t telling him something, but no matter how much he squinted at him, his lips were sealed. That or he’d lost how effective he used to be squinting people into submission. His dad was probably used to it after twenty-one years of it.

Shame. He’d need to find a new tactic.

The waitress returned when Stiles was done his plate and asked if they wanted to see the dessert menu. Stiles vehemently declined before his dad could get his mouth open, but all that earned him was the bill shoved at him from his father.

“Cold,” Stiles insisted with a frown, pulling his wallet out and tossing his credit card down.
“If you’d let me have some pie, I might’ve felt inclined to pay,” was the smug response.

“I’ll go broke before I let you kill yourself by putting junk in your body.”

His father’s snort suggested he was refraining from saying, “You put junk in your body all the time!”

Which, yes. Yes he did. But Stiles didn’t have a heart condition with a restricted diet—heart condition yes, but not one with a restricted diet! Stiles could afford to eat an entire bag of chips and a carton of curly fries in one sitting. His pants might disagree, but they were assholes, anyway.

After they’d finished paying, Stiles walked back to the station with his dad, rubbing the back of his neck and sighing slightly. They’d both been eating out a lot, and it was way more expensive than buying groceries and making food in advance. Not to mention doing that allowed him more control over his father’s food intake.

He figured he could head home, take stock of what they had, then head out to the store. It wasn’t even one yet, he’d have tons of time to get there and back and start making something for dinner.

“Beautiful day,” his dad commented.

Stiles turned to him, then looked up at the sky. It was a clear blue, not a cloud in sight. The sun was shining, but the breeze stopped it from being overly hot. It was actually a perfect day. Not too warm, not too cold, and full of sunshine. He imagined Lydia was probably in her backyard tanning. He wondered if Cora did the same thing, but he didn’t feel like he should ask. Maybe in a few months, when they’d both stuck with one another despite their weirdness.

Stopping by his Jeep when they reached the station once more, his dad slapped his cheek lightly in farewell, said he’d see him for dinner unless Stiles had plans—he didn’t—and then headed back for the door to return to work. Stiles watched him disappear through the door before climbing into the Jeep.

The interior was warm and muggy from having been sitting in the lot with the sun beating down on it for so long. He cranked the window down while starting the car, backing out of his spot and driving back towards home. The cool air coming through the window didn’t do much to offset the heat in the car, but it wasn’t a long drive, anyway.

When he reached his street, he reached down to roll the window back up, easing towards his house and frowning when he found his usual spot in the driveway taken by two other cars he didn’t recognize.

When Stiles eased the Jeep to a stop on the street beside his house, he couldn’t help the deep sigh that escaped him when he realized the reason behind the two unfamiliar vehicles. A small group of people were collected on the front lawn, and he didn’t need to be a genius to know who they were and why they were there.

He had no idea how long they’d been waiting, but hopefully not so long that the neighbours were interested. He wouldn’t know how to explain a group of people loitering in his yard.

Then again, most of his neighbours were likely at work, nobody around was unemployed or retired, so barring a random holiday, or shift work, they were likely all out. He hoped so, he didn’t need anyone calling the sheriff.

Sighing again while turning off the engine, and figuring he’d park the Jeep in the drive once he was back from the store, he stepped out of the vehicle and slammed the door.
The group turned as one, all of them eying him with interest. He didn’t know why, but something about them made him... nervous. Uncomfortable. They weren’t giving off the same air as all the other Werewolves he’d encountered of late, and something about this group made him feel like he had to be careful.

“Can I help you?” he asked, managing to sound normal instead of wary.

The guy who’d been closest to the door offered him a brilliant smile, pulling sunglasses off and tucking them away into his suit jacket, eyes raking up and down Stiles. It was an oily look, one of assessment, like he was sizing Stiles up to determine how much of a threat he was.

Stiles had gotten those looks a lot fighting monsters, but he usually had his bat, a pack, and a plan to go along with it. This time, he was a little under-prepared, and he shoved his hands in his pockets to see if he had anything useful in them.

Keys, a wad of paper—probably a receipt—and some loose change in his right one. Phone and a small glass vial in his left. He tried to remember what the vial was, honestly unsure of its origin since he didn’t remember putting it in there this morning.

Then again, he hadn’t washed these pants in a while, so it might’ve been from long before today. Wolfsbane, maybe? Too convenient, but Stiles was an optimistic guy.

“Hello,” the lead man said, stepping closer. Stiles resisted the urge to step back. “I am Alpha Deucalion. My pack and I have come to pay our respects to the Hale heir’s mate.”

Stiles’ eyes skirted to the rest of the group with him. All of them were staring at him hungrily, and there was a woman with them who wasn’t wearing any shoes. Her toes were clawed and as vicious-looking as any Werewolves’ hands.

The alarms in his head began to ring just a tiny bit louder, and he really didn’t have a plan right now. He could make a break for it, jump back in the Jeep and try and speed off, but he already knew from experience that Werewolves could knock it over with ease, courtesy of Derek trying to save his life. If he tried to make it to the house, with the mountain ash barrier, they’d cut him off long before he made it halfway across the lawn unless he had a distraction. He could try to get to a neighbour, bang on the door, but as he’d already been thinking, most if not all of them were likely at work.

Each new idea he thought up was hastily discarded, brain struggling to wade through a plethora of ideas before dismissing one to move on to the next.

When the silence stretched for too long, Stiles knew he had to say something, and the only thing he could come up with after such a long pause was confusion.

“I’m sorry?” he asked, trying to pitch his voice a bit higher in confusion, and praying to God his abnormal heart rate would save him. It seemed to be working so far, because nobody was coming at him or calling him out on his bluff.

“Derek Hale?” this Deucalion person prompted.

“You mean the deputy?” Stiles asked, trying for a frown. “What about him?”

Two of the other men on the lawn shared a look, but Deucalion was watching him intently. Stiles’ heart slowly but surely began to increase in speed, which wasn’t helped by the Werewolf beginning to move forward. Shit, shit!
“Are you not Stiles Stilinski?” Deucalion asked, moving slowly but also gracefully, like he was walking on water. He almost seemed to be floating, weightless, approaching like a spirit intent to cause him harm.

Stiles backed up a few steps, feeling like anyone would be uneasy in the face of this man’s slow approach.

“I am,” he said, having debated lying before realizing that would be a bad idea and easy to catch. “But I’m not sure what you’re referring to. Deputy Hale works with my dad. The sheriff,” he emphasized, even as Deucalion continued his approach and Stiles’ back hit his Jeep.

“Is that right?” Deucalion stopped right in front of him, and Stiles felt like he should have tried to run before getting boxed in. He had nowhere to go now, Deucalion shifting forward and inhaling deeply. “Hm,” he said, easing back. “You certainly don’t smell like him. Did you reject him, then?”

“What are—” He didn’t have the chance to finish, Deucalion moving quickly and grabbing at his hair with one hand, wrenching his head to the side and ripping his collar while checking his neck. He let out a startled shout, mostly at having claws so close to his throat, but Deucalion just hummed and bent down, inhaling deeply against his skin.

It made every hair on his body rise at the lips brushing his pulse point when Deucalion spoke again.

“I don’t smell him on you, but I do smell a Hale. The mouthy one. What was her name?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Stiles bit out, hands curling into fists at his sides. “Back off.”

“See, I know you do, boy.” Deucalion twisted the hand in his hair further, forcing a grunt out of him when it tilted his head even more. He reached out with one hand to grab at that arm, the other shoving hard into the Werewolf’s chest. “From far away, your erratic little bunny heart is difficult to read. But scent?” He inhaled deeply, right against Stiles’ throat. “Scent doesn’t lie. He hasn’t claimed you yet, but you are his mate, and you know it.” There was a small sound from deep in his throat, like a tsk. “I don’t like being lied to. That’s going to cost you a rib.”

“What?” Stiles asked, not following, but then the hand Deucalion didn’t have in his hair was pressed against his right side. He felt two fingers dig in, and then twist.

Pain flared up his side, the jarring crack meeting his ears a split second later, and the same hand covered his mouth when it opened in a scream, Deucalion’s lips at his ear while he shushed him in a soothing fashion.

His side was on fire, his lungs felt like they were burning. He was scared to move and jar his injury any further. Every breath was like needles against his skin, and he felt like he was going to throw up. It was worse than anything he’d ever felt before. Sure, he’d been injured in his life, many times, and he’d had his fair share of broken bones, but this was different. This felt like a full snap, like someone breaking a stick fully in half. Deucalion had broken one rib with two fingers, and then had enough time to bring his hand up to cover Stiles’ mouth before the pain had fully registered.

“I’m a fair man, Stiles,” Deucalion said while Stiles struggled to breathe, mouth still covered. “All I ask for is a little honesty. So, we’re going to try this again, and you’re not going to lie this time, or I’ll have to take another rib.”
He pulled back enough that they were face to face again, Stiles’ hands shaking against the Werewolf. One was still clenched against the meat of his arm, and the other had slid a bit down his chest, clenched in the material of his shirt at his stomach. Deucalion just smiled pleasantly at him.

“I’m looking for information on your soon-to-be husband. Like where he currently lives. You see, the Hales have always been very careful not to expose themselves to others. We always meet in a predetermined location, you understand. For safety reasons. But I would very much like to visit. I hear Talia’s had another son since I last saw her. Merrak, is it? He must be all grown up now, it’s been quite a few years.” He was still smiling pleasantly, like they were having a nice conversation instead of Deucalion holding him against his Jeep with one hand twisted mercilessly in his hair and a broken rib to boast about. “Now, Stiles. As his future mate, I’d imagine you can tell me where to find the Hale house, can’t you? You could bring me there. It would be so nice to see dear Talia after all these years.”

Stiles bit something out behind Deucalion’s hand and he pulled it back, his smile turning menacing.

“I’m sorry, what was that?”

“I said, go to hell,” Stiles forced out again.

Deucalion let out a small breath, eying him, then shrugged one shoulder. “That’s going to cost you another rib.”

Stiles screamed when the second rib was snapped, Deucalion pulling him close so his face was buried against the Werewolf’s shoulder while he shushed him gently. The hand in his hair loosened so he could rake his fingers softly through the strands, petting him comfortingly even with his hand still resting above the two broken ribs.

“There now, you understand, don’t you? You’re so very fragile, and you have so many bones to choose from. What have the Hales ever done for you, hm? They’re the reason this is happening to you, aren’t they? Just tell me where they are, and we’ll be on our way.”

“I don’t,” Stiles forced out, feeling wetness on his cheeks, hands sliding off Deucalion. His right arm hurt to move, jarring his broken ribs, but he managed to shove his left one into his pocket.

“Don’t?”

“I don’t know.”

“Oh, Stiles.” Deucalion pulled him back, bringing both hands up to cradle his face and staring at him almost sadly. “Shall I break the third rib on your other side, then? Even out the pain a little?”

Stiles couldn’t remember or even pretend to think about what was in the vial, but whatever it was, he knew it hurt Werewolves. He wouldn’t have it on him otherwise. So when Deucalion reached down with his opposite hand, pressing it to his first rib on the side that wasn’t screaming fire up the length of his torso, Stiles pulled his hand from his pocket and smashed the vial into Deucalion’s forehead.

It shattered, small shards of glass cutting into the palm of his hand as well as Deucalion’s skin, and the Werewolf screamed, high and agonized while clutching at his face, grey dust spilling between his fingers.

Mountain ash. It was mountain ash. Stiles distantly remembered putting vials of the stuff in various pairs of pants and hoodies back when Michael had first introduced him to it. He’d never been so
happy in his life.

He knew he only had a split second to react. The other Werewolves were frozen in shock, but that wouldn’t last long, and he didn’t have much time.

Having no other choice, he sprinted forward, using his momentum to slam hard into a set of twins. His shoulder burned at the impact and his broken ribs screamed at him so fiercely he almost blacked out. He managed not to, dodging a larger wolf who swiped at him, the others all rushing to who was clearly their leader. He could hear footsteps chasing him up the porch steps, and he knew he’d have to time this right. Too fast, and he risked the Werewolf stopping in time. Too slow, and he would get crushed and probably die.

Stiles reached his front door, managed to get his keys out as if he were stupid enough to try and unlock the door, prayed he had the timing right, and then fell to his knees, hearing the impact above him a second later before the Werewolf rebounded so hard he tumbled backwards down the porch steps.

He wasn’t an idiot. Stiles knew he wouldn’t get the door open in time to avoid being caught. But Werewolves were strong. Strong enough to slam a door off its hinges, which was exactly what he’d been counting on. The mountain ash barrier he still had erected inside his door meant the Werewolf had slammed into it to get it open, but bounced back because of the barrier.

Stiles scrambled desperately over the threshold, getting his foot over just barely before someone swiped at it.

He winced and clutched at his side, sliding backwards away from the door while the barefoot woman snarled and raked her claws down the invisible forcefield keeping her out.

Now that he was inside, and safe, he didn’t know what to do. He couldn’t call the police, these were Werewolves! But he couldn’t call Talia, either. That’s who they were looking for, and he wasn’t going to bring her to them on a silver platter.

“Kali!” One of the men yelled, and she snarled, turning away from him and hurrying back down the steps.

Stiles lay motionless, every breath like fire in his lungs, his torso going numb with pain even as it continued to pulse across every inch of him. He needed a doctor, right now, but he didn’t know how to get rid of these people. And his dad would come home eventually, not to mention if any of his neighbours were home, they’d likely called the police.

He tensed when the big guy who’d chased him appeared in front of the door, face shifting into something more dangerous.

“You fucked up, human,” he snarled. “You blinded him.”

Oh. That wasn’t good.

“We are going to flay the skin from your bones, and we will make your precious Alpha watch.”

Oh this was very not good.

It wasn’t like Stiles had known what was in the vial, exactly. He’d forgotten about his paranoia causing him to stash various pants and hoodies with mountain ash. It had just—worked out. Or not, depending on how he looked at it.
His hand had smeared blood along the floor from his mad scramble backwards, glass still imbedded in his skin, pulsing slightly. Nowhere near as bad as his ribs, which he was still clutching with his other hand, struggling to breathe without screaming. He hadn’t known broken ribs felt like this. Like someone was forcing the bones back and forth, back and forth, grinding painfully together.

All he could assume was that other bones hurt less because it was easier to keep them still. If his arm was broken and in a cast, it stayed immobile unless he jarred it.

Ribs were different. Every breath in forced them out, only to settle back once the air was released, a constant cycle of irritation to the wounded area.

“Stop playing with him, Ennis!” someone snapped, which prompted the big man in front of him to hunker down threateningly.

“Get out here,” the wolf at the door—Ennis, apparently—snarled, eyes bleeding red. Why did they all have red eyes? “Before we make you.”

Stiles had just opened his mouth to bite back a snarky remark when tires squealed loudly against asphalt and he glanced over the guy’s shoulder in time to see someone literally fly through the air. The crushing sound of impact suggested they’d slammed straight through the tree on the edge of the front yard.

His dad would be pissed, he liked that tree.

Ennis snarled and leapt off the porch, racing to attack whoever had just shown up. Stiles felt his stomach drop at the sight of a mangled hood, smooth paint and a glossy finish.

Jackson’s Porsche had been the cause of one of the wolves sailing through the air, evidently after having been slammed into at fifty miles an hour.

But the Porsche wasn’t why he felt dread pooling in the pit of his stomach. It was because Jackson had climbed out to swing fists, and he was severely outnumbered.

Going up against a group of humans was one thing, but these were all Werewolves. And not even regular ones, but Alphas. The difference in skill was woefully apparent.

Jackson punched at the closest Alpha, expecting them to go down like most humans did, and thus turning away to deal with someone else. Unfortunately, the one punch did little more than irritate the Alpha, and when Jackson turned away to handle the next threat, the Alpha he’d punched slammed his fist up under Jackson’s ribs, punching hard enough Stiles heard the snap of bones from where he sat just beyond the threshold of his front door.

Jackson let out a bit off cry, stumbling forward slightly and almost walking right into another Alpha’s fist. He managed to dodge at the last second, but then a fucking hulk of a man appeared behind him, grabbed him by the back of the neck, lifted him off the ground, and slammed him into the hood of his car so hard the entire front collapsed on itself and the windshield shattered.

Stiles couldn’t do anything other than stare. He knew he had to do something, knew that this was a league well above anything they’d ever seen before—the twins were gone and the giant was there, didn’t take a genius to figure that fusion out—but he couldn’t move. His ribs screamed in agony, and his mind was drawing a blank on what to do. All it kept repeating was, “Help Jackson, they’re gonna kill him! Help Jackson! They’re gonna kill him!”

Nothing remotely helpful.
Struggling to his feet, Stiles stumbled slightly and whipped around urgently, trying to think of what to do. He didn’t have any weapons aside from his bat, and that wasn’t going to do anything against these guys.

Except maybe break.

His dad had a gun safe in his office, Stiles could probably get to it and find a gun before Jackson was literally murdered before his eyes, but Stiles wasn’t a great shot. With how fast the wolves were all moving, he was just as likely to shoot Jackson as he was one of the others. And on top of that, he didn’t know how much damage bullets would do to Alphas.

Talia had said they were stronger, more powerful, extremely resistant to a lot of things that would kill other Werewolves. Wolfsbane and mountain ash were universal, but would shooting an Alpha in the head really kill them?

And even worse: could Stiles do that? Murder someone?

For Jackson, yes. Without question.

His mind was going a mile a minute trying to conjure up a plan, and by the time he turned back towards the door, Jackson was lying face down on the front lawn. Stiles’ heart stuttered into his throat, and he was about to lose his mind, but then Jackson groaned and struggled to push himself up.

The woman, Kali, helped him along, grabbing a fistful of hair and wrenching him up harshly until Jackson was on his knees, head angled back. His face was a bloodied mess, and the wounds Stiles could see in his chest weren’t healing. Alpha injuries took longer to heal, dealt more damage.

Kali hissed angrily and wrenched Jackson’s head back further, forcing him to arch his back, exposing his throat. The claws of her other hand were pressed to it instantly, drawing blood, but not tearing into it, red eyes locked on Stiles.

“Stop, stop!” he insisted urgently. “Please stop!”

“Your choice,” she spat. “Come out, or he dies.”

“Don’t,” Jackson bit out, then let out a grunt when Kali’s claws dug harder into his neck.

“All right, all right, stop!” Stiles shouted, left hand still clutching at his injured ribs. He clenched his fingers into the material of his shirt, feeling like his heart was trying to beat itself out of his chest. “All right,” he said again, moving slowly towards the front door. He held up his free hand, cautiously closing the distance until he stopped just past the line.

One of the wolves started for him and he gave him a look that had him pause where he stood.

“Let Jackson go,” he ordered.

“Come down here and then we’ll let him go,” Kali snapped, Jackson letting out another grunt of pain when she wrenched his head back even further.

“No,” Stiles said darkly, eyes locked on her. “You want me, fine. Jackson has nothing to do with this. Let him go.”

“No,” she snarled.
Stiles clenched his jaw, took another step forward, and lowered his voice dangerously. “Let him go now,” he snarled.

For a second, he honestly wasn’t sure what happened. All the Werewolves on his lawn seemed to jerk, some shifting the slightest amount whereas others immediately straightened, spines snapping almost audibly in their attempt to stand properly.

Kali’s hands loosened where she held Jackson, staring at Stiles like she couldn’t believe her eyes, but it was enough.

Jackson elbowed her and managed to twist sideways, her claws grazing against his throat and drawing blood, but the wound shallow. He leapt to his feet, sprinting for the door, and Stiles hurried backwards and crouched, breaking the mountain ash line.

The big twin fusion guy was the first to react, barrelling after Jackson at the speed of sound. Stiles stayed exactly where he was, ribs screaming in protest and heart pounding so hard he was positive it had dislocated into his throat. Jackson hurled himself up the porch steps, closed the distance to the front door, then leapt clear over Stiles. The second he was in the house, Stiles closed the barrier, managing just as claws grazed the top of his head before the big guy flew backwards, rebounding off the barrier like the other one had.

Stiles was glad closing the line hadn’t severed the hand, that was a nightmare he could happily live without.

Jackson was groaning behind him and Stiles turned, wincing and grabbing at his ribs again with his injured hand, pressing it hard to the wounded side as if putting pressure on it was going to help. Somehow, it felt like it did, so he just kept it up and glared at Jackson.

“What the hell is wrong with you? What are you even doing here?!” Stiles demanded.

He didn’t mean to get mad, he was just terrified. Fucking terrified. Jackson could’ve died. Jackson almost had! He could’ve lost him, and Stiles didn’t know how to handle that, so the easiest solution was to be furious.

“You butt-dialled me,” Jackson grit out, lying on his back and holding his stomach. His ribs were probably broken, too. Luckily for him though, they’d heal in a few hours, whereas Stiles had at least a month, if not more.

Unfair.

“When would you rush over here without calling anyone?” Stiles demanded angrily. “You could’ve died! I was in the house, I was safe!”

“What if they had a human who could break the barrier?!” Jackson snarled back, eyes flashing amber.

“My dad’s the sheriff!” Stiles bellowed. “You think I don’t know where the gun safe is?!”

A loud roar from behind them had both men focus on the impending danger lurking just beyond the threshold of Stiles’ front door.

The big guy had backed up and made a running leap at the open doorway, slamming into it hard enough for him to rebound clear off the porch. But even though it had managed to repel him, even though the guy had flown through the air and onto the lawn, Stiles had seen it.
“We need to do something,” Stiles said quietly, trying to stay calm. A difficult task, given he was human and injured, and Jackson was less human but horrifically wounded.

“Call Talia,” Jackson said through gritted, bloodied teeth.

“No, that’s who they want,” Stiles insisted, looking back at him. “If we call her, she’ll come out here, and we can’t—”

“You have no idea what you’ve started.”

Stiles whipped back around, feeling dread pooling in the pit of his stomach. The whole group of them were on the porch, and Deucalion was dead centre. His face was a mess of blood and unhealed injuries, but his eyes were the worst. They were still red, but they looked dulled and cloudy. The way he clutched at Kali’s shoulder suggested what he’d been told was true, and Deucalion was blind.

Whether or not the damage was temporary, Stiles had no idea, but he definitely knew he hadn’t earned himself any brownie points. If they were going to be cruel to him before, it was nothing compared to what they would do to him now.

Jackson snarled and struggled to sit up, shifting forward so he could grab at Stiles’ arm and pull him back, still trying to protect him even while he couldn’t protect himself.

“Whatever beef you have with the Hales has nothing to do with me,” Stiles snapped, shrugging Jackson off and getting to his feet. He grunted, clenching his hand tighter against his injured ribs, and raised his chin despite Deucalion unable to see his act of bravado. “You want to meet with Talia? Write her a letter or something. Call her, text her, go send a smoke signal. Don’t come for me because her son happens to have a crush.”

“A crush,” Deucalion barked, half-laughing at his comment. “You ignorant boy. You have no idea what they’ve done. The Hale heir mated to a human. They’ve practically painted a target on your back and haven’t even had the decency to tell you it’s there.”

“What are you talking about?” Jackson demanded, still on the ground, but having shifted closer to Stiles. “What target?”

“You don’t know,” Deucalion said with an unkind smile. “You have no idea the war you’ve been pulled into. I do hope you’ve spoken to your loved ones recently, because you are about to find yourself very, very alone.”

Stiles didn’t know what this guy was talking about, only that he believed him. Even from the beginning, he’d known there was something different about the Hales. The way they spoke about Werewolves, the halted conversations, the Alphas showing up to give Stiles gifts, Derek’s responsibilities, the way he commented that their family was a bridge. Even Merrak had told Scott he wasn’t allowed to speak to Derek the way he was. Because Derek was someone important. The Hales were important, and Stiles had no idea why.

Before he could open his mouth to demand answers, another voice spoke, and Stiles was a little relieved to notice everyone else jump as badly as he did, none of them having heard the approach of this new, unknown party.

“Well, well,” the voice drawled, sounding amused. “Talia is going to be very displeased when she finds out about this.”
Deucalion stiffened, turning his head slightly, as if trying to hear better. Ennis whipped around and snarled, but the bodies in front of them blocked Stiles and Jackson’s views of the new player.

“Peter,” Deucalion said pleasantly, though he didn’t turn. “I thought you died.”

“Didn’t suit me. Decided to give living another try. Something you’re clearly uninterested in, given where you’re standing. I wonder how my sister would feel to find out you’re threatening the life of her son’s mate.”

Sister? Stiles’ brain was working a mile a minute, but the guy had definitely said sister, and implied his sister’s son was mated to Stiles, which logically meant this person was Talia’s brother. He didn’t remember anyone mentioning anything about Talia having a brother, but to be fair, Stiles was a little too focussed on the huge family already in town, he hadn’t exactly asked about Talia and Michael’s siblings.

“You could join us, you know,” Deucalion offered, turning a bit more, despite being unable to see. “You’ve never liked that the second born in your family ended up being the Alpha. If you join us, we can help you. You can steal her spark, take control, become who you were born to be.”

The shift in Deucalion’s stance allowed Stiles a glimpse of the man standing on his front lawn. He was handsome, as Stiles had come to expect from all the Hales, with perfectly styled brown hair, a manicured beard, grey eyes and a small smile on his face, like he was enjoying himself despite the prospect of being attacked by no less than seven Alphas. Eight, if the twin fusion counted as two.

“While the thought of murdering my entire family to gain power is rather appealing, sadly there are laws against that. I feel I’ve already used up all my free passes, and I look much better with a head attached to my neck, don’t you think?”

“Let’s find out how you look without one, then,” Kali snarled and leapt off the porch.

The new arrival, Peter Hale, looked unconcerned. He let her approach him, and when she swiped, he just leaned back far enough out of the way before slashing his own claws across her side. Kali let out an angry snarl at the injury, but even as she continued to try and attack him, throwing in a few fancy flips to try and catch him with one of her clawed feet, Peter remained calm and controlled, fighting her off with apparent ease.

When more went to join the fight, Stiles thought the guy was a goner, but surprisingly, if anything, they were doing even worse having more bodies attacking him. He dodged at the right time to have them hit each other instead of him, kept twisting out of the way of fists and claws, and more than once Stiles was positive he’d teleported with how quickly he’d moved.

He was so transfixed that it took him a few seconds to realize he could hear sirens approaching. His stomach dropped, because sirens meant police, which meant his dad. No way was his dad not going to race home at the call over the radio. If someone called in, and gave the address of the disturbance, his dad was probably driving like a maniac to reach the house.

Surprisingly, a cruiser wasn’t the first vehicle to skid to a halt at the end of his driveway.

It was a red Audi.

Laura was out of it, already in her Beta shift, and she snarled loudly, snapping her teeth while rushing forward to help her uncle.

“Deucalion, we should go,” one of the wolves still on the porch with him said, but before he could decide whether or not to retreat, another car slammed to a stop inches from Jackson’s ruined
Porsche and Talia stepped out, radiating power even while still looking completely human. Her expression was murderous and when she slammed her door, the entire car rocked on its wheels.

“Talia,” Deucalion said calmly, holding one hand out to be helped back down the stairs. “Lovely to see you again.”

“As I understand it,” Talia said coldly, “you’re no longer able to see. Shame, I’d have liked to watch the fear slowly form in your eyes when you realize what you’ve brought on yourself by coming here.”

Jackson let out a whine behind Stiles, and he noticed the wolves were slowly pulling apart from each other, Laura and Peter moving to flank Talia while the other wolves retreated back closer to Deucalion.

“If you paint a target on a man’s back, you cannot punish a hunter for taking a shot at it,” he argued.

“I guarantee no one will ever shoot at this target again after I’m done with you,” Talia said, voice hard and dangerous. “The Council has been informed of your presence here. If you’ve hurt him, you will regret it for the rest of your incredibly short life.”

One of the wolves with Deucalion broke off, making a run for it towards where the destroyed tree of the yard was. He hadn’t made it far when there was a howl of rage and the wolf slammed hard into the ground with Eric practically crouched on his chest, snapping his teeth into the enemy wolf’s face. Stiles hadn’t even realized he was there.

The sirens were getting closer.

“You have two options,” Talia informed Deucalion, ignoring her son snapping and snarling in another wolf’s face. “You come quietly now, and face the judgement of the Council, or you run and force me to hunt you down, where I have grounds to kill you on the spot.”

“No crime was committed here,” Deucalion argued, holding one hand out and smiling darkly at her. “The mate is fine. And his little pet will heal.”

“His pet is part of my pack. And I don’t care what you did, laying a finger on what belongs to Derek is grounds for execution. You knew that when you came here. Do not pretend to misunderstand the crime.”

“Execution?” Stiles managed to get out.

No one paid him any attention, the tension in the air mounting while the two groups stared each other down. It was actually almost comical, in a messed up sort of way. The Hales were outnumbered two to one, and yet, the bad guys did nothing.

Then again, Stiles felt like he understood why. While he didn’t necessarily know how it had happened, he knew that the only reason Jackson had managed to get into the house was because Stiles had done something. He knew Michael had control over other wolves because he was an Alpha’s mate, so while Stiles himself wasn’t fully Derek’s, what with not being claimed and all, it made sense he could do it, too.

But these were other Alphas. These people were the same rank as Talia, and yet when she stood there, with only two other Betas at her side and another snarling and snapping his teeth in another wolf’s face, none of them moved.
They all stood there, like moving would be a bad idea. Like they’d been willing to attack Talia before, but only when she wasn’t aware of their presence.

Stiles was missing something. Stiles was really, really missing something.

And that was when the cruiser slammed to a halt a scant inch from Stiles’ Jeep.

Derek was out of it so fast, Stiles wasn’t sure it had fully stopped. He leapt onto the hood of the car in full Beta shift, roared loud enough to worry Stiles that all the windows in his house would break, and probably would’ve leapt at Deucalion if his mother hadn’t stopped him.

“Derek,” she said calmly, eyes never leaving Deucalion, “Control yourself.”

Parrish flew out of the car, ignoring everyone else and rushing past the enemy wolves. He hurried up the steps and into the house, grabbing at Stiles’ face and giving him a worried once over.

“Are you okay? Stiles, are you hurt?”

“His ribs,” Jackson muttered, still sitting on the floor. “He’s been favouring his ribs.”

“Parrish, what the hell is going on? The neighbours—”

“He’s going to come,” Parrish said urgently. “He’s going to come quickly, and he won’t be able to control himself because you’re injured. I know this isn’t what you want, but you need to let him, or he’s going to lose his mind.”

“Wha—”

Parrish stepped aside, sliding his foot across the floor, and just like that, Derek was suddenly all up in Stiles’ business. It was like he’d blinked and Derek had gone from the cruiser to the house. It took Stiles a few seconds to realize that Parrish had disrupted the mountain ash line so that Derek could get into the house.

Derek’s face was buried in his neck, one hand in his hair, and the other up under his shirt and pressing against his injured side. It was almost a relief to feel the pain ebb, Stiles letting out a slow sigh and closing his eyes, letting his forehead rest on Derek’s shoulder.

He was snarling viciously into Stiles’ neck, hand tightening to an almost painful degree in his hair, but the touch to his injured side was gentle.

“The neighbours,” Stiles said again.

“Don’t worry about that,” Parrish insisted, and Stiles realized he was bent down beside Jackson, likely checking him over. “Nobody called this in, so it’s likely no one is home.”

“Then how did you know?” Stiles asked, Derek still pressed against him.

“Peter saw Jackson speed past him,” Parrish answered. “He didn’t think on it much at first, but then remembered Talia said the two of you were close, so wherever he was going had to be important. He managed to figure out where Jackson went and as soon as he saw the trashed Porsche and the Jeep, he knew whose house he was approaching and he called Talia. She called us, and Laura, because she was closest.”

Stiles stiffened when he heard another set of sirens approaching. Oh God. Oh shit!

“My dad—” He started to pull away but froze at the threatening snarl that escaped Derek.
Fear spiked through him against his will, having sharp teeth so close to his neck and an angry wolf clinging to him. It was a lot for his poor, frazzled nerves. Evidently it came through in his scent because the growling stopped and Derek let out a small whine before slowly pulling his face out of Stiles’ neck.

He didn’t let him go though, shifting to instead press his forehead to Stiles’, hand still on his injured side.

“Are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” Stiles insisted. “I had things under control.”

He’d have figured something out eventually, he just hadn’t had the time. Jackson had shown up, then Peter, then the rest of the Hales. It hadn’t given him much time to think, things were happening too fast.

“Derek,” Parrish said, the sirens closer now. “He’s coming.”

Derek growled, eyes bleeding blue but remaining locked on Stiles.

“He’s his father,” Parrish reminded him, moving into Stiles’ peripheral, staring at Derek. “I know it’ll hurt pulling away, but you have to.”

The sirens cut off abruptly and Stiles heard tires screech outside. Lots of screeching tires today, the road was going to look like shit.

A door slammed open and he heard his dad shout his name. It seemed to take a gargantuan effort, but Derek grit his teeth and finally managed to let Stiles go, pulling his hand out from under his shirt. Stiles braced himself for the pain to come back, but it didn’t. He’d assumed the touch alleviated the pain, but it looked like the effects lasted a little longer than that.

“Stiles!”

His dad barrelled into the house and Stiles winced, bracing himself for the impact and the pain, but Parrish managed to blurt out, “He’s injured!” before his dad slammed into him.

It was a near thing, the man almost tripping in his haste to slow down, but he managed so that when he reached Stiles he just grabbed him by the back of the neck and yanked him closer, wrapping his other arm around him tightly.

“Jesus,” the sheriff muttered, clinging to him tightly. “Stiles. Are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” he insisted, though he was beginning to panic a little bit. He had no idea what was going on outside right now, no idea on what his dad thought of the blown apart tree. Was Eric still wolfed out on top of that running enemy? Were the Hales still having a staredown with another Pack on the lawn? Shit, had Jackson’s wounds begun healing?! Were Derek’s eyes unnaturally blue?!

Hyperventilating couldn’t be good for his broken ribs, but he didn’t know what else to do. So he just started breathing faster and faster, struggling to control himself but unable to.

“Let’s go back outside,” Parrish said softly. Jackson moved without prompting, but Stiles was sure he’d had to shove Derek out the door. He tried to shut it behind him, but it was broken, so it didn’t latch and eased back open a bit.
“Stiles, breathe,” his dad insisted, one hand still against the back of his neck and the other rubbing up and down his spine soothingly, rocking them slightly from side to side. “Breathe, it’s okay. I got you. I’m right here.”

Stiles clutched at the back of his dad’s jacket with both hands, feeling glass digging into his left palm, but no actual pain, like Derek had stolen that away, too. He wasn’t panicking over what had just happened, though he was sure that was coming. He was panicking because his dad was going to find out. He was going to know.

He was going to know Stiles had lied to him.

“Dad,” Stiles insisted. “Dad, I need—we need to talk.”

“It’s okay, son, I know.”

“No. No, you don’t,” Stiles insisted, clinging to him harder, afraid that if he let go his dad would pull away from him forever. “Dad, I’m—I need you to believe me. I’m sorry. I’m so, so sorry. I should’ve told you, but I couldn’t—it wasn’t my secret to tell. But what happened, outside, those people—”

“Stiles, it’s okay,” he insisted. “I know.”

“Scott’s a Werewolf!” Stiles blurted out, because he didn’t know what else to say. He needed his dad to understand that whatever happened, when they went back outside, he couldn’t just cuff them and put them into the back of the cruiser, they needed like, a Werewolf prison or something! They needed Chris Argent, at minimum. The army would be best, but they wouldn’t be easy to get out here this quickly. For all Stiles knew, the wolves had all run off in the chaos of people rushing to get to Stiles in the house.

“Stiles, it’s okay.”

“No, dad, listen! Scott is—they all are. They’re—dad, I swear to you, I’m not crazy. This is—it’s bigger than us. Those guys—”

“Stiles,” his dad said, pulling away so he could look at him and giving his head one firm shake. “It’s okay, I know. I believe you.”

Stiles blinked. “You—what?” Just like that? Stiles had taken almost three days to convince Scott he was a Werewolf, and Scott was the Werewolf! “You’re—okay.” He didn’t know what else to say. “You took that surprisingly well.”

His dad frowned at him. “What?” Then he paused, giving Stiles a weird look. “Did you honestly think I didn’t know?”

The world tilted sideways and Stiles was positive he blacked out for a second. “Wha—you mean you did know?” he demanded.

He got a real look for that. “What am I, an idiot? Of course I knew. You and Scott are not subtle.” He shifted the hand away from the back of Stiles’ neck so he could slap his cheek lightly. “I’m a cop, Stiles. I’d be a pretty terrible one if I didn’t notice the weird things going on in my own town.”

“So—so you’ve known the whole time. About Werewolves, and the pack, and-and—and everything?”
“Everything,” he confirmed, eying Stiles critically, like he could tell having this conversation was calming him down, and that was the only reason he was indulging him while he sported two broken ribs. “You think I never noticed you sneaking out of the house at night? Running around with a baseball bat? You don’t even play baseball, Stiles. Chris Argent and I talk, you know. We go golfing every other Sunday.”

Stiles stared at him. The only reason he managed to resist flailing was because it would hurt. “What?!”

“Michael’s come a few times, as well. It’s been nice having him back in town. Makes me feel good about my game since he’s so terrible at it.”

“What?!” Stiles demanded, borderline hysterically before immediately calming and saying, “I need to sit down.”

His dad shifted and moved towards the living room, one hand still on Stiles’ back, rubbing up his spine. They moved to the couch and Stiles carefully sat, mindful of his ribs. They didn’t even twinge, but they shifted uncomfortably beneath his skin. He was still inclined to believe the only reason he didn’t feel anything was because of what Derek had done.

That was a useful trick, he liked that one. Where the hell had that been all the times Stiles had injured himself in the past? Stupid Scott and Jackson, not knowing about the pain-sucking Werewolf magic.

“How did—when did you find out?” Stiles asked, feeling a little numb.

“After what happened with Gerard and Kate Argent,” his father said softly, Stiles wincing at that. “Chris came to see me after we arrested them, told me everything. He felt he owed it to me after what Gerard had done to you, to Scott. He asked me not to tell anyone, and I respected that, so I kept it to myself.”

“You didn’t tell me,” Stiles accused.

“I wanted you to have one normal thing in your life.” His dad patted his cheek again, smiling slightly. “You spent so much time dealing with this stuff, I didn’t want you to feel like you had to talk about it with everyone you knew. The Supernatural world fell into your lap as much as it did mine, but that doesn’t mean it defines us. I wanted you to have one person you could talk to about everything but that. Of course, you didn’t make my life easy, running off all the time and almost getting yourself killed.”

Actually, now Stiles was surprised his dad hadn’t put a stop to it sooner. “Why did you let me?”

“Oh, don’t get me wrong, I hated every second of it. The night I almost put a stop to it is the same night I bumped into Parrish while he was keeping an eye on you.”

“Parrish knows you know?!” Stiles demanded, almost angrily.

“Parrish is the only reason I didn’t lock you in the basement for safety reasons,” his dad admitted, smiling slightly. “He had to speak to Talia before telling me too much, but she allowed it and once she came back to town, she and I had a long conversation.”

Stiles stared at him. “Do you know about Derek?”

“That you’re his mate?”
“You know about Derek?!?” Stiles really couldn’t handle any more surprises. He was done for the year. Fuck, for the rest of his life! No more surprises!

“Stiles, in all the years you’ve been my son, how often do I usually check on you in bed?”

Stiles opened his mouth, but no words came out. It occurred to him that when the Hales came back, his dad had been poking his head in a lot, even waking him up sometimes. He’d thought his dad was just being a dad, but now that he’d said it, Stiles realized what he was doing.

“You were checking for Derek.”

“Didn’t work, as far as I’ve been told, but I was making sure he was staying out of your room.”

“Why didn’t you just yell at him to leave me alone?!” Stiles demanded.

“Because I’m not here to fight your battles for you,” he insisted. “You’re old enough and smart enough to do that yourself. I was just keeping an eye on things. When you came to tell me about your stalker, it wasn’t until your reaction to Derek that I realized what had happened. I noticed him leave, but something didn’t sit right, which is why I ended up going outside and sure enough, you were in his car. I was ready to tell him to stay away from you, but Talia asked me to let the two of you sort things out on your own. I didn’t like it, but I respect her, and your ability to take care of yourself, so I agreed. When things started calming down between you two, when you started getting closer, I realized she was right and if this was something that was meant to happen, it wasn’t my place to try and stop it.”

“Does Derek know you know?” Stiles asked, catching a few key words in those sentences.

“If he’s still outside, he does now,” the sheriff said with a small smile.

“Unbelievable. You’re the worst. That’s why you kept mm hm’ing me!”

“You sorted things out yourself, like Talia said. I wasn’t going to interfere one way or another. This, though?” He glanced towards the window, scowling. “This wasn’t something she and I discussed. I’m going to want answers.”

“Get in line,” Stiles muttered, wincing and touching his ribs again. Derek’s pain-sucking mojo was wearing off. “I uh, think I need to see a doctor.”

“Looks like Laura’s waiting for you,” his dad said, still looking out the window. “Let’s get you checked out.”

“What about the wolves?” Stiles asked, carefully getting to his feet and following his dad to the broken front door.

The man turned to him before opening it. “What wolves?”

When he stepped out onto the porch, Stiles saw everyone but Laura was gone. Even Jackson’s trashed Porsche was gone. The only vehicles that remained were Laura’s Audi, his Jeep and his dad’s cruiser. There was no sign of a scuffle barring the broken door and the completely decimated tree.

The street was quiet, and it was like nothing had even happened.

Stiles wasn’t entirely sure he wasn’t completely crazy.
As predicted, the broken ribs hurt like a motherfucker, because there was absolutely no way for
him to avoid jostling them since *breathing* jostled them. There wasn’t really anything he could do
to avoid the pain or to try and diminish it. He’d thought bruised ribs were bad, but it was
*nothing* compared to broken ones.

He’d gone to the hospital, gotten checked in for some X-Rays and an MRI, and while the good
news was none of his organs were damaged because of the specific way in which his ribs were
broken, the bad news was his ribs were broken.

Stiles had to lie to the doctor on how he’d gotten them, because it wasn’t like he could just say a
Werewolf had snapped them with two fingers. He didn’t really want to end up in Eichen house.

The only comfort he had right now was that his hand was deemed to be fine, so while it had bled a
lot and there had been an uncomfortable period of someone sitting with tweezers to pick every
piece of glass from his skin, it wasn’t actually too bad and didn’t even need stitches.

Small miracles, really.

He was given some heavy duty painkillers and told to take it easy for the next little while, but had
to resign himself to the knowledge that he was going to be in an extremely large amount of pain for
a long time.

Laura did that Werewolf mojo stuff before he left, which he really appreciated, but he knew it
wouldn’t last forever. It probably wouldn’t make it to bed time, at any rate, which sucked because
he anticipated a really rough night.

His dad had, predictably, taken the rest of his shift off and was driving him home from the hospital
when Stiles checked in with Jackson. He was still in pretty rough shape, but a few of his injuries
had healed up enough. His broken bones and bruising were all fixed, at least. The slashes were
taking longer, but Stiles had already known that, and so had Jackson.

At least he was all right, which was the important thing. His Porsche was already in the shop, and
Stiles hadn’t asked what kind of lie he’d told his parents about it, but he doubted they’d care. The
Whittemores were loaded, they’d probably rolled their eyes and offered to buy him a new one
instead of fixing the old one.

Stiles was sitting on the couch trying to get comfortable after he and his dad got home when Scott
called. The second Stiles answered, his friend panicked, and he could tell he was wolfed out on the
other end.

“What happened? Why were they at your house? *What* is going on?!”

“I don’t know,” Stiles admitted, thoughts returning to what Deucalion had said about a target on
his back. Stiles didn’t like having a target on his back, especially when he didn’t know it was there.

Or why it was there.

“They’re going to get us all *killed,*” Scott snapped angrily. There went any and all progress
between Scott and the Hales. “*You could’ve died, Stiles!* Jackson nearly *did!* I can’t believe you
both trust them!”

Stiles had to admit, he could understand Scott’s stance. His tolerance of the Hales had just barely
been hanging by a thread, and this seemed to have shredded that entirely, and Stiles couldn’t blame
him. Something was clearly going on, and being left in the dark had almost gotten him and Jackson
killed.

He also didn’t understand why Deucalion had said no one knew where the Hales lived. Stiles knew. So did Jackson. So did everyone else in the McCall pack. But more than that, it was strange that Deucalion didn’t know where the Hales lived, and yet knew where Stiles did.

Actually, now that he thought about it, he didn’t understand how anyone knew where he lived. All those Alphas showing up with gifts, how did they know his address? Was Derek sending out wedding invites with the return address as Stiles’ house?

Stiles wanted answers, and when he hung up with Scott to have dinner with his dad, he could tell the sheriff did, too. He was quiet while they ate, pensive, and every now and then his shoulders would tense and Stiles knew he was thinking something dangerous. Like losing Stiles.

Today had been a shitshow overall, not at all helped by the fact that Stiles had admitted to Scott his father knew about the whole Werewolf business. That had incensed him further since he felt the sheriff should’ve been keeping Stiles away from the Hales, but that was a battle for another day.

One thing at a time.

“I’m going to talk to them tomorrow,” Stiles said quietly, his father glancing up at him. “They probably won’t like it, but I’m going. I want answers. Will you come with me?”

He knew asking his dad if he wanted to come might have him feel like he was imposing on something that wasn’t his business, but phrasing it like a request instead made him more likely to agree. And he did, nodding once and confirming they could go as soon as they were both up.

After the day he’d had, Stiles went to bed early after taking some of his painkillers, but they didn’t do much to help him sleep. No matter how he lay down, it put pressure on his ribs, and they just ached all the time. It made it hard to fall asleep, and every time he managed to pass out, he’d shift in his sleep at one point and jolt awake at the stab of pain in his chest.

It was hard to ignore pain that made itself known when all he did was fucking breathe. It felt pathetic, shifting carefully every couple of minutes, struggling not to breathe too hard since it hurt even more.

Of all the days for Derek not to show up. He’d have appreciated some Werewolf magic right about now, but he figured Talia had locked him in his room or something because he doubted Derek wasn’t here by choice. Given Stiles was injured, he was willing to bet the poor guy was wearing grooves into the floor with his pacing.

Then again, he also suspected other members of the pack might be out watching the house, because after the reaction he’d gotten from the wolves earlier, he doubted they’d packed up and called it a night. He was willing to bet there were a few people watching his house right now for anything dangerous.

Stiles gave up any pretense of sleep around six in the morning, the pain frustratingly present no matter how he tried to sleep. He just climbed out of bed and went to take a shower. His hand stung when he got soap into his healing wounds, and he had to wash his hair with one hand because trying to raise his right arm made him want to throw up.

Drying off was almost a chore, but he managed to get it done with minimal discomfort and padded back to his room in the towel to get some clothes on. He just pulled on the loosest clothes he owned and then left to go down to the kitchen, left hand crossed over his stomach to press lightly
against his ribs. He didn’t know why he kept doing that, it really hurt to touch the injury, but somehow it also made it hurt less. It made no sense, but very little in his life did anymore.

When he reached the kitchen, he paused at the sight of his father at the table with a coffee reading the paper on his phone. He didn’t look up when Stiles entered, but the almost empty cup at his elbow suggested he’d been up for a while, probably as long as Stiles had been.

He hated that, because it meant his dad had been awake worrying about him all night. And Stiles was fine.

Mostly, anyway.

“Get any sleep?” the sheriff asked while Stiles headed across the kitchen to the cupboard, pulling out a bowl and wincing when the action shifted his ribs.


His dad didn’t say anything to that, which meant he was probably making an unhappy face and when Stiles turned, he saw he was right. Unhappy father face. He didn’t say anything and turned back to what he was doing, finding some cereal and dumping it into the bowl until it was almost full. When he went to pour the milk in, the cereal almost overflowed since it rose up, but he didn’t worry about that and poured as much as he dared before putting it back in the fridge. He sat down across from his dad, slowly eating his way through his breakfast. Both of them were quiet, his father pretending to read the paper but Stiles could tell he was thinking.

Stiles himself had a lot to think about, too. He didn’t know if he was going to get the answers he was looking for today, and he didn’t know how he would handle not getting them. He just wanted things to go back to normal. He wanted to be a normal human being, without a Werewolf best friend, without monsters being real, and without all this weird mates and fate bullshit.

Life had just been so much simpler before all of this was real. He envied people’s ignorance, and was actually a little sad when he thought about how his father himself, the one person he’d thought was shielded from all this stupidity, knew about as much as Stiles did.

“Hey dad?”

“Hm?” the man asked, clearly still pretending to be reading.

“Melissa... Did she know before we told her?”

The look he got made him sigh and shake his head. Apparently he and Scott weren’t as super secretive as they thought they were. Now he was wondering if maybe the whole town knew and they just rolled their eyes at the silly McCall and Stilinski boys who thought they were so slick.

“When did she find out?”

“Same time I did,” his dad said, picking his coffee up and taking a sip. He licked his lips while setting it back down, eyes on what he was doing. “When Chris came to speak to me, Victoria went to speak to her. As I mentioned yesterday, we’d been seeing weird things happening, and it hadn’t exactly escaped Melissa’s notice that Scott didn’t seem to need refills on his asthma medicine. We may not have known what, exactly, was going on, but we knew enough until Chris and Victoria clued us in on the rest. The day Scott came clean with her, she told me about it. We were waiting to see if you would tell me too, but I guess you felt like you were hiding it well enough compared to Scott.”
“I still can’t believe you didn’t stop me.” His dad was nothing if not overly protective.

“You were safe. Safer than if I’d tried to stop you. At least when you thought I didn’t know, you made it easier to keep tabs on you. If you knew I was aware of what was happening, you’d have worked much harder to sneak out unnoticed and it would’ve been harder for me to make sure you weren’t going to get hurt. But,” he said, giving Stiles a look, “I am definitely unhappy you risked your life so much. Even if you were never in any real danger, barring Gerard and Kate, you should’ve left the monster hunting to the professionals.”

“We didn’t even know there was another pack in town!” Stiles argued, spoon clattering into his now empty bowl. “The Hales are not very informative. It’s really frustrating.”

His dad hummed his agreement to that, putting his phone back in his pocket and then standing. He took Stiles’ bowl for him, likely so that Stiles himself wouldn’t have to move too much, and went to put it down in the sink.

It was still ridiculously early, but Stiles didn’t know what to do right now. He just wanted to talk to Talia, to get some information on what the ever living fuck was going on in his life right now, but also knew that people did sleep, on occasion.

He was still contemplating what to do, his dad hovering at the sink like he was equally lost, when the doorbell rang. Stiles jumped, then winced and wrapped his arm around his ribs again, his father moving quickly to answer the door.

It had been repaired at some point while he’d been in the hospital with his dad. He assumed one of the Hales had done it, or any other member of the pack.

He heard his dad open the door, and a quiet, murmured conversation. He strained to hear, but they were speaking too quietly until his dad’s final sentence.

“Thank you, I appreciate that.” The door shut afterwards and his father’s footsteps headed for the kitchen. He looked over at Stiles once he was back in the room. “Eric. The Hales were informed when we were both up and he was tasked with coming to let us know Talia is ready for us whenever we want to head over.”

“Could’ve just called,” he muttered, but he glanced out the window over the sink, wondering who was out there and where they were hiding. And how long they’d been out there. Was it an all night thing, or had they switched out? He felt kind of bad and hoped whoever it was got some sleep.

“They probably thought it would be more respectful to come by,” his dad offered in response.

Stiles said nothing to that, looked down at himself, and sighed. “Let me change,” he said, despite not wanting to.

He headed back upstairs and tried to struggle his way through finding clothes that wouldn’t hurt to put on. Once he got his jeans on, he decided the shirt was good enough since changing that out would be more trouble than it was worth, and then grabbed some socks to pull on. Once he had his shoes done up, he had to pause to catch his breath, struggling not to inhale too deeply.

“Fuck, broken ribs suck,” he muttered to himself, getting to his feet and wincing, resting his hand lightly against them.

When he headed back downstairs, his father was already waiting at the door. They left the house together, Eric nowhere in sight, and headed for the cruiser. Stiles had to lever himself in carefully, and wearing his seatbelt was almost more trouble than it was worth, but he didn’t feel like flying
through the windshield, so he tolerated it.

The drive to the Hale house was conducted in silence, Stiles trying to tabulate all the questions he had and put them into some semblance of order. He knew the chances of remembering them all, let alone the order, were slim, but hopefully he’d recall a few of them.

It occurred to him that his father also knew where the Hales lived, and wondered about that. Maybe there was this magical barrier forcefield thing around the Hale house. Like Harry Potter with the whole Secret Keepers thing. Maybe only people who’d been invited or driven there knew how to find their place.

Another question to ask when they finally got an audience with the Hale Alpha.

His father drove slowly along the last stretch of road and gravel that led up to the Hale house. Most of the cars were gone, but Stiles assumed that was intentional. Whoever was watching the Stilinski house had probably called ahead and told Talia they were on their way. She’d likely made everyone clear out.

Stiles hoped Michael was still there, at least, because the last few times Werewolves had tried explaining things to him, he’d panicked about it. It was really best to leave the explaining to the human in cases where another human was involved. His Tesla was there, at any rate, so he was probably still home.

The cruiser eased to a stop near the entrance, his dad turning off the engine and looking over at him. Stiles allowed himself a few minutes to calm himself down before pushing open the door and carefully easing himself out. His father followed suit and they walked up to the porch together. His dad was the one to lean forward and ring the bell, the door opening only a few seconds later, like Talia was expecting them.

It was more likely she’d heard them.

She smiled tightly at Stiles, like she could tell he was in an extremely large amount of pain, and before even inviting them in, she held out one hand.

"May I?"

"I’m fine," Stiles lied, even as he knew she would be able to tell in a second.

"This is going to be a long day for you," she said instead of calling him out on it, hand still extended.

Stiles felt like she wouldn’t take no for an answer, given it looked to physically pain her to see him favouring his ribs, so he obediently reached out and took her hand. She turned it over to look at the wounds there, but they barely hurt compared to the rest of him, and she didn’t say anything. She just closed both hands around his and he watched as black lines bled up beneath her skin, moving through her hands, past her wrists and up her forearms.

It was a relief being able to take a deep breath without feeling the ache in his bones and he let out a small sigh, hoping this would last a while so he could have some reprieve from the constant ache.

"Better?"

He nodded once. "Thank you."

She smiled again, still tight, and then let him go, moving aside so she could motion them both in.
The sheriff led the way, Stiles following, and Talia shut the door behind them before passing them so she could precede them towards the kitchen. They both followed without a word, and Stiles took a careful seat at the table when Talia motioned it.

His dad sat down beside him, reaching out one hand to grip his shoulder tightly, as if in comfort, then released it. Talia tinkered across the kitchen for a moment, then returned with some coffee for his father, having made it in such a way that Stiles could tell now that they knew each other.

“Would you like anything to drink?” she asked Stiles.

“No thanks.”

“Perhaps some water, then.” Talia turned and grabbed a glass for him, setting it down in front of him before taking her own seat on the other side of the table. She had no drink for herself, and Stiles wondered if she was anticipating this to be a short visit, though she’d implied at the door that Stiles would be there for a long time.

“How are you feeling?”

“I’m okay,” Stiles said, playing with the glass, watching droplets of water slide down the sides. “Sore, but no lasting damage because the breaks were contained so I can’t really complain.” He knew it was true, too. He’d been looking up broken ribs on his phone while waiting between various tests and it all sounded really nasty. Ribs breaking skin, damaging organs, splintering off and having bits of bone get stuck places they should not be. It all sounded particularly nasty. But because of how his were broken, with just enough pressure to break them without the actual impact broken ribs usually came with, he’d lucked out. He had the break, but nothing else.

“I’m sorry that happened,” Talia said softly. “It shouldn’t have. No one should have approached you, especially not with the intent to cause you harm.”

Stiles pressed his lips together, because he hadn’t exactly been honest lately, so while he was mad this happened, he knew he was partly to blame. “It’s kind of my fault,” he admitted. “I should’ve told you that more Alphas had come since Alpha Talbot, I just... every time something new happens, I get information that freaks me out. I figured I should just keep it to myself and eventually it would stop on its own.”

“How many have come?” Talia asked, her lips pressed together unhappily. “Since Alpha Talbot.”

“I don’t know,” Stiles admitted. “A few. Seven? I don’t know.” He pulled his glass closer, but didn’t drink from it. It was cool against his hand and he resisted the urge to raise it to his forehead, feeling warm. “How do they even know where I live?”

“Because the Council knows,” Talia said with a soft sigh. “They are required to know where you live, to ensure if anything goes wrong they have the ability to take action and protect you. But not everyone on the Council can hold their tongue. Word got out. Most are being respectful and waiting to be summoned, but I suspect the closer packs are looking to gain favour by paying their respects sooner than others.”

“I don’t understand what’s happening,” Stiles admitted, some of his frustration peeking through. “I’ve never even heard of this Council until you told me about it. And why would they protect me? I’m just a human.”

“You are Derek’s mate.”

“So what?” Stiles asked, a little impolitely, but he was so frustrated and annoyed and he hated not
having answers. “Michael is your mate. Presumably other Alphas have mates. What is so important about me?”

“Michael is just as important as you are,” Talia told him calmly.

The fact that she didn’t say all mates were just as important was not lost on him. And this only reinforced his earlier belief that there was something going on with this family.

Something he wanted to know right now.

“Who are you?” he insisted softly, both hands wrapped around the glass in front of him. “I need answers. Deucalion said you painted a target on my back. He said I was involved in something I didn’t understand. You can’t keep me in the dark if Werewolves are going to show up at my house looking to hurt me because Derek finds me interesting.”

Talia was watching him, but he knew she’d already decided on what she was going to share before he’d even showed up. He didn’t know if that was good or bad, but he felt like she had to realize not being honest was causing more problems.

“You’re right,” she finally said. “This has just been... a little out of order. With you.” She leaned back in her seat a little, like she was trying to get comfortable, even while knowing this conversation would be problematic. “Everything with you happened out of order because of how old Derek was when he met you. For that, I’m sorry. There is a natural progression to everything you’ve been through, and it is something that the Alpha is taught from a young age. I am honestly struggling to determine when is the best time to share information, because everything that’s happened with you hasn’t been in the way I was taught. It wasn’t how it happened between myself and Michael. I am just trying to protect my son from unnecessary heartache.”

“And I’m trying to protect my son from further harm,” his dad said, speaking for the first time since their arrival.

Talia looked at him and nodded once, looking a little ashamed. “You’re right, sheriff. I should have been honest with you when we spoke last. This is just not something that is widely shared with humans, and I was trying to find the right time to share it with Stiles.”

“Before you go any further,” Stiles interrupted, because he could feel another bomb about to drop, and he really, really, really couldn’t handle a panic attack with broken ribs. Sure, he couldn’t feel them right now, but he doubted it would be a good idea either way. “Should Michael be here? We already know he’s better at the whole human thing.” The look his dad gave him made him realize what he’d said and he winced. “Uh, no offense.”

“None taken,” Talia said with an understanding nod. “I asked him to stay behind in case you would prefer his involvement. Thank you for your honesty.”

She stood then, moving to head out of the kitchen, and Stiles figured she was going to get her husband. He was probably holed up in his study or something, no one needing to worry about him listening in since he wasn’t a Werewolf. It was probably why the others had all been told to scram, because whatever was coming, it was big, and Talia likely didn’t want them listening to Stiles’ meltdown.

“This can’t be good,” he said softly, glancing at his dad. “I’ve had way too many shocks dropped on me since the new year, I don’t know if I can handle another one.”

Actually, he was fairly certain he couldn’t. He wanted to go away on vacation for a while, just
disappear for a few months and be left alone. If he could afford it, he’d have asked to go to another university just to get some distance, but considering the Council was in New York and Stiles lived in California, he didn’t think distance would help. They seemed particularly invested in knowing where he was at all times, so leaving to go elsewhere wouldn’t change anything. They’d still know where he was.

“I don’t think anything can possibly top being an Alpha’s mate,” his dad insisted, ever the optimist. “Don’t worry, kiddo.” He patted his shoulder lightly. “It’s gonna be fine. We’re in this together.”

“Right.” Stiles was really glad his dad knew about all this. He didn’t know that he’d manage to make it through whatever was coming without him. He hated that his dad was now part of this side of his life, but he was also so thankful and grateful.

Talia returned a few moments later, Michael in tow and offering Stiles a kind smile while he took a seat beside his wife.

“Stiles. You’re looking well, considering the excitement from yesterday.”

“Yeah, I got off lucky,” he admitted.

“That isn’t what I heard,” Michael said gently, but didn’t press. “And how’s your friend? Jackson, wasn’t it?”

Stiles forgot that Michael wasn’t often around whenever Jackson came by. Merrak wasn’t usually, either, and Stiles attributed it to Talia wanting to keep her humans safe from a somewhat hostile wolf. Jackson was an acquired taste, after all.

“He’s okay. Last I spoke to him, he’d healed up almost everything except a few slashes. I’m assuming they’re gone by now.”

“They likely are,” Talia agreed.

“What happened, anyway?” Stiles asked. When he realized no one could follow his thought-process, he added, “With that pack. Deucalion and them.”

“The Alpha pack,” Talia said, sounding highly unimpressed. Before Stiles could ask, she evidently saw the inquiry on his face because she gave a brief background of who the Alpha pack was.

Apparently the Council had been after them for years, and to have them appear so close to Talia and her family, going after Stiles, was a bold move, even for them. They were a group of rogue Alphas who’d murdered their entire packs to gain power, and had begun to travel together. They were a force to be reckoned with, and often searched for other Alphas who shared their ideals, that being that only the strongest in a pack was worth being spared.

They attacked packs and either forced their Alphas to murder their own, or they decimated the whole pack itself as punishment. They’d mostly been trying to stay off the Council’s radar the past few years, Talia assuming that they were planning something big. Their appearance at Stiles’ house suggested they were looking to hurt the Hale pack.

“So what happened to them?” Stiles asked, because everyone had been gone when he’d exited the house to head to the hospital with Laura.

“They were to be delivered to the Council,” Talia explained, though the past tense was telling. “They agreed to cooperate, Deucalion told his pack to obey, but once we were all in our respective vehicles, they sacrificed the Alpha who tried to run and managed to escape while we tended to his
wounds.”

Stiles figured she meant the Alpha Eric had attacked. The one who’d tried to make a break for it before being stopped.

“Where is he now?”

“He was picked up by the Council yesterday shortly after Deucalion escaped. As I understand it, he succumbed to his injuries before reaching New York.”

Realizing that this pack of crazy Alphas was still out there, and that they’d killed one of their own to escape, was terrifying. Realizing that a Werewolf had been hurt to such a degree that he hadn’t been able to heal was even more terrifying, and now more than ever, he wanted Scott to get off his high horse and join the Hale pack. They couldn’t protect the town divided as they were, and Stiles didn’t want anyone else to get hurt.

“This means we haven’t seen the last of them,” his dad said, crossing his arms and sounding extremely unhappy.

“Regrettably not,” Talia confirmed.

“And the target on my back?” Stiles asked cautiously, since that was the whole point of his visit today. “Guessing I should get used to it?”

Talia sighed and glanced at Michael. He reached out to take one of her hands, pulling it up and kissing her knuckles. It was a sweet gesture, but it made Stiles sad, because his dad used to do things like that with his mother. Times like this, seeing another happy, functioning couple, made him miss his mother more than anything.

“This is generally only shared once confirmation of the claim being accepted has taken place,” Talia admitted softly, watching Stiles carefully. “Something that we only risk when we know the chances of our mates leaving us are slim.”

That didn’t bode well.

“It’s not a bad thing,” Michael jumped in instantly, likely seeing that Talia’s words had been the wrong ones. She really needed to figure out how to speak to humans but then again, maybe that was why she and Michael worked so well. They understood each other. “We just know the past few months have been challenging for you. You’ve discovered a lot of things in a very short amount of time, and we understand that we’ve not made your life easy. You and Derek are still on shaky footing, and we were hoping to keep this under wraps as long as possible in an attempt to allow you more of a chance to get to know him. We wanted you to decide how you felt about him before giving you more to think about.”

“Okay,” Stiles said slowly, looking between them, concerned. “So is that required, or a choice?”

“More of a guideline,” Talia said. “Every human mate in our family, and even some of the Werewolf ones who weren’t as involved with the Council and our family, had to be eased into this knowledge. Being a mate is stressful enough for people like you, who didn’t even know it existed. Being the mate of someone in our family is, well…” It looked like Talia had a word picked out, but she likely realized at the last minute that it was the wrong one.

“Overwhelming,” Michael offered.

“What does that mean?” the sheriff asked, which was a good thing, because Stiles himself almost
blurted it out much more rudely.

Talia looked at her husband, and it occurred to Stiles now how much she relied on him. How important a mate was to an Alpha. How tightly she was gripping his hand, likely hurting him, but unable to let go. She was worried about Stiles’ reaction, because it would mean bad news for Derek. Because if things went poorly right now during this conversation, Stiles was going to check out instantly and Derek wouldn’t have a say in it.

That only made Stiles more nervous because what the fuck was happening?

Michael kissed Talia’s hand again, murmured something too low for Stiles to hear, and she let out a soft breath before turning towards the back door.

“Kincaid,” she said.

Stiles didn’t understand what that meant, but a moment later, someone appeared at the back door, so suddenly that the sheriff jumped. The man slid open the door and stepped into the house.

Then he bent to one knee, bowed his head, and said, “Yes, your majesty?”

Everything stopped.

TBC...

Chapter End Notes

WARNINGS: There is some Deucalion in this. He breaks Stiles' ribs with his Werewolf strength, and the Alpha pack beats on Jackson fairly heavily. Stiles blinds Deucalion with mountain ash - he breaks a vial of it in his face.

Obligatory Copyright Crap:
- Teen Wolf (c) Jeff Davis
- Twilight (c) Stephenie Meyer
- Brooklyn-nine-nine (c) Michael Schur & Dan Goor
- The Good Place (c) Michael Schur
- Harry Potter (c) J.K. Rowling
If Stiles thought he was going to have a panic attack at realizing he was a future Alpha’s mate, it was nothing compared to the reaction he felt coming on at what had just happened.

Realistically, there were much better ways to tell Stiles that the Hales were royalty, but he figured Talia hadn’t known how and this was the easiest way. She’d kept her gaze locked on Stiles when the man had entered and fallen to one knee, and Stiles just stared at him incredulously, unable to do anything but just stare at him.

Your majesty.

It was almost hilarious when he really thought about it. People running around calling someone ‘your majesty’ or ‘your highness’ or whatever other titles existed. It felt like something Stiles and Scott would laugh about, things they commented on whenever the royal family in Britain was ever referenced because it was hilarious to think titles like that still existed. They were so medieval, and it was just weird to think of people saying it in twenty-nineteen.

And yet...

Merrak’s comment made more sense now. About how Scott couldn’t speak to Derek the way he was. About how he had to learn his place. Because of who Derek was.

Because the Hales were some form of royalty, likely exclusively within the Werewolf community, and Scott was a nobody. He was a bitten wolf, not even really a Beta given he wasn’t in a real pack —according to what Stiles had been told about packs. That Scott had been mouthing off the way he had for months without any kind of reprimand was both a relief and terrifying. It made Stiles wonder if he would’ve been punished had he not been Stiles’ friend. He’d seen the fury on the Hales’ faces when Deucalion had shown up, and that was only against Stiles, who wasn’t even really fully integrated into their pack. Scott had been rude and condescending to the whole pack for months.

“Any news on Deucalion?” Talia asked the man kneeling by the door, though her eyes remained locked on Stiles.

Stiles, who was pretty sure he’d stopped breathing.

“No, my Queen.”

“Please instruct the Council that this is a priority. I do not like the thought of Deucalion free knowing the one who blinded him is important to my son.”

Kincaid bowed his head further, then stood and backed out of the house, shutting the door behind him. He disappeared from sight quickly, but Stiles just kept staring at the back door like he was
still there. Like he could still see him. Like the sight of him kneeling was burned into his eyeballs, and no matter where he looked, he would see it.

“Stiles?” Michael asked cautiously.

Stiles jumped when a hand landed on his shoulder, squeezing hard enough to almost hurt. He turned to look at his dad, and saw the same expression he imagined he was sporting. Like this was fucking terrible news because holy shit, the Hales were royalty.

Talia was a Queen, and that meant Derek was some kind of Prince, but he was going to be the next Alpha, which meant he would eventually be King, and Stiles was his mate, which meant he would be some kind of royal once they got Werewolf married and holy shit, this was too much. This was way too much.

If Stiles decided he didn’t want to be Derek’s mate, if he left and said ‘thanks, but no thanks’ like he thought every now and then, he wasn’t only turning down the next Alpha, he was turning down the next King, and that was a lot.

His chest felt extremely tight, and his skin felt all weird and prickly. Was it extremely hot in the house all of a sudden? It felt like the temperature had just sky-rocketed and he was finding it hard to breathe.

“Son,” his dad said, hand tightening on his shoulder. “Stiles, talk to me. What do you need?”

What did he need? A fucking reset button on his life, apparently. One where maybe he could stop his mother’s cancer from spreading by having the doctors catch it sooner. Where he didn’t become friends with Scott, or at least stopped him from becoming a Werewolf. One where he saw Eric Hale being attacked and just shrugged and kept walking because it wasn’t his concern.

He knew that wasn’t him. Knew he hadn’t been raised that way, that no matter what everything would probably fall back into place exactly as it was, even if he tried to take a different route, but his entire year so far was a fucking disaster.

“I need some air,” Stiles said, pushing away from the table and stumbling to his feet. His dad looked like he was going to go with him, but Stiles just held one hand out without looking at him, shook his head, and then turned to head back for the front door. He didn’t want to go into the yard, considering Kincaid was back there.

Nobody followed him, though Talia’s quiet tones to his dad suggested the man wanted to. Stiles made it to the front door and managed to get outside. It still felt too hot and the sun was too bright, and everything was a fucking disaster.

He stumbled his way to the cruiser, placing his hands flat on the side of the hood, the metal warm beneath his palms. Bowing his head, he tried to breathe while bracing himself against it, clenching his eyes shut and forcing air between clenched teeth.

This was insane. This couldn’t be real. He was only twenty-one, how could this possibly be happening to him? He honestly felt like if he’d been older when these bombs had all been dropped, he would’ve been fine.

Thirty years old, finding out he’s got a Werewolf mate, sure, no problem. He’d have a job by then, maybe a house with a mortgage, some investments. He’d have his life figured out, probably would’ve dated a few people, managed to figure out what it was he liked and wanted. He’d be more mature, maybe wouldn’t worry about stepping out of line and getting beheaded for it. He
could’ve handled this better.

But he wasn’t any of those things. He was twenty-one years old, still had one year of university to go, hadn’t ever really dated people, was still a fucking virgin. And now he was being told he belonged to Derek, he was his mate, that even if he rejected him Derek would always be there, that Derek was a future Alpha, a future King. That was a lot to put on the shoulders of someone who’d only really known Werewolves existed five years ago.

“Well now,” a familiar voice said, making Stiles tense instantly, “isn’t that an interesting reaction.”

He managed to open his eyes and glanced up, still braced against the cruiser while Peter Hale approached from the trees. He didn’t know the man past what he’d seen of him the day before, but he was sure his presence was against Talia’s rules considering she’d said everyone had been told to leave for this conversation.

“What?” he managed to force out, Peter coming closer so he was standing on the other side of the cruiser’s hood, both of them opposite one another.

Peter looked down at the paintjob, then tapped his fingers absently along the hood, moving around it slowly, eyes on his moving fingers.

“Most people would be thrilled to find out they were slated to marry into a royal family. Do you know what that means to most people? It means power, money, freedom. Look around you.” Peter motioned the area expansively, Stiles unintentionally following the sweep of his arm. “Huge house, countless cars—granted, not currently here, but you’re aware of them. More money than they know what to do with. And you? Your father barely manages to scrape by with the salary he has. No retirement savings, no pension, barely enough to get you through school. A normal person would be thrilled to marry into a family like this.”

“I don’t care about money,” Stiles insisted, a little insulted Peter would think so badly of him. Then again, he didn’t know him, so maybe he was just assuming money was what everyone wanted.

“And power?” Peter asked, finally moving along the hood so he was now on the same side as Stiles, leaning against it slightly and tilting his head while giving him a once-over. “People tend to like power. Think of what you can achieve. You controlled the Alpha pack into letting go of your friend, didn’t you?”

Stiles had to wonder how long Peter had stood back to watch before making his presence known. Of course, he knew he’d stopped to call Talia, but if he’d seen Stiles step out of his house and help Jackson free himself, then he’d been there long enough to help, and that really irked Stiles.

“If you were there sooner, why didn’t you help?”

“I wanted to see what kind of man my nephew had fallen for.” Peter smiled, but it was sarcastic and unkind. “Imagine my surprise when you stepped out into danger to protect your friend. Sacrifice isn’t attractive. It can lead to problems, such as you willingly putting yourself in danger, which in turn puts Derek in danger.”

“I never asked for his protection.”

“But you’ll get it regardless,” Peter said. “But back to power, hm? You seem to be taking to your new role quite well. And who doesn’t like power?”

“I didn’t do whatever I did because I like power,” Stiles snapped. “I did it to save Jackson’s life. I
“You say that as if you don’t have a choice.” Peter looked thrilled now, like he was seeing something of interest in Stiles that he hadn’t previously noticed.

Stiles didn’t like having to admit it, but he’d heard enough to know how this would play out if he rejected Derek, so he replied honestly. “It would destroy Derek.”


“I don’t want to hurt him.”

“And hurting you is fine?” Peter asked, sounding surprised. He’d moved a step closer now and Stiles instinctively took one away from him, frowning slightly.

“He hasn’t hurt me.”

Peter affected a surprised look. “Hasn’t he?” His eyes lowered to Stiles’ ribs and he reached up instinctively to protect them, slightly worried Peter would reach out to jab at them.

Sure, Talia had taken his pain, but he knew once that faded that everything would hurt again, and he didn’t need to aggravate the injury more.

“That wasn’t his fault,” he argued, voice lacking in conviction. Because—wasn’t it? A little bit?

“No?” Peter asked, clearly hearing the hesitation in Stiles’ voice. “Then whose fault was it?”

“The people who did it.”

“And ask yourself why they did it.” Peter moved closer again, Stiles stumbling back a step and continuing quickly around the car while Peter followed him. “Who they were really trying to hurt.”

“Whose side are you on?” Stiles demanded incredulously, stumbling around the trunk and trying to keep some distance between them, but Peter’s hand shot out before he could succeed, gripping his shirt tightly and wrenching him forward again so their faces were inches apart.

“I’m rather fond of my nephew,” he said with an unkind smile. “He means something to me. I don’t want to see him hurt, so if your plans are to be with him until everything is too overwhelming, and then you’re going to leave, do us all a favour and turn him down now.”

He released Stiles, who stumbled back a few steps, wanting to put some distance between them. He stared at Talia’s brother, not quite sure what to make of him, because he seemed very contradictory in his words.

Peter, for his part, just inspected his hand, like he could feel traces of Stiles lingering on it, then lowered it and glanced back at Stiles, flashing amber eyes at him.

“You’re a smart boy, Stiles. You know this isn’t going to stop. The people coming for you, for your friends, your father. You know now what it will mean, belonging to this family, being with Derek. Either you jump in with both feet and accept the role you were born for, or run away with your tail between your legs before you cause irreparable damage. If you hurt him, I will eviscerate you.”

With that said, Peter smiled pleasantly, then turned on his heel and wandered back towards the forest, disappearing through the trees and leaving Stiles standing by the cruiser with his heart in his
throat and absolutely no fucking idea what was going on with this fucking family.

They didn’t stay long when Stiles re-entered the house. He knew Talia was well aware of the conversation that had transpired outside, but Stiles only stayed in the doorway long enough to tell his dad he wanted to go, and the man stood instantly to drive them both home.

It was a long and silent drive, the sheriff keeping his eyes on the road and Stiles staring out the window with his face against one fist, thinking.

While he could understand Peter’s stance on the matter, it had never been about power or money to Stiles. The information he was now privy to didn’t affect his decision because of money or power or whatever else came with it. His brain mostly focussed on the “holy shit, they’re royalty!” aspect of it.

He remembered how crazy things had been for Meghan Markle when she’d married into the British royal family, and while they had rules, she was unlikely to get murdered for breaking them. Stiles didn’t know what would happen to him or anyone he cared about if things went south.

On top of that, Meghan could just get a divorce if shit really hit the fan. Being Werewolf married sounded a lot more restrictive. He didn’t know how to deal with something like this.

Did he like Derek? Sure, absolutely. Now, anyway. The guy was nice, and kind of funny, and he seemed like a genuinely good person who didn’t really know how to people. Stiles knew he should feel thankful someone like him had even looked at someone like Stiles, but it was hard. Because how much of that was like the Twilight imprinting bullshit? Did Derek even have a choice? What about what he wanted? Sure, he said he wanted Stiles, but did he really, or did the wolf take over entirely and insist Stiles was what he wanted even if he wasn’t?

“Son?”

Stiles turned to his dad and hated the worried expression on his face. Stiles rubbed both hands across his own, trying to turn his brain off, but he knew that was an impossibility.

“I’m fine.”

“If anyone was ever actually fine after that conversation, I’d be concerned about their mental health.”

Stiles said nothing to that, letting his hands fall back into his lap.

“I miss when things were normal,” he admitted. “I didn’t expect my action-packed life to turn into a cheesy romance.”

“Nothing about the past few days is a cheesy romance,” his dad argued, turning to face him fully. It was only then that Stiles realized they’d stopped in front of the house.

He hadn’t noticed.

“Bella never had to deal with this shit,” he muttered to himself.

“What?”

“Nothing.” Stiles opened the car door and climbed out, slamming it behind him and walking towards the house. He honestly didn’t know how to feel over the fact that his life was literally
turning into a *Twilight* movie. Well, barring the whole royalty thing.

A part of him wondered how Bella would’ve reacted to that, but figured he didn’t want to know. If he and the damsel in distress had reacted similarly, he’d never live it down. It was best to pretend he’d taken the news like a champ.

He felt like nobody could fault him, though. Finding out all of this shit in a few months was kind of a lot to take in. His dad even agreed, so that meant it had to be fucking nuts. He didn’t know how he was still sane right now, and the matter wasn’t helped when he stopped at the base of the porch steps to find a package in front of their door.

Though with Deucalion out there somewhere intent on causing him harm, it could be anything from another gift from an Alpha to the crazy blind Werewolf sending him a bomb.

“Dad,” he said loudly, looking over his shoulder. The man was looking down at his phone with a frown, but glanced up at the sound of his son’s voice. Stiles just pointed at the package and the sheriff was beside him instantly, pulling him back like he was worried the thing would grow legs and come at him.

“Wait here.”

He started up the porch steps and Stiles grabbed his jacket and yanked him back, giving him an annoyed look.

“Oh, so it’s okay for you to get blown up?” He shook his head. “Call Parrish.”

“It’s his day off.”

“Then I’ll call Scott or Jackson.”

“So your friends can get blown up?” his father asked with the same expression Stiles had sported moments ago.

“They’re Werewolves, they can probably smell if it’s dangerous,” Stiles argued, beginning to scroll through his contacts. He paused when he heard the distinct sound of a motorbike heading in their direction, and when he turned, sure enough, there was Scott. Puttering his way down the street. He parked in the driveway beside Stiles’ Jeep, watching both Stilinskis with confusion while removing his helmet.

“What’s up?”

Stiles pointed at the porch. “Use your sniffer and tell me if that’s dangerous.”

“Wow, thanks Stiles,” he said dryly, rolling his eyes while climbing off his motorbike and setting his helmet down on it.

He did as asked though, obediently moving towards them and heading up the porch steps. Stiles’ ribs were beginning to twinge again and he pressed one hand against them, knowing it wouldn’t help but somehow always feeling a little better whenever he did.

They both watched Scott approach the package carefully. He sniffed the air around it, bending down slowly, then glanced at the sheriff before popping a claw out. His dad didn’t even blink, standing protectively beside Stiles with his arms crossed while they both watched Scott slice through the packing tape and pull open the flaps. He frowned, then reached into the box and held up a movie.
“Uh, you order some movies? Like, a box full of them?”

Present, then. Well, better than a bomb.

Stiles sighed in defeat, trudging up the steps and looking down into the box. It was full of action movies, as far as he could tell, and he bent down to pull out the envelope wedged between two of the Iron Man movies. Opening it, he saw a short message about paying respects and then a signature, with the printed words ‘Barry Pack’ beneath it.

“I’m getting really tired of this,” he muttered, pulling his keys out to unlock the door and walking into the house without bothering to touch the box.

The sheriff murmured a thank you to Scott, and broke the mountain ash barrier at the door for him so he could enter the house, since Stiles hadn’t stopped long enough to do so.

Scott ended up carrying the box into the living room for him while Stiles headed upstairs. He noticed his dad move towards it and pick through the items, as if double-checking they were truly safe. He didn’t stop to think about what the present meant and just walked into his room before falling face-first on his bed, desperate to turn his brain off.

Probably a bad call since it hurt his ribs, but he didn’t care enough right then. He just wanted to stop thinking for an hour, or a day, or forever.

“What happened?” Scott asked, having followed him to his room. “Did you talk to the Hales?”

“Unfortunately,” Stiles said, voice muffled by his pillow.

“And?”

Stiles didn’t know if he was actually allowed to say anything. He’d kind of run off upon discovering what was going on, and had only returned long enough to get his ride. People obviously knew in the Supernatural community, but Stiles didn’t know if this was something he could share. Especially given Scott was not their biggest fan and it could all turn out horribly for everyone involved.

On the one hand, it might be safer to tell him so he’d stop being a dick about it all, but on the other hand, it might also cause more problems. He’d definitely insist the Hales were bullying him into doing what they wanted and he couldn’t deal with that right now.

It occurred to him then that he really was Bella. Because Scott was obviously his Jacob—minus the love interest aspect, he hoped—and Derek was his creepy, stalkerish Edward.

How depressing.

“Can we just do something?” Stiles asked, sitting up and wincing again at the protest in his ribs. The pain was coming and going, like the Werewolf pain-suckage was trying hard to stick around but failing miserably. “I don’t want to think about this anymore.”

Scott looked unhappy at being left in the dark, but he offered to play Mario Kart if Stiles was up for it, and really, that sounded perfect. Nothing like yelling and trying to murder each other to get his mind off the craziness that was now his life.

It was actually surprisingly nice. And normal. He and Scott played various games for a majority of the afternoon, Jackson dropped by at some point to bitch and moan about how much he hated everyone and everything because they were boring, and Scott ended up leaving to go have dinner.
Jackson stuck around for a few hours, and admitted to Stiles that Cora had told him about their family back when they’d bumped into the Hale siblings at the movies. Stiles wanted to be annoyed with him about it, but considering he himself hadn’t told Scott because he wasn’t sure he was allowed to, he figured Jackson had been in the same boat.

He ended up sticking around for dinner, the sheriff eating quickly because he had to head to work, then they both went to grab some snacks so they could peruse the movies Stiles had received. His ribs bothered him something fierce by the time they settled down to watch one of the *Monty Python* movies, but Jackson had just shoved his shirt up and pressed a hand to his side, staring intently.

Stiles was actually kind of proud when he managed to steal his pain, and he grinned and punched Jackson lightly in the arm in thanks. Jackson just grunted at him, but Stiles could tell he was pleased with himself.

He left around nine, Stiles alone in his empty house with nothing but his rampaging thoughts for company. He went to take a shower in hopes of distracting himself, but he didn’t know why showering seemed like the best course of action. He did more thinking in the shower than anywhere else, so that was a bad call on his part.

Once he was dry and in his pyjamas, he went to his room and just sat on his bed with a textbook. He figured trying to jog his memory on all the things he’d learned the previous semester might help him stay distracted, but it proved futile the longer he sat there. Eventually, he was just sitting cross-legged with the open textbook in his lap and his eyes staring down at nothing, his vision blurring.

He had no idea how long he sat there with his mind spinning, but he jumped and almost threw his textbook into the ceiling in fright when there was a light knock at his window. He turned to it quickly, the textbook hugged safely to his chest—they were expensive, he didn’t want to be tossing them around—and saw Derek crouched on the roof right outside his window.

Dropping the book on the bed beside him, he moved to the window and slid it up, Derek’s eyes following every movement he made like someone trying to map him perfectly in their mind. It was a little uncomfortable, but Stiles figured Derek was trying to see if he’d completely lost him or not.

“You know, someone’s gonna see you and end up calling the cops,” he informed him, crossing his arms and making no move to break the mountain ash line he had set up just inside his window sill.

Derek offered him a small smile. “Good thing I’m here then, save them the trouble.”

“Yeah, and how do you think that’s gonna look to the neighbours?” Stiles asked, even though he silently acknowledged Derek would already be inside the house and out of sight by now if he’d allowed him entry. “One of the sheriff’s deputies sneaking into his son’s bedroom in the middle of the night while the man’s on shift.”

“I’m not sneaking, and I’m not in your bedroom,” Derek argued, still smiling slightly. “Besides, I know the sheriff. We’re real close. I hear he’d love to have two of me.”

Stiles rolled his eyes. “Hilarious. You should have your own show.”

“Working on it,” Derek teased. The smile slowly left his lips and he watched Stiles for a long moment before saying, “Can I come in?”

Stiles thought about it for only a few seconds before reaching out to break the barrier and stepping with Kira.
aside. Derek climbed in gracefully, making Stiles a little jealous of how dexterous all Werewolves were. He’d have fallen flat on his face after catching his foot on the sill, he was sure.

Once Derek moved out of the way, Stiles closed the line again. He didn’t want to risk anything else coming into his house, and was actually more paranoid than he’d been previously about making sure he always had some mountain ash on him. Considering he’d forgotten he’d even done that, he was now eternally grateful to past-paranoid-Stiles, otherwise things with Deucalion could’ve gone much worse.

Stiles watched Derek look around his room, as if he’d never seen it before. He knew he had, considering his previous nightly visits, but maybe he’d spent more time watching Stiles than actually looking around so all of this was new to him. He moved towards Stiles’ bed, reaching out to turn the book a little to check the title, then running his fingers along his nightstand before settling on the butt of his bat. He tapped it a few times, like he was thinking, then turned to Stiles.

“How’re your ribs?”

“Sore,” he admitted. “But Jackson pulled my pain before he left, so they’re still okay.”

Derek moved closer to him, holding one hand out. “May I?”

This decision took a little longer, but Stiles eventually nodded and lifted his shirt a little. Derek’s hand slid up along his side, making him tense because it tickled a bit, and pressed gently against his broken ribs. He was warm, and careful, and Stiles’ gaze was shunted to the side so he wasn’t staring at Derek while the man pulled at his pain.

He felt Derek stiffen, wondering what that meant, but when he glanced at him Derek looked like he was trying really hard not to smile. It looked like a huge weight had been lifted off his shoulders, and Stiles didn’t understand why.

It seemed to take him entirely too long to pull his hand back, but he did eventually and Stiles dropped his shirt.

“Thanks.”

Derek nodded once, taking a step back and shoving his hands in his pockets. His jeans were so tight, Stiles didn’t know how he was managing it. He wondered why Derek always wore tight clothes, but then figured if he had a body like that, he’d probably show it off, too.

“Mom said things didn’t go well today,” Derek said quietly, forcing Stiles’ eyes back up from his tight pants, and hoping the Werewolf hadn’t noticed.

“I mean, no, but they didn’t go horribly, either,” Stiles admitted, crossing his arms and shifting his weight uncomfortably. “I don’t think your uncle likes me very much.”

“Actually, he had nothing but good things to say about you,” Derek insisted. “Peter’s hard to read sometimes, but he seems to like you a lot.”

“Oh.” Stiles found that to be surprising, considering how they’d left things. “He said he’d eviscerate me if I hurt you.”

Derek snorted at that, like it was an empty threat. “Peter and I have a... complicated relationship. He tried to kill me when I was younger.”

Stiles’ eyebrows shot up. “What?”
“Yeah.”

“For someone who tried to kill you, he seems remarkably protective.”

“It’s complicated,” Derek admitted with another shrug.

“I’m pretty smart,” Stiles offered. “Not like, Lydia smart, but we can’t all be Valedictorian. Salutatorian isn’t bad, though. I’m sure I could keep up.”

Derek watched him for a moment, then glanced at the window, and then back again. He moved a step forward, Stiles forcing himself to hold his ground, and said, “Are you hungry at all?”

“Not particularly,” Stiles said slowly, unsure of how they’d moved from Peter trying to kill him to food.

It only occurred to him Derek was asking to head out somewhere so they could chat when the man’s shoulders slumped slightly. He seemed to be trying to think of something else to say, then his eyes caught sight of the bat once more.

“You any good with that?”

“What?” Stiles asked, then realized what he meant. “Good enough to survive various attacks from monsters with it.”

“I meant with a ball,” Derek offered with another small smile.

“I don’t know,” Stiles admitted. “My experience is kind of limited to using it to try and take a monster’s head off.”

Derek let out a small laugh at that, then pulled his phone out of his pocket, presumably to check the time. “You have any plans tomorrow?”

“No?” Stiles said cautiously.

Derek moved to the bat and picked it up, holding it in both hands before taking an experimental swing, being mindful not to hit anything in Stiles’ room. He hummed, like the weight of it was satisfying, then motioned for Stiles to get some real clothes on.

“Get dressed. We can find out if you can hit something other than a monster with it.”

Stiles balked. “What, right now?”

Derek shrugged, still swinging the bat slowly in a wide, downward arc. “Why not? You don’t have plans tomorrow, so you can sleep in as late as you want. I’m on the graveyard shift, so this won’t affect my sleep schedule.”

“Might affect my ribs,” Stiles argued.

Derek wasn’t able to contain the smile this time. “Your ribs are fine.”

“That is literally impossible,” Stiles insisted with a snort, but the look Derek gave him made him feel like maybe he knew something Stiles didn’t. It also made him wonder if there was something Derek wasn’t telling him about his ribs. Maybe being an Alpha’s mate was making them heal at an accelerated rate, who knew?

He glanced down at his left hand to test that theory, seeing the cuts from the glass still there, but
that had been with mountain ash so maybe that was different. He didn’t dwell on it though, and just looked back up at Derek, who had the bat resting on his left shoulder now.

“Come on.” He nodded towards Stiles’ dresser, then smirked slightly. “Unless you’re scared of embarrassing yourself.”

Stiles snorted so hard he felt like he might break more ribs. “If I was scared of embarrassing myself, I’d never get out of bed.”

He hesitated for a moment longer, the two of them staring at one another, then rolled his eyes and conceded defeat. He moved to the window to shut it again, making sure the mountain ash was still in place, then waved towards the door.

“Go wait in the kitchen, I’ll be down in a minute.”

Derek’s smile then was genuine and he disappeared from his room, shutting the door behind himself.

This was such a bad idea. Stiles knew it was, because it was the middle of the night, there was a crazy, blind Werewolf out looking to hurt him, his ribs were broken, and Derek was some kind of Werewolf Prince who really shouldn’t be running around in the middle of the night with people out to kill him—including his uncle, apparently.

Stiles shrugged it off, because he didn’t feel like he was in any danger, and he needed to talk to Derek about—well, everything. If this was how they would do it, then he’d tolerate it. Wasn’t like he’d have to hit any balls, he didn’t even have a baseball. Just the bat.

Changing out quickly into more outside-appropriate clothing, he pulled on some shoes and headed out of his room, going down to meet Derek in the kitchen. When he walked in, Derek was sitting at the kitchen table, tossing a baseball up into the air and catching it. Stiles paused, staring at him.

“Where did you get that?”

“Magic,” Derek said with a mysterious smile and stood. “Ready to go?”

Stiles’ eyes stayed on the ball in Derek’s hand for a few seconds, but he eventually nodded and they headed out. Stiles had to break the mountain ash line at his front door so Derek could exit, but he put it back into place as soon as he stepped out, then followed and shut the door, locking it.

They headed for the Camaro, Stiles climbing into the passenger seat while Derek dropped the bat and ball in the back and got behind the wheel. They were driving down the street before Stiles turned to him.

“So, your uncle?”

Derek was silent for a moment, like he was trying to choose his words carefully. Considering how much damage words had done in the past coming from members of his family, Stiles figured he could understand the hesitation and caution.

“After Laura was born, when it was clear she wasn’t the next Alpha, Peter tried to talk mom out of having any more kids. If she stopped, the Alpha spark would have to find a new host, and Peter’s always been a little bit obsessed with power. Mom didn’t listen, and after she had me and it came about that I was the next Alpha, Peter got pissed. He always felt like he’d make a much better Alpha, a better ruler than anyone else in our family. When I was twelve, he took me out into the woods under the guise of teaching me how to hunt like a real man.” Derek scoffed, glancing at
Stiles. “My dad is human, he doesn’t know how to hunt like a man, or so Peter said.”

“Rude,” Stiles offered with a small smile.

Derek’s lips quirked as well, but he continued, eyes on the road. “He got me out far enough away that no one could find us without some work. Then he attacked me. Tried to rip my throat out. Didn’t count on mom not trusting him, so she had a detail on me. As soon as Peter came at me, a Council guard intercepted and stopped him. He had me go home and get my mom, so I did. Then mom went out to the woods and she came back with the guard. No sign of Peter. I thought she killed him.”

“But she didn’t,” Stiles said, given Peter was still alive and well.

“She didn’t,” Derek agreed. “Though he has died twice in the past few years. He just doesn’t stay dead. Like a cockroach.” Derek didn’t seem to know whether he wanted to smile at that or not, so his face did a weird twitch before he continued. “Anyway, he was sent to the Council for a decision to be made. Eventually, mom said it was up to me because I was the one he’d wronged.”


“He was my uncle.” Derek glanced at him again. “And my cousin had already lost her mom. So I just said he had to stay away from me. Peter’s loyalties are a little weird and skewed, and my sparing his life with only the caveat of him not coming near me made him decide I was weak and unworthy. So a few years later, when I was in New York, he came at me again. He was tried again, and I spared him again. Mom ordered him never to come near me again, and as the Alpha, it’s an order that stuck, at least for a while. Mom can’t order people into doing what she wants indefinitely, otherwise Deucalion wouldn’t be a problem. But she has some pull for a little while, especially if the person is pack and family. So she told him to stay away, and he did. And then I saved his daughter, who is probably the only person he gives two shits about, and since then, I’m suddenly someone worth protecting.”

“Hm.” It was all Stiles could think to say. He supposed it made sense, having someone close to Peter being protected or saved by someone he hated. It tended to shift people’s opinions a little bit, for the most part. Not Scott’s, apparently, but most people’s.

To be fair to Scott, Stiles was only ever in danger anymore because of the same people who ended up trying to save his life, so he supposed it was fair for Scott to be bitter.

“Is he allowed near you again?” Stiles asked curiously while Derek drove them into the Preserve.

“No. We can be in the same general vicinity, but mom still doesn’t trust him. Until I actually become the Alpha, she reminds him to stay away from me. She doesn’t order him anymore, but she makes it clear he can’t be within a few feet of me.”

“Your family is very complicated,” Stiles decided.

“Yeah.”

They drove the rest of the way in silence, Derek parking in one of the many lots around the Preserve. It was dark out given the hour, but the moon was almost full and provided some illumination. Still, the trees overhead were dense, and Stiles didn’t have night vision. He tripped more than once trying to follow Derek, and the fact that the man was wearing black wasn’t helping. Every few seconds he had to reach out to make sure Derek was still in front of him, fingers brushing against the back of his leather jacket.
When he stumbled and almost fell into Derek, the Werewolf turned to steady him, then gently wrapped his fingers around Stiles’ wrist, leading the way more slowly and carefully, trying to advise on any roots sticking out or branches to avoid. Stiles figured Derek was around Werewolves so often, he forgot that some people didn’t have super senses.

They eventually ended up in a small clearing, the area much more illuminated since the foliage overhead didn’t block the moon. Stiles blinked a few times to get his eyes used to the dimness and honestly wondered if Derek expected him to be able to hit anything when he could hardly see.

Then again, the ball was white, and Stiles could clearly see it when Derek tossed it into the air once and then caught it.

“Don’t think this baseball thing is going to distract me,” Stiles insisted as Derek walked a little ways from him, the bat held firmly in both of Stiles’ hands. “Your mom didn’t really tell me anything about you.”

“You left before she could,” Derek countered.

Which, fair.

“So,” Stiles said, tapping the end of his bat lightly against his own shin, “you’re royalty, then.”

“Yes.”

“Should I like, bow and call you Prince Derek and shit when I see you?”

Derek snorted and even without being able to see in the dark, he could tell the man had rolled his eyes. “No. Only the Council calls us things like that. And I’m ‘your Highness,’ not ‘Prince Derek.’”

“Oh, my apologies, your highness,” Stiles said sarcastically, mock-bowing. “Please forgive my ignorance.”

“Shut up,” Derek muttered, and Stiles grinned.

“But you are a Prince, right?”

“For now. Until I become Alpha. Then I’ll be King.” A short pause. “Why are you amused?”

“Dude, come on. You have to understand how ridiculous this is. Royalty is hardly a thing anymore, it’s so medieval. Like, sure, it totally freaked me out realizing you were some kind of royal family, but it’s not like even you act like it’s a big deal.”

“I guess it’s not really.” Derek shrugged, then waved the ball slightly. Stiles obediently got into position, still thinking this was a bad idea for his ribs, but figuring it was a small price to pay for information. Besides, he didn’t think Derek would honestly allow him to injure himself on purpose, so he likely knew something Stiles didn’t.

Derek threw the ball and Stiles swung, missing it. He blamed it on the darkness, but didn’t say anything and just went to retrieve it from the edge of the clearing, tossing it back. He was annoyed at how easily Derek caught it.

“So you’re just Werewolf royalty, right?” Stiles asked, getting into position again. “You’re not known royalty? Like the British royal family?”
“Supernatural royalty,” Derek corrected, throwing the ball again. Stiles hit it this time, Derek moving quickly to catch it before it went too far. “We kind of govern all things.”

“But it’s not like it’s known. Scott and Jackson don’t know. Well, Jackson does, but overall it doesn’t seem very advertised.”

“Bitten wolves tend to be less informed.” Derek threw the ball, but Stiles missed again and went to retrieve it while Derek continued. “Born wolves and other born Supernatural creatures know about the hierarchy. They pass it down to their children. They all know the Hale family is royal and while some are malicious and look to wipe us out, most respect us enough that even if they disagree with us, they don’t come after us.”

“Would be nice if that extended to your town,” Stiles muttered, tossing the ball back.

“Haven’t you noticed a steep decline in monsters since our return?”

Stiles paused and thought about it, then pointed his bat at Derek. “Fair point. So they’ll stay away then because you guys are back?”

“Most of them.” Derek threw the ball and Stiles missed again. Darkness was not his friend. “But some won’t care and will come anyway, hoping not to get caught.”

“So having a human mate kind of puts you at a disadvantage, huh?” Stiles asked awkwardly, holding the ball in one hand and his bat in the other.

“No more than any other mate I could’ve chosen,” Derek insisted. “There are laws about this sort of thing. Mates that aren’t involved in the Supernatural aren’t to be touched, especially a Hale mate.”

“Technically I am involved,” Stiles argued, pointing a finger at Derek with the hand holding the ball.

“You’re not Supernaturally inclined, though. They know better than to approach you. Anyone who harms you knows where that will lead.”

“And where does that lead?” Stiles asked slowly, hesitantly. He remembered Talia talking about hunting Deucalion down, about killing him. He wondered if she was serious, or just trying to strike fear by threatening the Werewolf’s life.

“Technically we can hunt them down and make them pay for their actions, but usually we make them stand trial with the Council. The final call would be mom’s, but depending on how close she is to the crime committed, she leaves it up to the Council so she isn’t biased.”

“Your mom sounds like she’s a really good person,” Stiles admitted.

“I like to think she is.” Derek held out one hand and Stiles obediently tossed the ball back.

When Derek threw it, Stiles managed to hit it this time, swinging harder than he’d intended and feeling something shift uncomfortably in his side. It was enough to distract Derek, because he was just slightly too slow and next thing Stiles knew, the man’s head had snapped back from the ball slamming right into his nose.

“Oh my God!” Stiles blurted out, rushing forward to close the distance while the ball bounced harmlessly on the grass at Derek’s feet. “Oh my God, I’m so sorry!”
Derek had one hand on his face, covering his nose, and when Stiles reached him and pulled at his wrist so he would lower it, he saw blood.

“Oh fuck! Oh shit!” Stiles started to look around for something to use to stop the bleeding, but glanced back at Derek when he spoke, his voice low and dangerous, more of a growl than anything.

“I’ll have your head for that.”

Stiles’ heart lodged itself in his throat and he felt his breath catch. He started to take a step back, apologies bouncing around in his skull but none making it past his lips.

Derek’s hard expression remained for a few seconds longer before melting away, the man smiling at him and pulling the bottom of his black shirt towards his face.

“I’m kidding,” he said, wiping at his face with his shirt. “You seem to respond best to sarcasm and jokes, so I thought I’d give it a try.”

“Oh.” Stiles’ heart beat double-time in his chest, and he was finding it hard to calm himself down. Derek just watched him, wiping the blood from his face.

“This isn’t the middle ages, Stiles. We don’t just behead people because it’s fun.”

“Good to know,” he said slowly, watching Derek finish up with the blood. He looked completely fine, which meant his nose was probably already healed. Stupid Werewolves and their stupid accelerated healing. It was unfair.

Unfair!

“Notice you didn’t deny killing them though,” Stiles said quietly.

Derek paused in bending down to retrieve the ball, like he hadn’t been expecting Stiles to catch that. Stiles had warned him he could keep up, it was Derek’s fault for not believing him. Or maybe just dismissing how much he could keep up.

Following through with what he’d started, Derek picked up the ball and straightened. He wasn’t much taller than Stiles, but he had a presence. Something Stiles would never have. It made Derek seem much, much taller.

“We don’t,” Derek said softly, but Stiles also didn’t miss the ‘we’ in that. ‘We’ being the Hales. Not the Council.

“What about before, then?” Stiles asked.

“Before?”

“Back in March, before we were speaking. You followed us while we hunted down something. The acid blood monster?”

“That was a Demon,” Derek informed him. “I didn’t kill it. I sent it back where it belongs. It can claw its way back up here eventually, but it’s not dead.”

“Oh.”

“We don’t kill,” he said again. “Mom would never.” Derek’s words proved his point about the
Council not following suit. “The Council sometimes thinks she’s too soft, and they go behind her back to protect her.”

“Can they do that?”

“Technically mom’s word is law, but there are other laws that allow the Council to make decisions they deem to be in the best interest of the royal family. They tried to make that call with Peter, but he’s part of the royal family so they didn’t win that battle.”

“Your life sounds very confusing,” Stiles informed him. “I don’t know how you manage.”

“It’s not without its challenges,” Derek agreed, eying Stiles. “Some are more challenging than others.”

“Like thinking you want someone you don’t actually want?” Stiles offered.

Derek watched him for a long moment, then slowly reached out with one hand, lightly brushing his fingers against Stiles’ cheek. It was a soft touch, and a little too intimate for Stiles’ liking, but he didn’t move. He figured Derek had been patient enough, he was allowed at least this.

“What makes you think anyone wouldn’t want you?”

“You’re a Prince,” Stiles reminded him. “You can have anyone you want.”

Derek’s expression closed off then, and Stiles wasn’t sure what he’d said wrong until the other man dropped his hand and said, “Not anyone, apparently.”

That was something Stiles didn’t want to touch. Because he had no idea what to say. He kept asking for time, but he didn’t honestly know that time was going to change things. He was still only twenty-one without a clear idea on where he was going in life, and having to deal with Werewolf royalty on top of that was a little outside his comfort zone.

Before he could say anything, or decide what to say, Derek’s gaze shifted to the side. Stiles frowned and turned to look beside himself, then cursed and jumped at finding someone literally close enough for him to touch.

“Stiles, you remember Vernon Boyd.”

Stiles did, in fact, remember Vernon Boyd. Derek’s best friend, stuck to him like glue for as long as Stiles could remember. He hadn’t known they’d been followed, but then again, maybe Boyd had just sniffed them out.

“Your mother wants you home,” Boyd said, voice a deep baritone that Stiles didn’t remember at all. “Stiles needs time.”

“I didn’t kidnap him,” Derek replied curtly. “He came on his own.”

Boyd said nothing, and he and Derek had a staredown for a few seconds. Eventually, Derek scoffed, turned to Stiles and just gave him a curt nod in farewell before heading out of the clearing. He still had the ball in his hand.

Stiles glanced at Boyd nervously. “Uh, can I get a ride home?”

Boyd said nothing, but Stiles followed him when the Werewolf turned to head back in the direction they’d come. They ended up back in the same lot as the Camaro, which was still sitting there.
Derek had likely headed home through the trees, and Boyd climbed behind the wheel, waiting on Stiles to get in before starting it up and driving them back towards town. That meant Boyd had a key to the car, which Stiles found interesting given he hadn’t seen the guy once since the Hales had returned.

He supposed it made sense since he didn’t see much of the Hale pack in general, but they probably all hung out together when the McCall one wasn’t around. Boyd and Derek likely hung out all the time.

The ride was silent, and uncomfortable. Stiles didn’t really know Boyd, and the guy didn’t seem like the chatty type. He kind of wanted to ask if he was one of the people who had to protect Derek, but considering Derek was a cop, he doubted anyone had to protect him. Derek seemed to do just fine on his own.

Fucking Werewolves.

When he stopped the car at the curb outside Stiles’ house, he turned to Boyd and asked, “How come Deucalion didn’t know where the Hale house was?”

“Magic,” was Boyd’s easy response.

“So like being Secret Keeper in Harry Potter?”

“I don’t know what that means.”

“You people need to read more,” Stiles informed him, then climbed out of the car.

It wasn’t until he went to bed and rolled over to finally get some sleep that he realized no one had sucked his pain in a while, and his ribs weren’t aching anymore.

“I’m sorry, what?”

“I’m kidnapping you,” Cora repeated, wandering around his room and picking up various books to read the backs before tossing them back down. “We’re going on a roadtrip. My treat.”

“Cora, I don’t want to go on a roadtrip,” he informed her with a groan, covering his head with his blankets and trying to block out both the sunlight and her voice.

No dice, because she appeared beside him and yanked the covers off. His measly human fingers were no match for a Werewolf’s annoyance at being ignored. She got him exposed to the light in a second, and while the blanket hadn’t done much to shield him from her voice, he didn’t even have that barrier anymore, either.

“It’ll be fun. Just us hanging out, eating tons of food, watching movies, going out. You can even bring Jack.”

“Don’t call him Jack, he’ll kill you.” Stiles rolled over and pulled his pillow over his head. “I’m not going. Let me sleep.”

“You can sleep when we get there,” she insisted, and Stiles found his pillow disappearing from his hands, as well. “Come on, Stiles. Live a little.”

“Is your mom even okay with this?” he demanded, finally sitting up and raking a hand through his mussed hair. “Someone’s trying to kill me, you know.”
“Someone’s always trying to kill you, you’re very killable,” she argued. “Deucalion isn’t going to come after you again so soon after a defeat. And the Council’s tracking him. Besides, it’s not like we won’t have people watching us.”

“Creepy.”

“Mom’s getting paranoid. Come on.” She slapped his leg, much harder than he was sure she meant to. “Let’s go. I already cleared it with your dad.”

“Probably as a means to get you to go away,” Stiles muttered, but he knew it had to be true. Cora wouldn’t currently be in his room if his father hadn’t been involved considering the mountain ash around all the entrances.

Unless there was a Cora-shaped hole in his living room wall.

“We’re going. I won’t take no for an answer. Pack up and get organized. I’ll be back to pick you up at one. If you want Jack to come, make sure he’s here.”

“Stop calling him Jack,” he called after her, since she’d left the room to bound back down the stairs. She was like a golden retriever.

He heard the front door slam and lay back down, groaning and covering his face. He let out a slow exhale, but heard a board creak just outside his bedroom. Dragging his hands down his cheeks, he looked over and found his dad standing in the doorway.

He was still in uniform, and he looked exhausted, but he seemed somewhat amused.

“Good morning.”

“What’s good about it?” he muttered.

“That’s the spirit,” his father teased, moving further into the room. “You should go, Stiles. It’ll be good for you. Get some distance. Get some perspective. Just spend time with your friends.”

“Scott’ll be pissed.”

“So let him be pissed.” The sheriff leaned against his desk and crossed his arms. “Talia wants him to come back around anyway. If you disappearing with her daughter will get him to visit, I don’t think she’ll mind. She just wants what’s best for him, and he’s the reason the pack is divided. You should all be in the Hale pack, he’s the piece stopping it.”

“You make it sound like a business merger,” Stiles muttered, sitting up and stretching before throwing his legs over the side of the bed and standing. He scratched at his stomach, then arched an eyebrow at his father’s surprised look. “What?”

“You seem to be doing better. A lot better.”

“What do you mean?”

“Your ribs?”

Stiles blinked at him, then realized his ribs weren’t twinging. He shifted his weight a bit, trying to check on them, but even when he lifted and lowered his arms, it didn’t hurt. He jabbed his fingers against them, knowing it was a stupid thing to do, but he felt... nothing.

He felt nothing.
“Huh.” Great. More Werewolf magic for him to figure out. He supposed his assumptions yesterday about accelerated healing for mates was true, and it explained why Derek had been so pleased.

Then again, if that was true, why hadn’t it worked when he’d been in the hospital after the Jeep had gone down the ravine? Or even this time around, before Stiles had left. Derek had pulled his pain before his dad had arrived, so why had pulling it yesterday been different?

Something for him to worry about later. Not right now.

His dad shook his head, like he didn’t want to know, and stood up straight again, moving to pat his cheek.

“Go. Have fun. Get some space.” He headed for the door, likely to get to bed after a long night. “And get out of the house for a while so I can eat junk.”

“You’re not supposed to eat junk,” he reminded him loudly, but his dad said nothing in response and disappeared into his room.

Conceding defeat, Stiles just hunted his phone down since he hadn’t plugged it back in the night before and called Jackson. The snarl he got in response made it clear he had also still been sleeping, but if Stiles had to be awake this early, so did Jackson.

“Roadtrip with Cora. Be at my house for one. No, you can’t not come.” He hung up.

He went to take a shower, despite having taken one before going to bed, though he’d also had his trip out in the woods after said shower so it was just as well. He packed once he was out, texting Cora to ask how long they planned on being gone, and then relaying the information to Jackson, who didn’t reply. He’d probably gone back to sleep.

Once he was ready to head out, he stood in his room and lifted his left arm poking hard at his ribs and frowning. As far as he knew, he wasn’t a Werewolf, so his ribs being completely healed seemed unlikely. But for the life of him, no matter how hard he pressed against the injured area, nothing hurt. He didn’t understand, but figured it was another question to harass Cora with. Probably another stupid mate thing.

He was halfway through breakfast when the doorbell rang. He cursed, because his dad was sleeping, and when it rang again twice in succession, he knew it was Jackson and bolted for the front door, throwing it open and smacking his hand away from the doorbell.

“Dad’s asleep, asshole.”

“So was I,” Jackson replied dryly, then looked down expectantly. Stiles started to bend down, but scowled when he saw the line still broken. His dad had likely forgotten to put it back into place when Cora left. That wasn’t comforting, he’d have to talk to him about that.

Jackson entered the house and went straight to the kitchen, dropping a large duffel by the door right on top of Stiles’ much smaller one.

“We’re only going for a few days, not a month.”

“I’ve seen what you own, I was packing for two,” Jackson informed him, grabbing a slice of toast off Stiles’ plate and biting into it, sitting down in the seat beside him.

“Asshole,” Stiles muttered, but he just took his seat once more and went back to his eggs.
Jackson spent the next hour and a half they waited for Cora whining and bemoaning Stiles’ existence. The only reason Stiles ignored him was because he knew Jackson wouldn’t have come if he didn’t actually want to come. And hopefully his dad was right and having the two of them gone would have Scott going to see Talia.

Now more than ever they needed a united front. He just hoped Scott would get his head out of his ass soon. Besides, what Derek had said the night before was true, since the Hales had returned, the number of monsters around had diminished drastically. Stiles actually slept now, which was unheard of even eight months ago. This was a glorious turn of events.

Jackson glanced towards the door while he and Stiles were in the middle of watching something on Netflix and then turned the TV off before getting to his feet. Stiles had been around Werewolves long enough to know that meant Cora was coming.

They grabbed their things and Stiles allowed Jackson to exit before putting the mountain ash barrier back into place and locking the door. When he turned to head down the porch steps, he was surprised to find Laura’s Audi in the driveway, and even more surprised to see Eric behind the wheel. Cora climbed out of the passenger seat to greet them and Eric also stepped out, moving into the back where a clearly disgruntled Merrak was sitting with his arms crossed.

“What’s going on?” Stiles asked cautiously, eyes on Merrak, who was glaring at Eric for daring to be anywhere near him.

“I’m not allowed to drive, remember?” Cora asked with a small smile. “Merrak was adamant on coming because he’s tired of being the only human in the house since dad’s working on his next book right now, and Eric begged mom. So we have some company.” She motioned the Audi. “I traded Laura for the Audi, since it’ll be more comfortable for all of us. You’re driving.”

She took Stiles’ bag from his hands and he turned to look at Jackson. He seemed annoyed, but just followed Cora to the trunk.

Stiles went to the driver’s side and climbed in behind the wheel. It occurred to Stiles that Jackson’s Porsche wasn’t there, but then again, it had been thoroughly totalled only two days ago so he’d probably gotten a ride from his parents.

Something for Stiles to tease him about. Excellent.

“Um, excuse me. What’re you doing?”

Stiles turned to the still open passenger side door and saw Jackson standing there, about to get in, but his head was turned towards Cora.

“Getting into the car, what’s it look like?”

“Oh no, I see that. Let me rephrase: what’re you doing trying to take my seat?”

“I don’t sit in the back.”

“You’re cute for thinking you’re getting the passenger seat.” Cora smiled, all teeth. “You’re not taking that spot. It’s mine.”

“You can sit with your weird brothers, they weren’t invited anyway.”

“Fuck you,” Merrak snapped heatedly while Eric muttered that he wasn’t weird.
“I’m not sitting in the back with my brothers.”

“I’m not sitting in the back period,” Jackson snapped.

The two of them started arguing, voices rising and becoming less human. Stiles didn’t have the patience for this, and he tried, he really did, not to let their petty argument bother him, but after almost two entire minutes, he’d hit his limit.

He didn’t even want to go on this roadtrip.

“Enough!” he shouted, and both of them snapped their mouths shut, falling silent immediately. He hadn’t honestly thought that would work, but he just saw Merrak smirking haughtily in the rearview mirror while Eric stared wide-eyed. He ignored that and focussed back on Cora and Jackson.

“Just—rock-paper-scissors it or something.”

“If you assholes get to luck your way into the front seat, I’m in too.” Merrak leaned forward between the two front seats and held one hand out. Eric said nothing, presumably fine with being in the back and avoiding the arguments.

Jackson and Cora both looked put out, but they obediently held their hands out. The three of them did two rounds of rock-paper-scissors, Cora getting eliminated in the first, and Jackson in the second.

Merrak looked extremely pleased as he unbuckled his seatbelt and climbed out of the back. Jackson and Cora both looked livid—Jackson moreso—but they obediently filed into the back seat, Cora in the middle, and buckled themselves in. Merrak took his spot beside Stiles, looking thrilled with his win, and buckled himself in.

When everyone was settled, Stiles rearranged the mirrors and the seat, then backed out of the driveway and headed for out of town. Cora told him what signs to follow and said she’d give more concrete directions when they got closer, so Stiles just headed towards the edge of town, trying not to check the rearview mirror nervously every three seconds because, was it his imagination, or was that car following them?

No, it wasn’t. He was just antsy because they were leaving town and he’d blinded an angry Werewolf who had beef with the royal family. He was fine. Everything was fine. Wasn’t like he had three members of the Werewolf royal family in the car with him, of course not, no problem. Life was good. Awesome, even. Wonderful.

“I know your little heart jackrabbits on the regular, but any particular reason you’re trying to give yourself a heart attack?” Cora asked, leaning between the two seats to cock an eyebrow at him.

“No reason.” Stiles’ eyes went back to the mirror.

No, that car was definitely following them.

“No, reason. That car’s following us.”

“I hope so,” Merrak muttered from his seat, having lounged back comfortably with his feet on the dash and a PSP in his hands. Stiles hadn’t even noticed him pull it out. “Mom would murder Kincaid if he lost us.”

“I told you we had a detail,” Cora insisted, poking his cheek. “Don’t worry. It’s just some Council
guards. They’re coming along to make sure no one tries anything.”

Stiles said nothing to that, but his grip on the steering wheel loosened slightly and he tried to calm down a bit before he really did give himself a heart attack. He flipped on the radio when the silence in the car became too much for him and continued the drive out of town, managing not to obsessively check the rearview mirror every two seconds.

When they were out of town, he went through a McDonalds drive-thru to get some food since he’d been on roadtrips with Scott before and hungry Werewolves were the worst. They were somehow more obnoxious than hungry children, which he hadn’t ever thought was possible.

Once they were stocked up, they started the long drive towards wherever Cora was taking them. She said to follow signs for San Francisco, but Stiles didn’t think that was where they were heading. He just obeyed and tried his best to turn his brain off.

It didn’t work, and he ended up talking about random things to get his mind off what he really wanted to discuss. He was just tired of talking about all the Werewolf bullshit he’d been dealing with lately, he wanted to just take a break from it, so he talked about anything else, from the invention of the lightbulb to the possibility of unknown species living undiscovered in the Mariana Trench.

He was mid-sentence when Merrak turned to him after having lost the level he was playing.

“Are you having some kind of nervous breakdown?”

“Merrak,” Cora reprimanded.

“He’s always like that,” Jackson advised from his seat. “He could talk his way out of literally anything if he didn’t make people want to kill him first to shut him up.”

“I’m just saying,” Merrak insisted, turning back to his game and restarting the level. “You have people in the car who can answer questions, instead of hyperventilating yourself into a panic attack that would only kill you and me if you crashed the car—”

“Merrak!”

“—maybe you should take advantage and ask us about what’s bothering you.”

“Why are my ribs healed?” Stiles blurted out immediately.

Merrak froze beside him and he saw Cora and Eric share a look in the rearview mirror. Jackson just frowned, clearly not in the loop on what the Hales all seemed to know.

When Cora answered, she did so slowly, like she was choosing her words. “You said you still—you’re not sure about Derek. I thought you hadn’t made up your mind yet.”

“I haven’t,” he insisted, wondering what that had to do with his broken ribs magically healing overnight.

“Told you,” Merrak said, having lost his level from the brief moment of shock, restarting it so he could try again. “I told you he Mate Talked me.”

“I what?” Stiles demanded, turning to him briefly before looking back out the windshield, not wanting to actually crash and kill only him and Merrak.
“It’s what we call it when dad does it,” Eric said softly. “As the Alpha mate, you know, *the* Alpha mate, he can do the same thing as Alphas can. Control the pack. His word is law.”

“You can do it, too,” Merrak said easily, frowning down at his screen and tapping insistently at one of the buttons with his thumb.

“Yeah, I already knew I could,” Stiles insisted. “It’s how I got the wolves to let Jackson go.”

There was silence for a moment longer before Cora spoke again. “Stiles, only true mates can do that. Ones who’ve already decided they’re going to be claimed by the Alpha.”

“What are you talking about? I did it, like, an hour ago to make you all stop arguing.”

“It’s not the same thing,” Cora insisted. “That wasn’t an order, it was just a pull. A slight nudge. Something you can do regardless of being claimed. But Mate Talking Merrak, a *human* in our pack... that can only be done when you’ve officially made up your mind.”

“Same with your injuries,” Eric added before Cora’s words could fully process. “An Alpha can accelerate the healing for their unclaimed mate, mom says she used to do it to dad all the time. Once he was claimed, he started being able to just do it himself. If you’ve decided you want Derek, and you’ve let him pull at your pain on the injured area, it temporarily accelerates the healing to a degree similar to our own.”

“In other words,” Merrak said, still scowling at his game, “the only person you’re fooling is yourself.”

Stiles said nothing, because that was ridiculous. He hadn’t made any decisions about anything yet. Sure, he and Derek had gone out to play baseball last night, but he hadn’t decided anything.

“He touched me before I went to the hospital, and it didn’t work then,” he argued.

“Maybe your mind wasn’t made up until after he touched you again,” Cora said softly.

“Can we stop talking about Hale touching him?” Jackson demanded. “Use another term, I don’t need to think about what kind of things the two of them get up to in the bedroom.”

“You’re so immature,” Cora insisted, but said nothing else.

Stiles was grateful, because he needed to think. He hadn’t made up his mind at all between leaving the Hale house and letting Derek into his room. Or not consciously, anyway. Maybe the simple act of him letting Derek in was like him accepting that this was his life now. This was how things were going to be.

And would it be so bad, anyway? Having Derek? He was nice, and funny, and attractive, and apparently into him. Not just because of his wolf, either, if the way he’d reacted the night before was any indication. It was just...

“I’m not exactly royal material,” he muttered.

“Merrak look like royal material to you?” Cora asked immediately.

“Fuck you,” he snapped without even looking up from his game.

“See? And I mean, you’ve met Derek. None of us fit the mould of ‘royalty,’ but that’s because mom raised us to be Werewolves first, and Hales second.”
“What do they call you, anyway?” Jackson asked, narrowing his eyes at Cora. “Are you Princess Cora?”

“No.”

“Yes,” Eric said immediately after Cora’s vehement dismissal.

Merrak was smirking down at his screen. “They call her Princess all the time. ‘Oh, may I be of service, Princess?’ and that kind of shit, it’s hilarious.”

“Yeah, laugh it up, Little Lord,” Cora snapped.

Merrak whipped around in his seat and bared his human teeth at her. “Don’t call me that.”

“Little Lord?” Jackson snickered, then let out a sputtered sound when Merrak punched at him. It probably didn’t hurt, but had likely startled him.

“Shut up!”

“So you all have titles then?” Stiles asked loudly to try and stop the fighting. Talking about this was helping him not focus on the other conversation they’d just had, though he knew he would be obsessing about it once it was quiet again.

“Mom and dad are Majesty,” Eric said, ever-helpful. Stiles liked him, he was calm and studious, and seemed like he just wanted everyone to get along.

Barring the one incident where he’d tried to cut Jackson’s hand off for insulting Derek, but they’d moved past that seeing as how he and Jackson seemed to get along pretty well now.

“Laura and Cora are Princess. I’ve heard both Prince and Lord. Merrak tends to be Lord, but a few people call him Little Lord.”

“Because they want me to bite their faces off,” Merrak said heatedly, stabbing rather violently at the buttons on his PSP.

“And Derek?” Stiles asked.

“As next in line, he’s Highness.” Eric paused. “Um, as his mate, so are you.”

“Anyone tries to call me that, I’ll throw something at them,” Stiles informed him, turning slightly in his seat to give him a look. “I’m Stiles. That’s it.”

“Or Mieczyslaw,” Jackson said with a wicked grin.

“Oh my God, is that your name?” Cora demanded, sounding delighted. “It’s adorable!”

“It sounds like a contagious and deadly disease,” Merrak argued under his breath.

Seeing as he was beside Stiles, and in a car of Werewolves, it was easily heard and Stiles got to listen to the four of them argue for the next twenty minutes over whether or not his name was adorable, atrocious, or something that would corner an innocent bystander in a back alley and knife them.

The violent one, evidently, was all Merrak. He was particularly dark when he wanted to be.

Eventually, talk of that died down a bit and they moved on to other topics of discussion. Stiles
brought up the house again, and while only Eric had read *Harry Potter*, he said it was similar but not exactly like *Secret Keepers*.

He explained that it was more about who the Hales trusted to be close to them. Everyone in Beacon Hills knew where they lived and could go to their house, but people with malicious intent, like Deucalion, wouldn’t be able to find it on their own. They would need to be physically brought there to find it again, and only someone trusted could bring him there. That was why he’d gone after Stiles.

Overall, it was ridiculous magic, in Stiles’ opinion, and he mentioned Deucalion could’ve gone to literally anyone in town and headed towards the Hale house with them, but Eric once again brought up trust. The Hales trusted the townspeople to come to their house, but not enough that they could bring an outsider there. The human would find themselves unable to recall *exactly* where the house was located.

Stiles, though, had the full trust of the pack. If he got into a car with anyone, he could lead them straight to the front door without any problems.

Jackson asked why they hadn’t done the same thing to Stiles’ house, in a rather curt and angry way, but Eric explained, rather sheepishly, that they had.

So apparently Stiles and his father were too trusting. Great. Maybe it was time for him to be overly paranoid.

They stopped on the way to grab dinner, which was an experience in and of itself, and Stiles had to leave halfway through the meal when his phone rang. He sighed while staring down at the caller display, because he knew the call wouldn’t end well, and he was right once he answered and admitted to Scott where he was and what he was doing.

Scott hung up on him in a rage, and Stiles really hoped someone let him know who the Hales were sooner rather than later before he got himself murdered.

Once they were back on the road, as it turned out, apparently they were going to San Francisco, because once they were in the downtown area, Cora started giving him directions to The Fairmont. Stiles felt uncomfortable with that, but none of the Hales or Jackson batted an eye. Rich people, they had no idea what it was like to hyperventilate over money. Kind of like Stiles was currently doing.

He felt ridiculously underdressed all of a sudden, in his jeans and graphic tee with a plaid overshirt. The only reason he didn’t want to stop and dig through Jackson’s bag to change was because Cora was wearing ripped jeans with a graphic tee, and Merrak had jeans and a hoodie. Eric looked a bit more presentable, as did Jackson, but evidently this place wasn’t going to turn away a group of people who were paying customers.

Hopefully.

There was a valet who took the car when he pulled up and someone grabbed all their things while Cora led the way inside. Stiles tried not to make eye contact with anyone since he didn’t want them to know he definitely couldn’t afford to be in there.

When Cora went to the counter, it was obvious the concierge was *not interested*, acting borderline rude and confirming with her three times that she was *sure* she was at the right hotel before Cora could even get two words out.
Eventually, Cora cut the man off and snapped that she had a reservation under Hale and that if they
didn’t want her money she’d be more than happy to go elsewhere. The man looked up her
reservation and then almost tripped over himself to get them to their room. Apparently they were in
the ‘Napoleon,’ which meant nothing to Stiles, but evidently meant something to the man.

He asked if they wanted anything brought up or needed anything at all and Cora just informed him
coldly that she might like to speak to his manager before long, then turned on her heel so the
bellhop could show them up. Stiles just kept his shoulders hunched and his eyes lowered, feeling
extremely uncomfortable.

The ride up was conducted in silence, given Cora was still fuming, Jackson looked annoyed,
Merrak was still trying to kill things in his game and Eric was trying to calm his sister down. The
bellhop just looked uncomfortable, like he didn’t want anyone to punish him for the concierge’s
pigheadedness.

When they were led into the room on the second floor of the large building, Stiles almost tripped
on his way in because holy fuck, it was massive. The second they walked in, the place branched off
both ways, one leading immediately into a bedroom with two queen-sized beds and a bathroom, the
other down another small corridor. He headed that way since Cora went straight into the closest
bedroom. The other small corridor led to a sitting room with a huge TV, another small bathroom—
sans shower—and a second bedroom with a king-sized bed and its own washroom. There was even
a small kitchenette between the bathroom out in the hallway and the bedroom Stiles was in.

“Holy crap,” he muttered to himself, hearing the bellhop ask Cora something. He jumped when the
man entered the bedroom a moment later, carrying his duffel and asking if he needed anything
unpacked.

“Oh, no. No, I uh, I’ve got it.” He took the bag from the man’s hand and offered him a tight smile
and an awkward nod. When he left the room, Stiles pulled the strap over his shoulder, moving up
to one of the windows and whistling while looking out at the view.

They weren’t very high up, but enough that they had a decent view of the city. It was also
surprisingly quiet, considering, but that was a good thing. Beacon Hills was quiet at night, too.
Well, on his street, anyway. He didn’t know that he’d be able to sleep if all he could hear was car
horns blaring and people shouting, though that might’ve just been his perception of big cities from
movies.

“It would’ve been better with a third room, but it’ll do,” Jackson said from behind him, Stiles
turning. Cora was right behind him, looking annoyed.

“I told you, you can’t sleep in here. This is Stiles’ bedroom!”

“Wait, why is this my bedroom?” Stiles demanded.

Cora gave him a look like he was an idiot and he just rolled his eyes. She was the fucking Princess,
he was just a nobody who’d protected her brother from bullies when he was in middle school.

“I’m not sharing with you or your brothers,” Jackson argued, dropping his bag on the bed. “Stiles
and I share all the time.”

“It’s different now,” Cora insisted, grabbing his bag and pulling it off the bed. Jackson’s hand
twisted into the fabric and they had another staredown, tugging back and forth with both their eyes
bleeding gold.
Stiles rolled his eyes. “It’s fine, Cora. I don’t care if he shares with me. The bed is huge, we probably won’t even be able to find each other if we tried.”

Cora didn’t look happy about it, but she relented, letting Jackson’s bag go. He looked particularly smug while getting his things unpacked. Stiles didn’t see the point of it since they weren’t going to be there very long, but he obediently did the same when Jackson motioned him over.

Once all their things were put away, they went into the living area where the Hales were and Stiles sat down on one of the couches.

“This, uh—place is nice,” he said awkwardly.

“You’re worrying about the price,” Cora deduced, channel surfing. “Don’t. It’s covered, don’t worry. The only thing I do want you to worry about is your clothes.”

“What’s wrong with my clothes?” he asked, even while knowing perfectly well.

“We’re going shopping first thing tomorrow to get you nice things. We’re gonna be clubbing and having a good time, and it’ll be harder to do with you looking like a farmer.”

“I do not look like a farmer,” he insisted, annoyed.

“Kind of look like a farmer,” Eric said quietly, offering him an apologetic look.

Stiles huffed and crossed his arms, leaning back in his seat.

This was going to be a long vacation.

Derek called him every day. Cora thought it ridiculous, considering Stiles could more than take care of himself given his history, was with three Werewolves, a sassy human and five Council guards, even if Stiles hadn’t seen them. Apparently it was one guard per body they were protecting, though at least three of them would focus entirely on Stiles considering the Werewolf to human ratio of their group.

Merrak was very vocal about his ability to look after himself and often glared off into the distance, as if he could see their detail when Stiles couldn’t. He just tried not to worry about it, he had bigger problems.

Like Cora’s shopping sprees. She was terrifying when let loose in a mall. Stiles was kind of thankful he’d managed to escape this fate the last time he’d bumped into her in a place shops were located.

Apparently nothing he tried on was good enough for her tastes, and Jackson actually got frustrated enough that he sent her off to find herself something she wanted to wear before dragging Stiles to another shop. Merrak and Eric trailed along with them, Merrak not taking his eyes off his PSP. His brother had to pull him aside every now and then to avoid having him walk into pillars or other people.

By the time they were done in the mall, Stiles never wanted to try on another pair of pants ever again in his life. He had no idea how anyone found shopping enjoyable, and it wasn’t even about not having any money. It was literally about hating having to put something on, show it off, take it off, put something else on, and so on and so forth. Annoying and boring.

Eric paid for Stiles’ things, no matter how much he protested, and Merrak ended up just shoving
him out of the store because he was, “Too loud and making a fucking scene, Jesus Christ.” When Eric finally joined them, he insisted Stiles was going to have to get used to it, because if he was going to join the royal family—or even be in the pack in general—he was going to have to accept that he was going to be taken care of.

They met back up with Cora, who was carrying more bags than Stiles felt she should be able to manage by herself, then went back to the hotel. They all took turns taking showers and getting dressed up, then left again to head to an upscale restaurant Cora had booked for them. Apparently this entire trip was about spoiling themselves because, while they had money, Cora admitted that their mom didn’t let them go crazy. It made sense, Stiles supposed, because otherwise they would all be spoiled, entitled assholes. But they were all down to earth, and while it was clear they were used to getting what they wanted, they never threw a fit when they didn’t get it.

In some ways, they were no different than Stiles, except that if shit really hit the fan, they could afford to get out of it. Stiles and his dad didn’t really have that luxury, but he wasn’t bitter about it. Wasn’t like it was the Hales’ fault.

After dinner, they headed back to the hotel where Merrak argued heatedly with Cora about her being a bad sister and unfair. Eric didn’t say anything—he seemed to be pretty chill except where Derek was concerned—but it was clear he was a little annoyed, too.

“You are underage,” Cora said again, speaking loudly over Merrak, who wasn’t willing to take no for an answer. “It doesn’t matter how angry you get and how many times you curse my name, you’re sixteen, Merrak. You can’t come with us.”

“You can sneak me in, I know you can.”

“No. Mom would kill me. You and Eric are staying here.” She pointed at the floor she was standing on. “You will behave, and you will stop being a little shit about it. When you’re twenty-one, I’ll take you bar-hopping all you want.”

“You’re so fucking full of shit,” he snapped angrily. “Like Derek and Laura never snuck you into clubs in New York! Why can’t you be more like them?”

Cora let out a sharp laugh. “Are you serious? The golden child Derek sneaking me into clubs? I think not. As for Laura, she didn’t have time to go clubbing, let alone get close enough to anyone working at one of the clubs to sneak me in. You’re delusional.”

Before a more heated argument could start up, Stiles touched Cora’s shoulder and looked at Merrak.

“Tell you what, how about we compromise. You can’t come out with us, you really can’t, they won’t let you in and it’ll be impossible for us to sneak you in. But, today we did what Cora wanted to do, so how about tomorrow you find the most obnoxious thing in the world that you know she’ll hate, and we make her do that.”

Cora gave him a betrayed look, but Merrak seemed to be thinking about it, like annoying his sister was trumping going out with them that night. Stiles was hoping he’d go for it, but honestly wasn’t sure. His backup was insisting that if he wanted to drink, they would bring alcohol home so they could get him drunk in a controlled environment, but he didn’t think his sheriff father, cop pseudo-boyfriend and future mother-in-law Queen and Alpha would be very appreciative of that.

Thankfully, Merrak decided that was a suitable punishment for Cora and he went to sit grumpily on the couch with Eric so they could decide what to watch and order room service—even though
they’d just eaten.

Cora punched Stiles lightly in the arm, clearly crossed between annoyed and relieved, then went to get ready. Jackson dragged Stiles back into their room to do the same, despite Stiles arguing that he didn’t see the point in changing when what he was wearing was perfectly acceptable.

Apparently it wasn’t, because Jackson forced him to pull on jeans so tight he thought his balls would concave up into his abdomen—seriously, what was it with Jackson and getting him into tight pants?!—and a ripped black tee. It was ‘stylishly’ ripped, apparently, which Stiles thought was ridiculous because he could’ve just bought himself a T-shirt and ripped holes into it and claimed it had cost him a hundred dollars. Still, when he checked himself out in the mirror while Jackson changed, he felt like he looked pretty good. The ripped shirt wasn’t really ripped, there was a mesh under-layer so that he didn’t actually have that much skin poking through. Still, when he turned and saw Jackson only pulling on a blue polo shirt, he felt a little annoyed he was meant to dress like some random goth wannabe while Jackson got to dress like a douche.

So himself, basically.

Cora took an additional twenty minutes, having to redo her makeup to match her shirt. It was flashy and gold, the front cut so low Stiles was sure too much dancing would have her boobs pop out. The back was open, showing off her lack of bra, and he felt like he was going to spend a majority of the night chasing after her to make sure no one tried to get her alone in a dark room.

Then again, it would be at the other person’s risk if they did, he doubted Cora would have any reservations breaking fingers if anyone so much as looked at her wrong.

They headed out shortly thereafter, Stiles kind of jealous of Merrak and Eric since they were watching *Aquaman* and had so many snacks his dad would’ve been salivating. But, he was old enough to club, so he couldn’t talk his way out of it and obediently followed Cora and Jackson out.

Once they were in the elevator, Cora pulled a small vial out of her purse, prompting Stiles to pat at his pockets, feeling his heart sink when he realized he’d forgotten to bring mountain ash. The pants were new, and thus didn’t have his usual stash, but he figured he would be safe.

After all, there were three other large, intimidating Werewolves in the lift with them, since the council guards were coming with them. It was awkward, because Cora acted like they weren’t even there, while Jackson and Stiles couldn’t stop casting glances at them. This was the closest they’d all been since arriving at the hotel, it was fucking weird. Usually they kept their distance, but this time they were sharing the elevator.

“Here,” Cora said, passing the small vial to Jackson. “This is for you.”

“What is it?” he asked, taking it and inspecting the liquid inside.

“Aconite. Put a few drops in your drink and it’ll be like being human.”

“Meaning?”

“You can get drunk.” She grinned.

Jackson straightened instantly, looking a little excited, eyes flashing briefly. Stiles didn’t really understand at first, but then realized that Jackson had been turned before legal drinking age, so he’d likely never been drunk before in his life. Despite being an asshole for the first two years of high school, Stiles knew Jackson wasn’t the kind of person who’d go out and get wasted while underage, because he had a lot he wanted to do in life. Get good grades, be captain of the Lacrosse
team, graduate top of his class. Two out of three had to count for something, but it also meant he hadn’t been as ‘out there’ as people assumed someone like Jackson would be.

Stiles knew Scott had never been drunk, either, and he could only assume that for born wolves, it was even worse. They’d probably learned long ago what to do to get drunk because it must suck going out with humans and not being able to get as wasted as them.

“Does this mean I should stay sober and keep an eye on you two?” Stiles asked uncertainly, following after them while they walked through the lobby, Cora’s heels clicking on the marble floor. He felt like she might regret that choice, but then remembered she was a Werewolf and probably didn’t feel pain for longer than a second.

“No,” she insisted with a snort, waving absently over her shoulder. “That’s what they’re for.”

“Pretty sure they’re not here to take care of your drunk ass,” Stiles argued.

“They’re not, but they’re here to protect us, so while they’ll let us pass out drunk on the side of the road, they’ll stay with us until we’re sober enough to stumble home.”

“Awesome,” Stiles said with an eye roll, deciding he was definitely going to stay sober. He’d have a few drinks, sure, but he wasn’t going to get trashed because he didn’t want the super expensive hotel room to go to waste.

They had to order two Ubers, since there were six people involved, with four of them in one and two in the other. Cora went alone with one of the details, while Jackson and Stiles headed out with the other two. Kincaid was one of them, and Stiles wondered if he was his official bodyguard, since he wasn’t in the car Cora was in.

When they arrived at one of the clubs Cora had chosen, there was a massive lineup, but she just headed straight for the door and gave her name to the bouncer. Stiles wasn’t sure if she’d called ahead, or had slipped him some money when he wasn’t looking, but the man waved their group in and Stiles followed her through the door, trying not to feel guilty about bypassing the line.

The three council guards disappeared into the shadows the second they were inside, but Stiles didn’t pay any attention to them. The club was stuffy and loud, with flashing lights that hurt his eyes and a sticky floor that had his shoes threatening to come off with each step. He moved after Cora while she headed to the bar, ordering herself a drink and slapping money on the counter. Stiles had to call over what he wanted when the bartender looked at him, then Jackson. Within minutes, all three of them had drinks in their hands.

Grinning at Jackson, Cora uncapped her own vial of aconite, put a few drops into her electric blue fruity drink, and then put it away. Jackson copied her, putting a few drops into his own beer and then tucking the vial safely in his pocket.

“To getting Jack drunk for the first time ever,” Cora called over the music, holding her drink up.

“Don’t call me Jack,” Jackson barked back, the three of them clacking their drinks together before taking a sip. Jackson just downs his beer in one go, like he was eager to get completely drunk, and then ordered another while Stiles was barely a third of the way through his own.

Cora sipped at her drink while her eyes raked across the dancefloor, and Stiles had to wonder if she was looking for someone of interest. He didn’t worry about it, figuring he’d just stick at the bar to keep an eye on her, but when Jackson was on his third beer and a little unsteady on his feet, Cora had finished her fruity drink and got herself a Smirnoff Ice before grabbing Jackson’s hand and
motioning for Stiles to follow, the three of them heading out onto the dancefloor.

Stiles was sweaty and uncomfortable within minutes, the crush of bodies hot and suffocating around him, but he was enjoying watching Jackson make an ass of himself and Cora was swaying happily from side to side, her long hair sticking to her skin and lights bouncing off her sparkly shirt.

He wasn’t sure if it was because they were somewhere unfamiliar, or if Jackson wasn’t interested in straying too far in his intoxicated state, but he didn’t wander off to find himself someone to dance and make out with. He stuck close to Stiles’ back, one arm around his stomach like he was using Stiles to keep himself standing, and his hips rocking from side to side in time to the music.

It didn’t take long for Cora to want in on that, and she ended up plastering herself to Stiles’ front, arms around his neck and teeth biting along his jaw while she followed Jackson’s rhythm.

It was surreal, when he thought about it. Guys had been looking their way all night, most of them with their eyes on Cora, and Stiles had absolutely no illusions that everyone in the place wanted to get with either the Werewolf behind him, or the Princess in front of him.

He was sandwiched between them both for a majority of the night, the three of them dancing closely together in a purely platonic way. Though Jackson’s grinding into his back was a touch more suggestive than usual, but Stiles just attributed it to the first time he’d ever gotten drunk. He was going to tease him about this when he was sober, because he knew for a fact Jackson didn’t have a gun in his pants, which meant there was really only one thing being ground into him from behind.

Jackson also had his face buried in Stiles’ neck, both arms around his waist now since he didn’t have a drink anymore, snuggling into him. He was also kind of scenting him, rubbing his cheek against any part of Stiles’ skin he could reach and sighing contently in Stiles’ ear.

It was very clear to him that Jackson was a cuddly, lovable drunk, and Stiles found that hilarious.

Cora—not so much. She was an emotional drunk, and while she spent most of their time together just clinging to Stiles and rubbing up against his front while biting lightly at any part of his face she could reach, she eventually ended up tearing up and asking him uncomfortable questions.

His favourite so far, sarcasm included, was when her teary face was so close their noses touched and she practically wailed, “Why don’t you wanna marry my brother? I want you in my family!”

Less loquacious than that, given the slurring, but he got the point. And with nothing but two hot bodies pressed into him, rocking suggestively into him from both sides, and the pounding music for company, it gave him a lot of time to think.

He’d been doing a lot of that lately, and really, why shouldn’t he be with Derek? He didn’t know him as well as he’d like, and he kept getting bombs dropped on him, but Derek had made it clear he liked him. And not just because his wolf had forced him to, but because he liked Stiles. Whatever he’d been told, or learned himself about him, Derek liked. And Stiles... well, he liked Derek, too.

Sure, the whole royalty thing was still totally freaking him out, but he got along well with all the Hales, and provided he didn’t get beheaded for doing something wrong by accident, he felt like it wouldn’t be terrible to at least try with Derek. They’d been getting along, he was funny, and nice, and attractive.

Really, Stiles had always thought he’d end up marrying some old, fat dude because nobody else
would have him. He’d king of lucked out.

He was still thinking about how to move forward with Derek when Kincaid appeared beside him so suddenly he almost pissed himself. He’d needed to go to the bathroom for almost half an hour, but it was hard getting away from the two leeches attached to him.

“Highness, we need to go,” he said loudly right into Stiles’ ear.

Stiles winced at the title, because he was nobody’s highness. “Is everything okay?”

“No, the two Lords left the hotel. They’ve been involved in an altercation.”

Stiles’ heart did something weird in his chest that had both Jackson and Cora whine. Shit, what had happened? Were they okay? He doubted they’d be dragged out of this place if it wasn’t important.

“We gotta go,” Stiles told Cora, trying to push her away from him slightly. “Cora, we gotta go! Your brothers!”

She still seemed a little out of it, but neither she nor Jackson had had anything to drink for a while, so she wasn’t so far gone that she didn’t realize something was wrong. She blinked owlishly at Stiles, then turned to look beside them at Kincaid. She pulled away from Stiles, and held one hand out. One of the other guards appeared out of thin air and took her hand gently, leading the way towards the door.

Getting Jackson to let him go was harder, since he’d definitely overdone it with the alcohol. Eventually, he had to just let his friend hang all over him while half-dragging him towards the exit. Cora and the other guard were already gone, but Kincaid stood close to Stiles’ side while they waited for another Uber to show up, then helped Stiles get Jackson into the back before climbing in on his other side, the second guard in the front.

Stiles could tell Kincaid was unhappy with how close Jackson and Stiles were, because he kept turning to give Jackson disapproving looks. Jackson, for his part, was snuggling into Stiles’ neck, one arm still around his middle, and looking like he was ready to just sleep like that.

Stiles was never letting him live this down.

They reached the hotel relatively quickly, and Stiles had to drag Jackson out again. They headed for the elevator, Stiles’ heart pounding a mile a minute at what he was going to walk into, but when they reached the door to their hotel room, all he could hear once he stepped inside was Cora’s loud reprimand.

Her words were slightly slurred, but she was evidently sober enough to be pissed off.

“—or one night, Merrak! One night! I can’t believe this, mom is going to murder me!”

“Ease off, you’re not going to help by yelling at him,” Eric’s calm voice insisted while Stiles struggled his way into the second bedroom, Jackson still hanging all over him.

Hilarious as it was, he was fine never having Jackson drunk in his presence again. He wasn’t a Werewolf, and Jackson was fucking heavy. All muscle Werewolf versus puny human whose sharpest point was his intellect didn’t bode well for him not toppling over with Jackson landing on top of him.

Finally entering the room, his eyes found Eric first. He was sitting on the bed closest to the door, facing Stiles, hands up at Merrak’s face like he was tending to his wounds. Merrak’s back was to
the door, and Cora was standing between the two beds looking furious.

Eric’s shirt was ripped in a few places, and he had blood on his face and staining his collar, but being a Werewolf meant his wounds had all healed long before Stiles had even been notified of the brothers having gone out and gotten hurt.

Jackson was getting heavier by the second and Stiles decided to dump him in bed before dealing with the youngest Hale. When he turned to get him to the room, the guard with Kincaid moved forward and tugged him away from Stiles. Evidently he was beginning to pity him because he doubted getting rid of a drunk Werewolf was in his job description.

He thanked him quietly, the man disappearing down the corridor. Stiles didn’t see any of the other men, just Kincaid and his partner. He didn’t worry about it and turned back to the room, moving forward and around the bed so he could get a good look at the damage.

He winced, because Merrak was likely going to look like a raccoon come morning. His lip was bloody, his nose was swollen and looked like it had been broken and reset, and he was definitely going to have a shiner. The corner of his eye was red with blood, like the hit had burst a few blood vessels. That was concerning, if Stiles was honest, and he hoped Merrak was actually okay.

“What happened?” he asked, since Cora was still trying to get herself under control.

“Nothing,” Merrak snapped, then winced and slapped at Eric’s hand, since he’d obviously done something painful. “You’re too fucking rough!”

“You’re squirming,” Eric argued, but when he went to try again, Stiles touched his shoulder and motioned for him to move.

Eric didn’t argue, getting up and moving aside so Stiles could take his place. He wondered where the First Aid kit had come from. Maybe someone had gone out to buy it, or maybe they’d had to ask the hotel for it. Either way, he was sure it hadn’t come with them in the car. Which made sense, given the Werewolf to human ratio right now.

“What happened?” he asked again while carefully cleaning up Merrak’s mess of a face. He didn’t squirm or bark at him, so Stiles figured he was doing a better job than Eric had been. Made sense, since Stiles was human and understood that injuries hurt long past their creation.

“Assholes started a fight with us. We finished it.”

Stiles paused in what he was doing to glance over at Eric. He shifted his weight uncomfortably, hands in his pockets, blood spattered across the front of his shirt. He really did look terrible, and Stiles wondered how much of a beating he’d gotten to protect his brother.

“They asked where ‘mommy’ was, then one of them said being fucked by their friend.”

“Really, Merrak?” Cora demanded angrily. “So you went after them because you can’t handle people being assholes?! What are you, twelve?!”

“Why didn’t your detail step in?” Stiles asked quietly, trying to block Cora from Merrak’s line of sight since a drunk, angry Cora was helping literally no one.

“Because they know I can take care of myself,” Merrak snapped.

Stiles turned back to Eric, who winced and looked like he wished Stiles would stop forcing him to tell the truth.
“They were human. I had it under control, they only would’ve stepped in if it got out of hand.”

“Like I said,” Stiles muttered, turning back to Merrak and continuing to dab at his injuries, “they’re not babysitters.”

“I don’t need a fucking babysitter,” Merrak snapped, but Stiles just gripped his chin and tried to force him to keep his mouth shut since he was working on his lip and speaking was affecting his ability to do so.

“Eric, are you okay?” Stiles asked when Merrak finally shut his trap.

“I’m fine,” he said quietly from behind him.

Stiles just nodded in understanding, but he knew it couldn’t be easy. While Werewolves healed faster, they still felt pain, and Stiles had to wonder if Merrak realized what his brother had gone through to take the brunt of the beating.

Once Merrak was mostly cleaned up, Stiles sent him to the bathroom to wash up and get ready for bed. He stomped towards it so loudly and slammed the door so hard Stiles worried they’d get a noise complaint.

“Unbelievable,” Cora muttered angrily, beginning to pace and seeming a little more sober than she had been even five minutes ago. “Fucking unbelievable! Can’t leave him alone for five minutes.”

“Ragging on him isn’t going to help,” Stiles insisted, packing everything back up and eying the bloodied items. He knew they should dispose of it in a safe manner, but he didn’t have a biohazard bag or anything, and at least it was just gauze and blood. He ended up just grabbing a small paper bag from their earlier shopping and dumping the soiled items into it. They could dump it into a garbage later so the cleaning staff didn’t have to deal with it.

“He needs to grow up,” Cora snapped. “He’s always causing trouble, starting fights, being rude. What is wrong with him?”

It wasn’t Stiles’ place to say anything, but he knew why Merrak was like this. They’d spoken about it once, however briefly, and really, Stiles felt like he wanted to lash out sometimes, too. It wasn’t Merrak’s fault, not entirely. He just wanted attention, and he didn’t know how else to get it.

“Just get some sleep,” Stiles insisted with a sigh, getting to his feet. “We’ll figure this out tomorrow. Just—leave him alone, okay?”

Cora looked like that wasn’t okay, but she just crossed her arms and huffed angrily. Eric shifted his weight uncomfortably, then moved to grab his pyjamas and headed out of the room to the other bathroom.

Moving over to Cora, he gave her a brief hug, wished her goodnight, then left the room.

Kincaid and the other guard were still there, but after Stiles confirmed everything was fine, they left, heading back to wherever their room was. Stiles assumed it was next door, but just saw them out and made sure the door was properly latched.

Jackson was already snoring on their bed, still fully clothed and on top of the covers, but Stiles ignored him and just grabbed his toiletries, heading into the bathroom to change and brush his teeth. Once he was ready for bed, he climbed under the covers on his side, pulling his phone over from where he’d dropped it on the nightstand.
He had a message from Derek, telling him he hoped he had a good night, and Stiles hesitated before replying to him.

[Stiles]
Hey, I hope this doesn’t wake you
[Stiles]
Just wanted to let you know that everyone is FINE, but Merrak and Eric got into a fight earlier
[Stiles]
I didn’t want anyone to find out about it secondhand and freak
[Stiles]
They’re both fine, and Cora already railed on Merrak so I hope your mom shows him mercy

He started to put his phone down, but a message appeared before he did so and he read it over.

[Derek]
of course he did
[Derek]
eric wouldn’t know how to start a fight if he tried
[Derek]
merrak needs to stop

[Stiles]
Cut him some slack
[Stiles]
It’s not easy being the only human in a family of wolves

[Derek]
DAD is human stiles

[Stiles]
Not really. I mean...
[Stiles]
My ribs aren’t broken anymore
[Stiles]
So
[Stiles]
You know

Derek didn’t respond again, and Stiles wondered what was going through his mind on the other end. He let out a slow breath, and before he could talk himself out of it, he typed up another text.

[Stiles]
I was thinking we could go out when I got back
[Stiles]
Nothing fancy or anything, just... grab a bite together

[Derek]
like a date?

Stiles rolled his eyes. Derek was ridiculous, he had no idea why he liked his stupid face.

[Stiles]
Yeah dude, like a date
[Stiles]
I’m not made of money so it won’t be fancy, but I’ve been thinking and we should at least TRY
[Stiles]
You know, just to see
[Stiles]
If you want

[Derek]
time and place
[Derek]
i’ll be there
[Derek]
just say when

[Stiles]
I’ll let you know when I get home
[Stiles]
I should sleep
[Stiles]
It’s late
[Stiles]
You too

[Derek]
your dad might have words with me if i do

[Stiles]
Ah. Night shift?

[Derek]
yup

[Stiles]
Well, I hope it goes well
[Stiles]
Good night, Derek

[Derek]
night stiles

Stiles set his phone down, feeling a little warm and fuzzy at the idea of going on a date with Derek. It had the potential to be awkward and weird, but it could also work out and who was he to not even try?

Settling in for sleep, he closed his eyes and tried to clear his mind, an impossibility given how active it always was. The fact that Jackson sounded like a steam engine beside him wasn’t helping matters, but he did his best to try and ignore him.

Eventually, he couldn’t handle it anymore and he kicked out at Jackson, his friend grunting and rolling over, almost right off the side of the bed. Stiles made sure he wouldn’t, then settled again, more than ready for some shut eye.
He realized the sound of Jackson’s snoring wasn’t the only thing that he’d been hearing, keeping him awake. Frowning, he listened for a moment longer, then sat up, turning to look over at the closed bedroom door.

Debating, he eventually sighed and climbed out of bed, padding out of the room and poking his head into the living room.

Merrak was sitting on the couch with one of the hotel blankets wrapped around him. He had ice in one hand, pressed against his jaw, and his eyes were locked on the television where Die Hard was playing, the explosions and gunfire being what Stiles had heard since it was fairly far into the movie.

“What are you still doing up?” Stiles asked, moving further into the room, eyes on the television since it was at an interesting point in the movie.

“What are you still doing up?” Merrak snapped back instantly, tone heated. Stiles chose to ignore that and answered honestly.

“Jackson’s snoring kept me awake. I got him to stop, but heard the TV, so thought I’d come check it out.” He turned to Merrak and motioned beside him. “Can I sit?”

Merrak just shrugged, avoiding looking at Stiles, still icing his cheek. Stiles took that as approval and sat down beside him, both of them silent while they watched the action unfold on the screen. Stiles hadn’t seen this movie in a long time, and he forgot what Bruce Willis used to be like back in his prime. Not that he wasn’t still a great actor, but he hadn’t done anything remotely good since The Fifth Element, so it made movies like Die Hard seem like classics.

They were watching John McClane and Sergeant Al Powell speak to one another over their radios, having a heart to heart over why Powell couldn’t fire his gun anymore, when Merrak spoke, voice tight.

“Don’t you ever get angry?”

“Yeah, all the time,” Stiles admitted, still watching the screen. “You should see me at the DMV, I’m a nightmare.”

“No,” Merrak snapped, making Stiles finally turn to him, “I mean, about this.” He motioned around them, but Stiles was fairly certain he didn’t mean the lavish hotel room. “About all of this. How stupid it is. Don’t you hate it?”

Stiles watched him for a long moment, Merrak staring back at him, looking just as angry as he always did, eyebrows down in a frown, hazel eyes as cold as the ice he held against his face. It sucked, because Stiles knew where he was coming from. He understood exactly what it felt like being Merrak. But he’d only lived through it for a few years, whereas Merrak had been living with it his entire life.

But even so, Stiles didn’t understand why Merrak thought it didn’t make him good enough. Stiles knew he was the research guy, he was the smart one with the plans. Sure, Lydia was technically smarter than him, but she never made the plans. Stiles did. And on top of that, Stiles could do things the wolves couldn’t. Like touch mountain ash, and survive wolfsbane. Sure, wolfsbane was deadly to humans, as well, but it wasn’t as immediate as it was for Werewolves.

Humans had their strengths too, and Stiles didn’t understand why Merrak was only focussing on where he fell short instead of where he excelled.
Stiles chose his words carefully when he answered. “You know, there’s nothing wrong with being human.” Merrak snorted and looked back at the television, which Stiles thought was a good thing because, movie or not, John McClane was a badass and he was human. “You don’t have to prove anything to anyone,” he insisted.

“But don’t you hate it?” Merrak demanded, looking back over at him, still scowling. “I mean, clearly you’ve never dated anyone before—”

“Hey!”

“—and now you’re practically married to Derek! Why aren’t you mad?”

Merrak sounded almost desperate, like he needed someone to be on his side. Like he desperately wanted someone else to understand why he was always so angry. And Stiles did. He did understand. But it was something he’d worked to overcome a long time ago, where Werewolves were concerned. And he’d never been angry about Derek choosing him as his mate. Freaked out, sure. Scared, yeah, he’d admit it. But why would he ever be angry?

“I don’t think there’s anything to be mad about,” Stiles answered honestly, shrugging. “Derek’s a great guy. This wasn’t exactly how I pictured my life going, but I don’t regret any of it.” Merrak still looked like he was waiting for Stiles to take his side, and he sighed shaking his head. “Merrak, there’s nothing wrong with being normal.”

Evidently, Merrak recognized he wasn’t going to get an ally in his anger and he just scoffed and turned back to the television, sulking. He was very obviously sulking, but he wasn’t pissed off, anymore. That was a win, at least.

Maybe he was trying to decipher why Stiles was okay being normal, but there were worse things than being human. It wasn’t so bad, and he wished Merrak understood that.

“Are you hungry?” Stiles asked after another silence.

Merrak turned to him, looking at him like he was an idiot. “What?”

“We passed this twenty-four hours breakfast place on the way back.” Stiles slapped him in the shoulder lightly, then stood. “Come on, my treat.”

“It’s the middle of the night,” Merrak argued, like that was the best argument in the world to stop Stiles from wanting pancakes.

“You planning on becoming a detective with those observational skills?” Stiles asked, grinning at him and slapping him lightly in the arm again. “Come on, get off your ass, let’s go.”

Merrak hesitated, like he was trying to figure out whether or not Stiles was fucking with him. Eventually, he rolled his eyes and got to his feet, tossing his wrapped ice into the blankets he’d had around his shoulders. Stiles went to find some shoes and a hoodie, not bothering to change out, and met back up with Merrak at the door.

He didn’t know how Kincaid knew they were heading out, but when they left the hotel room, Kincaid and two others were dressed and waiting for them in the corridor. Merrak snarled like an animal, but Stiles acted like they weren’t there and just wrapped an arm around Merrak’s shoulders, pulling him into his side and beginning his ode to pancakes while they waited for the lift.

He knew it would take a while for Merrak to get off his high horse and stop feeling so inferior, but
Stiles hoped that having another human around close to his age would help just a little.

After all, humans were fucking awesome, not that Stiles would ever say that to a Werewolf’s face. Especially not ones packing heat.

Their vacation away was short, but ultimately ended up being really fun. Though Stiles was bitter about Cora and Jackson both getting drunk and not having to deal with hangovers—because Werewolves were the fucking worst—they all agreed that it would be more fun to hang out together as opposed to doing things that the younger siblings with them couldn’t participate in.

Merrak seemed to like the inclusion a lot more, and by the end of the trip, he was less angry. Definitely not anywhere near coming to terms with the fact that he was and—hopefully—always would be human, but he at least didn’t start any more fights, and he was only moderately snarky with his siblings.

Derek texted Stiles virtually the second he got home, probably because he knew when Stiles had made it back considering his sister and brothers had returned at the same time. They’d texted for a little bit, Stiles trying to figure out the best timing that worked for both of them date-wise. It was easier for Stiles, since he wasn’t working, but school was fast approaching and he wanted to ensure they did this before that started.

If things went well, he wanted to be able to spend more time with Derek before school. If they didn’t, well, they’d go from there. Stiles was trying to be optimistic.

Of course, once that was over, Stiles had to deal with Scott. Easier said than done, since his friend was livid and adamant that Stiles was forcing his hand. Hilarious, considering Scott had argued that was what the Hales had originally been doing, but he tried not to dwell on it. He just went over to explain things in person, and got snarled at and basically told to get the fuck out.

Deciding to try again when Scott wasn’t colossally pissed off, he just went home to lounge on the couch, and got an angry call from Lydia asking what was happening because Scott had ripped her a new one when she’d gone over to drop something off for Melissa.

“I’m not the fucking babysitter!” Stiles insisted to nobody, annoyed that someone around him always seemed to be angry about something. Why couldn’t everyone just get along?!

He was still sitting and fuming on the couch when someone rang the doorbell. A part of him wanted to just ignore it, because he didn’t have the patience to deal with any more angry people, but after a moment he just grumbled to himself and got up to answer it.

He almost sighed when he opened the door, but felt that would be rude and managed to hold it back.

“Hello Stiles. May I come in?”

He moved aside and swept his arm out in invitation, but Talia just smiled at him for a moment longer, then glanced down. Stiles realized the mountain ash was still there and used his shoe to break the barrier. She stepped inside once she was able to and he shut the door behind her.

“I wondered if we might have an honest chat about your friend.”

“Jackson?” Stiles asked, confused.
“Scott.”

“Oh.”

She took a seat on the couch, looking way too sophisticated in his dingy and outdated living room. He tried not to think too much about the fact that she was a Queen, it would just freak him out, and he didn’t need that right now.

He went to sit down beside her, unsure of what they would be discussing, but having a fair idea. Sighing, he turned to face her, waiting for her to say what she needed to say. Talia was silent, watching him for a moment, then her gaze lowered to his lap.

Stiles looked down, confused, wondering if he’d dropped something on his jeans, then heard muffled cursing and winced, reaching into his pocket and pulling his phone out. It was connected to Jackson, of course, because why wouldn’t it be?

“Sorry,” he said.

Jackson was silent on the other end. “Are you okay? What’s going on?”

“What?”

“Usually you’re more dickish when you butt-dial me.”

“Oh.” He supposed he was. But right now, his brain was a little preoccupied, so he just shook his head. “Distracted. Sorry. I’ll talk to you later.”

“Stiles, who’s with you?”

“Talia.”

“Okay. You’re okay?”

“I’m fine. I’ll talk to you later.” He hung up, giving Talia an apologetic look. “Sorry.”

“It’s all right. I hear it happens quite often.”

Stiles felt embarrassed that she knew that, but didn’t dwell on it and shoved his phone back into his pocket. “You wanted to talk about Scott?”

“Yes, I wanted your honest opinion.” She smoothed her skirt out, looking every inch the successful businesswoman she was. That, or a Queen. Which she... also was...

“About?” he asked hesitantly.

“About whether or not you believe he will join the pack.” The look she gave him was intense, and Stiles squirmed under it. He didn’t really know how to answer a question like that, and no way was he going to give her anything that would harm his friend. Not that he thought she was up to anything malicious, but she was royalty and Scott had spoken out of turn multiple times.

“I don’t know,” he said, because it was the truth.

“Can you at least provide some guidance as to why he is so against joining us?”

Stiles winced and shrugged one shoulder. “He likes being in control. He likes knowing he has a choice. I think he’s just... we managed. You know, before. Alone. The five of us. We worked as a
pack, and we made it through everything that attacked us. I think he just doesn’t like the idea of someone trying to take that power away from him.”

“We aren’t taking anything away from him,” she said softly. “We are trying to unite the two packs. Surely you’ve noticed the strain.”

“Strain?”

“On you.”

Stiles felt a lot of things all the time, it was hard to really pinpoint anything specific. He said so, and Talia smiled sadly.

Apparently he was so exhausted lately because of the pack war. Stiles was the piece keeping the McCall pack sane, and Scott was the piece resisting joining the Hales. It was putting strain on Stiles’ mental state, and the fact that Jackson, Kira and Lydia all had one foot over the line into the Hale pack was only making Scott pull harder to get them back, which was pulling harder at Stiles’ psyche.

No wonder he was so grumpy and tired lately.

“Scott likes control,” Stiles said with another sigh, shrugging. “If he loses it, he’s not going to want to be part of the Hale pack.”

“Hm.” Talia smoothed out her skirt again. “Something for me to think about. Do you know if he’s home?”

“Should be, yeah.”

“Perhaps I’ll stop by for a visit, then. I just thought I would check in on you and get your opinion at the same time.” She smiled and got to her feet, Stiles doing the same. He walked her to the door and she turned to him with a smile before opening it, hand on the doorknob. “You know, it’s rather interesting. I seem to recall a time he despised you.”

Stiles frowned. “Who?”

She just smiled and opened the door, heading down the porch steps while Stiles bent down to put the mountain ash barrier back into place. He glanced up when she spoke again.

“Hello Jackson. My apologies for monopolizing his time, he’s all yours.”

Jackson nodded awkwardly, leaning back against his newly fixed Porsche—or maybe just new in general—and watched Talia enter her own ridiculously expensive car. She pulled out and drove off before Jackson motioned for Stiles to hurry the fuck up.

“We didn’t have plans, you know,” Stiles insisted, rolling his eyes, but obeying, shutting the front door behind him. “I was just stuck in a room with you for days, show me some mercy.”

“I’m a fucking delight,” Jackson snarled, climbing back into his car. Stiles followed without preamble and didn’t ask where they were going when Jackson started driving.

He cocked an eyebrow when they pulled off the main road and towards the Hale house, but said nothing. Jackson only had to pull up to the house for the door to open, Cora hurrying out with a grin on her face. She climbed into the back, cursing over how cramped it was, but didn’t say anything else while Jackson pulled back out.
“What’s going on?” Stiles asked uncertainly. The two of them together was a recipe for disaster.

“Someone didn’t tell us he had a date coming up,” Cora accused, poking him hard in the cheek. “We have to fix your wardrobe.”

“Wha—who? We’re not going anywhere fancy! I said there would be no fanciness!”

“Just because you’re not spoiling him doesn’t mean you can’t look respectable,” Jackson insisted, scowling out the windshield while he drove just a touch too fast. Stiles double-checked his seatbelt was secure.

“Eye candy counts as spoiling him,” Cora teased with a wink.

“Gross,” Jackson insisted. “Stilinski is a six, at best.”

“Tell that to your dick,” Cora insisted with a gleeful smile.

Jackson let out an offended noise and Stiles groaned, not wanting to remember all the uncomfortable grinding. Sure, it had been funny at the time, and teasing Jackson had been a good laugh, but as time passed, he’d slowly come to the realization that they were like brothers and he did not want Jackson all up in his business like that ever again.

Stiles listened to the two of them bicker, jumping in every now and then just to keep things interesting. He had fun with them, his old and new pack combined, and it made him a little bitter that Scott wasn’t willing to give them a chance.

If things continued down this road, Stiles really worried about his friendship with him. Things were already on rocky ground between them. He didn’t want to lose Scott, but he also didn’t want to have an ultimatum.

Scott was the piece that refused to fit, and if he pushed too hard, he was going to find himself alone, and Stiles didn’t want that.

Whatever Talia was going to do, he hoped she did it quickly.

And he hoped it worked.

TBC...
Pulling up to the Hale house in his old, beat up Jeep had Stiles slightly embarrassed, because the Hales were all money and power and fancy cars. The fanciest thing Stiles had right now was the shirt he was wearing, which had cost an astronomical two-hundred and seventy-three dollars. Thankfully, Jackson had footed that bill because Stiles had almost laughed himself unconscious at the idea that Cora and Jackson thought he would pay that much for a fucking shirt. Why were shirts so expensive? It wasn’t made of fucking gold. Hell, it wasn’t even made of silk! Why on earth would anyone pay so much for a shirt?

Stiles acknowledged he was procrastinating by obsessing about his shirt, but this had been his idea, and it wouldn’t be polite to keep his date waiting. Nevermind that Derek knew he was there—Werewolf and all, how couldn’t he?—but he was being a good date and waiting for Stiles to ring the doorbell.

Letting out a slow breath, Stiles parked the Jeep by the edge of the large gravel path and turned off the engine. Climbing out, he slammed the door, wiped his sweaty palm on his black, form-fitting pants, and then moved across the clearing to the front door. His heart was pounding in his chest, and he knew all the wolves could hear it. Hopefully it didn’t sound any different than usual, but he honestly didn’t know.

Exhaling sharply once more, insisting to himself he could do this, Stiles reached out and rang the doorbell. It opened a few seconds later, Merrak giving him a once over before cocking an eyebrow. “What?” Stiles asked, feeling a little scrutinized. Of all the Hales who opened the door, why did it have to be this one?

“Nothing.” Merrak paused, then muttered, “Stop freaking out, you look fine.”

Hearing that didn’t really stop him from freaking out, but thankfully Derek appeared behind his brother, wrapping an arm around his shoulders and dragging him into his side with a small, fond smile.

“Thanks for trying to help.”

“Get off me, you fat, ugly fuck,” Merrak snapped, elbowing Derek and ducking out from under his arm, Talia’s loud reprimand heard across the house. Stiles let out a small laugh and Derek rolled his eyes, stepping out of the house and shutting the door.

“Some things never change, huh?” Stiles asked.

“Not when it comes to him,” Derek agreed, giving him a once over much like Merrak had. “You look great.”
“Thanks. You also look great.” Stiles winced, realizing how lame that sounded. “Uh, ready to go?”

“Whenever you are.”

Stiles nodded and turned on his heel, heading back for the Jeep. This all felt very awkward and formal. He didn’t know why, considering he’d hung out with Derek before. Maybe because those weren’t actually dates, whereas this one was meant to be. Stiles was committed to kissing Derek before the night was through, provided things went well.

Which of course explained why they went horribly from the get-go.

They were in the Jeep, Stiles trying to get it started, and of course the damn thing decided to just sputter and die. Right there, on the Hale lawn. If Stiles had been alone, he’d have asked Roscoe why she felt like embarrassing him. As it was, Derek was sitting beside him, looking adorably concerned.

“Everything okay?”

“Yup.” Stiles tried again, but nothing happened and he pulled his seatbelt off, kicking open his door. “Just—one second.”

Slamming the door and cursing under his breath—hopefully too quiet for the Werewolves to hear—he moved to the hood and popped it, trying to figure out what the problem was. He heard the other door open and shut, then Derek was beside him.

“Glad to see it’s surviving,” Derek said with a hint of teasing in his voice.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Stiles demanded, still trying to locate the problem without actually touching anything. He didn’t want to pull his tools out, he’d get grease all over his hands, and likely his shirt, and it was just a bad idea.

“Well, before the unfortunate tumble down the hill your Jeep took, everything under the hood looked like it was being held together with duct tape.”

“And love,” Stiles shot in.

“What?”

“Duct tape and love. Haven’t you ever heard that Beatles song?” he teased, turning to offer Derek a small smile.

Derek huffed out a laugh, shaking his head, then motioned for Stiles to lean back so he could close the hood. He took Stiles’ hand, palm warm and surprisingly soft, and led the way towards his Camaro.

Not exactly the best start, but at least everything hadn’t gone to shit yet. So, Stiles got into the passenger seat and Derek pulled out, driving down the long path towards the main road so they could head into town. Stiles had to tell him where they were going, since he was supposed to be the one driving, but he felt a little relieved when he saw Derek look pleased.

Stiles had opted for one of the restaurants in town. It wasn’t a diner, but it wasn’t a fancy, upscale buffet. It was comfortably in the middle, somewhere Stiles could afford, but still served good food. They chatted idly about the restaurant the entire drive there—Stiles did most of the talking, actually, Derek was pretty quiet.
He didn’t know if that was a good or a bad thing.

When they parked and headed inside, Stiles gave his name and they were led to a table, the hostess handing over some menus before leaving them in peace for their waiter to come by. Stiles already knew what he wanted, but he used the menu as procrastination anyway. When Derek put his own down, Stiles followed suit, opening his mouth to speak when the waiter appeared beside them.

“Hello, how are we doing tonight?” he asked with a bright smile, looking between them.

“Great,” Stiles blurted out. “So good. Awesome, even. And you?”

“I’m doing well, thanks.” He smiled at Stiles, and out of the corner of his eye, Stiles saw Derek scowl. “Have you had a chance to take a look at the drinks?”

“Oh, uh...” Stiles hastily grabbed the drinks menu, looking it over. He didn’t really have anything in mind, and he was honestly too young to appreciate a good wine, so he just went for whatever beer they had on tap. When the waiter said they had two, Stiles just told him to surprise him.

“And yourself?”

“House white. Dry.”

The waiter didn’t seem perturbed by Derek’s curtness, he just wrote their orders down and said he’d be right back. The second he was gone, Stiles wished he’d come back. He tapped his fingers uncomfortably against the table, but when Derek’s eyes shot to his moving hand, he hastily stopped and clamped his fists in his lap.

“So...” He had no idea what to say. “Did the waiter offend you?”

“What?” Derek frowned.

“You were kind of glaring. And a little rude.”

Derek’s expression softened and he made a face at that. “Was I?” He started to reach up to rake a hand through his hair, then seemed to recognize it would mess it up and let it fall back down. “Sorry.”

“An apology?” Stiles smirked. “Did it hurt a little?”

Derek gave him a look, then took a breath. “You’re still not fully mine. I’m a little... territorial right now.”

“Fair, but, please recognize that I am here on a date with you, after I asked you to come with me. So the waiter’s just being smiley and nice because he wants a good tip.” Stiles shrugged. “Nothing to be territorial about.”

“You’re right.”

“Course I am.” Stiles grinned, leaning back in his seat and crossing his arms. “Only a small percentage of my immeasurable charm.”

Derek gave him a look at that and Stiles grinned.

“So, Derek Hale. Tell me about yourself,” Stiles prompted.

“What?”
“You don’t talk much.”

“My sisters talk enough for the whole family,” he said with a small smile.

“Well, I’m not on a date with your sisters, either. So,” he clapped his hands together twice. “Come on. Let’s have a real conversation about something not involving mates or royalty or any of that other panic-inducing stuff.”

“Panic-inducing?” Derek asked, frowning.

Stiles waved the words away. “I just—want to get to know you. All I really know is all the Supernatural stuff surrounding you, not you. Like, what’s your favourite colour?”

“Green,” Derek said immediately.

“Excellent! See! Bonding!” Stiles motioned between them and grinned, even though Derek just rolled his eyes and was clearly wondering how Stiles knowing his favourite colour meant they were bonding.

He didn’t take it personally, and was a little pleased when Derek was much more polite when the waiter came back with their drinks and took their food orders.

Derek was a bit of a mystery to Stiles. He was all hard edges and threatening scowls sometimes, but other times he was smiling and goofy. It was a weird contrast and Stiles figured it was a way for Derek to protect himself. If he shut down occasionally, and didn’t let people know how good of a person he was, it meant they couldn’t hurt him as easily.

He supposed he could understand that. After all, Derek already felt like things weren’t going according to plan with regard to their relationship, so he could see why Derek was putting himself out there, and then immediately pulling back.

They were well into their main course by the time Derek relaxed enough to seem more natural. Stiles really liked it when Derek spoke, because he had interesting things to say. He knew a lot about... well, everything. Stiles knew a lot too, because of his ADHD and his obsession with looking up the most random things, but Derek’s knowledge was more widespread. Basically, Stiles would look into stupid things he wanted to know whereas Derek actually read and researched things that were of importance.

He knew a lot about medicine, courtesy of Laura, and a lot about history, mostly due to his original architecture background. He knew business thanks to his mother, and various other topics thanks to his father and his writing. He was actually a fascinating person, and Stiles ended up staring at him slightly open-mouthed while Derek explained the inner workings of psychiatric facilities since he and his father had visited one in New York for one of his books.

Derek had mistaken his silent awe for discomfort and started to shut down again but Stiles urged him to continue and when it became clear he was genuinely interested, Derek hesitantly finished off the conversation.

Things were going well. Really well, in point of fact. Stiles felt less anxious than he had in months, and he honestly felt like he did have a crush on this guy. Like being mates wasn’t just a one-sided thing he didn’t have a choice in, but something he could clearly determine was there for both of them to agree to.

Derek seemed to enjoy his company, and Stiles definitely enjoyed his. So much so that when they were finished with dinner, Stiles actually asked if Derek wanted to share dessert. Derek looked
pleased, the corners of his lips quirking ever so slightly, but he couldn’t hide the full-blown smile when Stiles ordered their brownie sundae and asked for two spoons.

By the time they left, Stiles felt good. A part of him didn’t know why he’d been so freaked out in the first place, but then he remembered that Derek had been stalking him for the better part of four months and it came back to him why this was all really freaky.

Derek drove Stiles home, the two of them silent and content. Derek even hesitantly set one hand on Stiles’ thigh and when he didn’t push it away, the smile that greeted him at the next red light was almost blinding. Stiles rolled his eyes.

“It’s just a leg.”

“It’s your leg.”

“Don’t get sappy on me, I didn’t sign up for Edward Cullen.”

“What?”

“Never mind.” Stiles insisted, setting his hand on top of Derek’s and squeezing.

They made it back to Stiles’ place relatively quickly, Derek pulling into the driveway since the Jeep was still at the Hale house. He shifted into park, but didn’t turn off the engine. He probably didn’t want to assume, which Stiles appreciated. Though he was determined to follow through on his earlier decision to kiss Derek.

“Thanks for the ride home,” Stiles said, wincing slightly. “Sorry the Jeep died.”

“Thanks for dinner.” Derek turned to smile at him.

It all felt very awkward. Like they both wanted to move things along, but neither knew how to do it.

Well, Stiles wasn’t one to beat around the bush, and it wasn’t like he had to worry about rejection, so he just unbuckled his seatbelt, leaned over, and was about to kiss Derek when the Werewolf’s head whipped to the side, eyes flashing blue.

Stiles’ eyes followed his line of sight, his heart in his throat, but he let out a slow sigh when he saw Kira crouched on the front steps, as if she’d been sitting on them and had been trying to silently stand up. She’d likely been waiting for him and had decided to sneak off when she saw what was going on in the car. Unfortunately, it was hard to sneak away from a Werewolf.

Stiles knew, he’d tried. It never worked out.

“Sorry,” he said quietly, shifting back so he was in his seat once more. “Kira never comes by unless it’s important.”

“It’s okay,” Derek said, though Stiles could tell he hated that he’d reacted, because if he hadn’t they’d have been making out. Probably very heatedly. Stiles was sad they were missing out on that. “Next time?” he asked, somewhat hopefully.

“Why are you making it sound like you think there won’t be a next time?” Stiles rolled his eyes. “You’re stuck with me now, Hale. No takebacksies.” He did lean forward to kiss his cheek, enjoying the scratch of stubble against his lips, then pushed open his door. “Night.”
“Good night, Stiles.”

Stiles climbed out of the Camaro and shut the door. He waved to Derek while he backed out, watching him turn and head off down the street, then moved towards his front door.

“Stiles, I’m so sorry. I’m so, so sorry,” Kira insisted, getting to her feet and wringing her hands together. “I had no idea—if I did, I wouldn’t—”

“It’s fine,” Stiles insisted with a small smile, though the porch was dark and he doubted she could see it. “Not like I’m never gonna see him again.”

“Still,” she insisted, sounding miserable while he climbed the steps and pulled his keys out to unlock his door.

“It’s fine, Kira. Derek and I are just... getting acquainted.” It sounded ridiculous to say it, but it was true. They’d hung out before, but this was their first official date. This was the first time Stiles made it clear that, yeah, okay, sure. He’d be Derek’s mate. And Derek had looked so tense and worried for so long that night, like he was scared of fucking up. But he shouldn’t have worried, everything had gone well, and Stiles could probably officially start calling Derek his boyfriend out loud, now.

He’d already kind of started in his head, but out loud made it more official.

“So,” Stiles said, dropping his keys on the hall table and bending down to brush the mountain ash aside so Kira could enter the house, “what brings you to my humble abode?”

“I think Scott’s going to break up with me,” she blurted out before Stiles could even get back to his feet.

He stared up at her, eyebrows raised. “What? No way, he’s crazy about you.”

“We had a fight,” she muttered, crossing her arms defensively while stepping into the house, Stiles shutting the door behind her. “A big one. About the packs.”

_Dammit Scott_, Stiles thought angrily, dragging one hand down his face.

He motioned Kira into the living room, then went to get some drinks for them. He anticipated this was going to be a long conversation, and if Scott wasn’t careful, he was going to lose _everyone_ whether he wanted to or not.

“I’m too young to be a father,” Stiles muttered, pulling two Cokes from the fridge and shutting it loudly.

His night had been going so well, too.

“Scott’s a toolbag, we should just cut our losses,” Jackson insisted, snatching fries off Stiles’ plate and stuffing them into his mouth.

Stiles let out an angry sound around his mouthful of burger that Jackson ignored, licking salt off his fingers before going back to his own plate of tacos. Stiles pulled his plate closer to himself to try and avoid any more fry thefts.

“That isn’t how we resolve the situation,” Lydia insisted, the same look of distaste on her face she’d been sporting since arriving ten minutes ago. They were having an impromptu pack meeting
to discuss their options. Well, kind of a pack meeting, given Kira was still at home worried Scott was going to break up with her—“No loss there on Kira’s side,” Jackson snapped—while Scott himself had been purposefully excluded.

Stiles felt bad about going behind his back, but ever since the Hales had returned, he’d been intolerable. Stiles was all for leaving the protection of the town to the real adults, but Scott seemed to think it made him... less.

Less important, less worthy, less of a man or Werewolf.

Stiles didn’t understand why he wasn’t just cheering over their ability to go back to being teenagers. Not that they were in their teens anymore, but Stiles knew they’d missed out on a lot of stuff dealing with all the Supernatural bullshit they’d had to face over the years. He just wanted to go back to being a university student. Go to parties, get drunk, play video games with his friends and eat Cheesy Puffs until he threw up.

Maybe not that last one, but at least something as childishly entertaining.

He didn’t want to have to protect the town from evil all the time, he didn’t want to be perpetually sleep-deprived, and lie to his dad, and stay up all night researching things the internet didn’t even believe was real. He just wanted to go back to how things were.

Sure, with a pack and a mate and all that stuff that came with it, but still normal. For the most part.

Why didn’t Scott get that? Why was he so obsessed with not losing the pack he had when having a larger one would be beneficial for all of them? Stiles just didn’t get it.

“Sup losers?”

Stiles jumped when Cora slid into the seat beside him. Lydia rolled her eyes at the greeting but Jackson just nodded to her, attempting to steal more fries from Stiles. He protected them from him by dragging them to the left, which turned out to be a mistake since Cora took that as an invitation to help herself.

“Should I just order a side of fries?” Stiles demanded, throwing his hands up in defeat. “If you guys wanted fries, you should’ve ordered some!”

“I didn’t come for the food,” Cora argued.

“Why order them when I can steal yours?” Jackson added.

Stiles just threw his hands up dramatically again. Then he turned to Cora. “How did you know we were here?”

“I figured it out based on the sounds.” She motioned vaguely towards the bowling lanes behind them.

“Sounds?” Stiles asked, but Jackson just thrust one fist in the air in triumph.

“You’re his new butt-dial!”

“What?” Stiles pulled his phone out, then sighed when he saw he had one outgoing call from a few minutes ago to Cora’s phone. He really needed to figure out what the fuck was going on with his phone, it was getting annoying.
“Word of advice?” Cora said, stealing another fry. Stiles didn’t bother trying to stop her, he’d already lost this battle. “Don’t cut Scott off.”

“He’s being a child,” Lydia insisted haughtily, flipping hair over her shoulder and smoothing a napkin on her lap despite not having ordered anything to eat. “This isn’t something he should be allowed to decide for us. If we want to be in the Hale pack, that’s our right and our decision.”

“Agreed, but he was your leader first. He’d just trying to figure things out, see where he fits in this new hierarchy. He thought he was the top of the food chain for you guys, and to find out Stiles was the only reason the rest of you rallied, it stung.”

Stiles cocked an eyebrow at her and she shrugged.

“What? I’m a Werewolf, it’s hard not to listen.”

“You eavesdropped,” Stiles accused. “Man, I’m missing out by being human.”

Cora just smirked at him, punched him lightly in the arm, then seemed to show him pity because she grabbed at one of Jackson’s tacos instead of more fries. He didn’t react to the theft, probably because he’d go and buy himself some more. That, or he was furious but didn’t want to make a scene and prove Stiles right.

“When did he say this?” Lydia asked, ignoring all the food thefts going around.

“Like fifteen minutes ago?” Cora said, mouth full of taco.

“Wait, today?” Stiles demanded, turning to her fully. “Scott’s at your place?”

Cora nodded, licking sauce off her fingers and taking another huge bite. She chose the moment her mouth was full to continue speaking, because of course she did.

“Showed up about an hour ago and he and mom went to have a heart-to-heart in the study. Basically, he feels like everyone’s forcing his hand, and he doesn’t want to fight anymore. He just doesn’t understand where he falls in the grand scheme of things, because he’s been in charge for so long he doesn’t know if he can take orders from someone else. Mom’s basically trying to help him find a balance so that we can all get alo—”

Stiles jerked in his seat, something hot and borderline painful snapping in the base of his spine, forcing him to straighten instantly in an attempt to alleviate the pain. He noticed Jackson and Lydia do the same, a snarled curse escaping Jackson at the action before he reached back to massage one shoulder.

Cora had cut off at the action, chewing paused and eyes on the three of them before she let out an excited noise and slapped repeatedly at Stiles’ arm with one sauce-covered hand.

“Ow, ow!” he insisted, slapping back at her. “What? Use words!”

“Oh my God, it worked!” she insisted, mouth still full and giving Stiles a great view of partially masticated food. “Oh my God, it worked!”


“Agreed, it was rather unpleasant,” Lydia said, clearing her throat and shifting, clearly uncomfortable and in pain. Stiles could relate.
She may have been a Banshee, but physically, she was still human. If his spine ached, hers had to be smarting, too.

“What the hell was that?” Jackson demanded, despite clearly being the only one at the table who didn’t feel any more pain.


“What?” Stiles asked, staring at her. “No way, that can’t be what that was. It hurt a lot and Scott’s too stubborn.”

Cora rolled her eyes. “It hurt because Scott’s stubborn. Mom got him to agree to join the pack, and his stubbornness made it so that when mom pulled you all in, he resisted just enough to have you guys feel it. If he hadn’t, you’d all have snapped straight like everyone usually does at an Alpha order. It’s not painful, it’s just... absolute, you know? But oh my God!” Cora bounced in her seat and pulled Stiles into a sideways hug, almost smashing the taco into his face. “Yay! We’re all in the pack together! This is so great!”

“About time,” Jackson muttered. “Fucking McCall.”

“Well,” Lydia said, getting to her feet and dropping her napkin on the table. “Fun as this has been, given we have nothing further to discuss considering Scott apparently decided to get his head out of his ass, I’ve got plans.”

“Say hi to Parrish for me,” Cora called as Lydia headed off.

The redhead turned sharply to give Cora a scathing look and Stiles’ chewing slowed, looking between a grinning Cora and a furious Lydia. He clued in a split second before Jackson.

“You’re dating Parrish?” Jackson demanded. “No wonder you wanted to get into the Hale pack, hard to date the enemy.”

“We’re not dating,” Lydia insisted haughtily. “We’re just... seeing each other.”

“That’s another term for dating,” Stiles informed her, grinning and shoving a fry into his mouth.

She just turned her back on them and flipped hair over her shoulder, striding out of the bowling alley with her head held high.

“He’s not good enough for her,” Jackson said as soon as she was gone.

“Hey, Parrish is nice,” Stiles insisted. “I like him, and I think they’d make a cute couple.”

“Laura’s pretty sad, she’s had her eye on Parrish for years, but I guess it just wasn’t meant to be.” Cora sighed, arms still around Stiles while she attempted to eat her taco.

Heducked out from under them and went back to his fries, his mind surprisingly blank. He felt... lighter. Different. He didn’t know if it was legitimately because of the whole Scott finally agreeing to join the pack thing, or just because his life was starting to fall into place.

It was less Twilight-y, at any rate, but either way, things were looking up.

Scott was in the pack, he and Derek were kind of dating, his dad knew about all the weird Supernatural bullshit which meant he didn’t have to lie to him anymore, he’d gotten into all his classes for the fall... Things were good. Stiles felt like his life was finally calming down.
His phone went off in his pocket, and he contemplated ignoring it because he’d just been thinking about how good his life was and didn’t want anything to ruin it, but he couldn’t. Sighing, he reached into his pocket and pulled it out, frowning when he saw Merrak’s name blinking back at him.

He also noticed his battery was almost dead, which made sense considering all the unintentional outgoing calls he always seemed to do. It had enough juice for this call, but likely wouldn’t last longer than another half-hour, at best.

“Hey,” he said, answering the call. “What’s up?”

“Come pick me up,” he ordered.

Stiles rolled his eyes, Cora giving him a confused look since she’d obviously recognized her brother’s voice.

“You know, when someone asks for a favour, they’re usually a bit more polite about it.”

“Do you want me to break someone’s face with my fist?”

“No.”

“Then come pick me up.” Merrak hung up.

“I can’t—really?” Stiles sighed and pulled the phone away from his ear, then dialled Merrak back. He answered with a snarl on the third ring.

“What?”

“Dude, where are you? I can’t come get you if I don’t know where you are.”

Merrak bit out an address before hanging up again. Stiles just rolled his eyes a second time before shoving his phone back into his pocket and sliding his half-eaten basket towards Cora.

“Everything okay?” she asked, clearly concerned. “What’s going on?”

“Merrak and I had a heart-to-heart in San Fran,” he said, sliding out of the booth and grabbing his hoodie, shoving his arms through the sleeves but leaving it unzipped. “He’s trying to hold up his end of our arrangement.”

“Do you need me to come with?”

“Nah, it’s fine, I got it.” He glanced at Jackson. “Give her a ride home?”

“I’m not a chauffeur,” he sneered, but Stiles knew he would anyway.

Turning, he headed out of the bowling alley, half-walking, half-running since he didn’t know how long Merrak’s temper would hold out. Someone had evidently said something to him that set him off, and he was trying extremely hard to not kick the crap out of them. Stiles had been trying to drill it into his head that he had nothing to prove, and he was glad that Merrak was actually taking his advice and trying not to do anything stupid.

He got behind the wheel and headed out of the lot, knowing how to get virtually everywhere in Beacon Hills after growing up there. He didn’t know the house, per se, but he knew the street and how to get there. His mind was working the whole time he drove, thinking about how weird it would be when he saw Scott next, knowing he’d finally agreed to be in the pack.
Things were falling into place, and Stiles was hoping that this would finally help fix their friendship. Things had been... tense lately. They’d been fighting a lot, and the pack had been all over the place and divided. Lydia had been keeping out of it, for the most part—though apparently that was because she was dating Parrish, but that was neither here nor there. Kira, of course, had been trying really hard not to take sides, because her mom was on one, and Scott was on the other. Jackson had basically thrown up both middle fingers to Scott and basically told him to stop being a stubborn asshole.

Stiles... well, he’d tried to find a balance, like Kira, but it was hard. Some days he understood where Scott was coming from, and other days he thought he was being unreasonable. The blowout after his return from San Francisco a week ago had made him feel like maybe there was no salvaging their friendship, but maybe that was the catalyst. Maybe Talia had gone to see Scott after stopping by to check on Stiles, and maybe Scott had finally realized that this didn’t have to be a fight he couldn’t win. Maybe he’d finally acknowledged that the only person pulling the packs apart was him and he’d decided he didn’t want to be that guy anymore.

He pushed the thoughts back when he pulled up to a house that was clearly having a house party and he sighed, wondering if he should call his dad before deciding someone else on the block would probably do it before long.

Merrak was sitting on the curb, looking furious, and he jerked to his feet when the Jeep approached, moving to the passenger-side door and climbing in, slamming it so hard Stiles let out a small shout.

“Hey, hey. Roscoe didn’t do anything to you, be gentle.”

“Just drive,” he snapped, buckling himself in and then crossing his arms angrily, glaring out the windshield hard enough to freeze the damn glass.

“Oh. All right.” Stiles shifted back into drive and pulled away from the curb, doing a U-turn in the middle of the deserted street and heading back the way he’d come. “Looks like it was some party.”

“It was full of fucking idiots and degenerates,” Merrak snapped.

Stiles nodded once, then decided he was not bringing Merrak home while he was in this kind of mood. He didn’t want to kill the happy that was likely floating through the Hale house at the knowledge that the packs were finally one pack, so when they neared the turnoff for the Preserve, he went the other way to head out of town instead.

“Where are you going?” Merrak demanded angrily.

“We’re going to get ice cream.”

“I don’t want any fucking ice cream,” Merrak shouted angrily. “I’m not a fucking child!”

“Who said the ice cream was for you?” Stiles asked, giving him a look before facing forward again. “I love McDonalds soft-serve.”

Merrak hunkered down in his seat and said nothing else. Stiles turned on music because he didn’t want to listen to Merrak’s angry breathing the whole drive, and they sat in silence the entire ride to McDonalds. When they got to the drive-thru, Stiles decided he wanted more fries, since he hadn’t actually finished his super late dinner—it was almost ten, after all—so he moved up to the menu board to decide on his ice cream, then turned to Merrak.
“Want anything?”

“No.”

“If you end up like Cora and steal all my food, I’m gonna be annoyed, so if you want something, you better tell me now.”

Merrak was silent, so Stiles moved forward to the order box, and just as he’d cranked his window down, Merrak muttered, “Chocolate sundae.”

“Hi there, welcome to McDonalds, can I take your order?” a girl’s voice said, speaking so quickly the words almost tumbled over each other.

“Yeah, hi, can I get uh, two large fries, a chocolate sundae, and a small Oreo McFlurry?”

The girl repeated his order just as lightning fast as her greeting, and when he confirmed it was correct, she gave him the price and told him to pull up to the first window. He did so, handing over some cash in exchange for the bag of fries. He set them on his lap while waiting for the ice cream, dumping his change in the cup holder. When the two ice creams were handed out, he passed the sundae to Merrak, shoved the McFlurry on top of his change in the cup holder, and wished the girl a good night.

He went to park in the lot, since he couldn’t eat his ice cream and drive at the same time, and he didn’t want it to melt. Once he was parked, he pulled it out of the cup holder and grinned at the spoon while he pulled it out of the container, ice cream sticking to it. He stuck it in his mouth, and turned slightly in his seat so he was facing Merrak, who was staring down at his sundae without making any move to eat it.

“So, what happened?” Stiles asked, licking his spoon clean before sticking it back into his McFlurry.

“Like you care.”

“I do care,” Stiles insisted with a sigh. “If I didn’t, I wouldn’t have asked. Or picked you up. You know you have siblings, right? I could’ve just called one of them to go and get you. Derek’s working tonight, could’ve called him to go break the house party up.”

Merrak turned to give him a sharp look, then looked back into his sundae, finally yanking the spoon out and sticking it into his mouth. A string of chocolate sauce connected the spoon to the container, but Merrak just licked his lips in an attempt to break it and then dug the spoon back into the ice cream.

“People in this town suck.”

“Yes they do,” Stiles agreed. “But why, exactly, do they suck in this particular case?”

When Merrak went silent again, Stiles figured he wasn’t going to talk about it, but after a short silence, he exploded. He started yelling about assholes who had no idea what he had to deal with on a daily basis, and the fact that he had to live up to people’s expectations, and that just because he wasn’t interested in drinking alcohol didn’t mean he didn’t know how to have fun.

Stiles tried to keep the surprise off his face—and wasn’t entirely sure he’d succeeded—because Merrak had a lot of opinions about peer pressure and how douch-y all the people in Beacon Hills were. It suddenly occurred to him back when they’d been in San Francisco that Merrak and Eric hadn’t been complaining about being left behind because they wanted to drink, but because they
wanted to be included. It was a weird thing for him to realize and he felt bad that Merrak was so mature for his age and always felt like people were talking down to him.

“Motherfuckers are going to spread stupid ass rumours about me and I’m going to want to murder them all when school starts up again!” Merrak finally finished off with, shoving a handful of fries into his mouth and chewing angrily.

Stiles was glad he’d bought two.

“So what?” he asked, shrugging when Merrak turned to him sharply. “So people think you’re ‘lame’ because you won’t drink,” Stiles said, putting air quotes around the word ‘lame’ before continuing with, “big deal. What does the opinion of a bunch of assholes matter anyway? High school ends, and once you’re all out in the real world, they realize that they can’t get away with that anymore.”

“Some people can,” Merrak insisted. “Money talks.”

“Yeah, and who has more of that in town than you do?” Stiles gave him a pointed look. “Listen, people suck. High school sucks. Life is shit sometimes. But that doesn’t mean you should let people get to you like this. Seriously, some people change, and some people don’t, but don’t let them tear you down to their level. You’re better than that.”

“Easy for you to say,” Merrak muttered. “You have friends who’ll look out for you.”

Stiles let out a bark of laughter that actually startled him, it was so loud. Merrak gave him an annoyed look and Stiles turned more in his seat, slapping one of his knees.

“Okay, kiddies! Story time about Stiles’ life in high school!”

He hadn’t been planning on giving Merrak his life story, but he wanted him to understand that life fucking sucked but it was only going to get better so long as he didn’t sweat the small stuff. He told him about Jackson, since apparently Merrak was one of the only ones in the Hale house who didn’t know Jackson had been the bane of his existence for most of his life.

He’d been surprised, which was understandable given Stiles and Jackson’s friendship was something nobody really saw coming. His dad had been especially confused, though things had probably been cleared up once the whole Werewolf thing came out.

It was weird explaining his messed up high school life to Merrak, but he could tell as he spoke that it put things into perspective for him. He probably looked at Stiles and saw the awesome human in a pack of bitten wolves who had no idea what they were doing, but somehow still survived. The guy who was his brother, the future Alpha and King’s, mate. The person who’d had two ribs broken and still managed to get away from his Werewolf captors.

To Merrak, Stiles was like a badass superhero. To Stiles, he was just Stiles. And the sooner Merrak learned that, the sooner he would realize that this was all temporary. High school was nothing, and he had a great family who cared about him, and he was smart, and tough, and seriously amazing.

Stiles knew he hadn’t fixed everything—he wasn’t that good—but Merrak seemed a bit calmer, now. He seemed less angry about his evening, and that was really the only thing that mattered.

When he started the Jeep back up, he asked if Merrak wanted anything else before they headed out, and he begrudgingly said he wanted more ice cream, so Stiles went back through the drive-thru to get another sundae and some more fries.
He wanted fries, and people kept stealing them from him, he was going to get his damn fries!

The drive back into town was more comfortable, Merrak eating his ice cream in silence while Stiles shoved salty goodness into his mouth, chewing thoughtfully while he contemplated his past. It was really strange when he really thought about it. All the shit he’d been through.

Definitely not how he imagined his life when he was in middle school.

They’d just started the last stretch back into town when his phone buzzed in his pocket. His free hand was still covered in salt, and when he arched his back and asked Merrak to get it for him, the teen gave him a look and said he wasn’t Derek and thus uninterested in feeling him up.

Stiles rolled his eyes and let it go to voicemail, despite hating that.

It rang again almost immediately, Stiles cursing and wiping his hand on his pants before digging into his pocket. He had just enough time to see his dad’s name flash on the screen before the call ended. When he went to call him back, the screen went black and he cursed.

“Fuck. Stupid fucking batteries, they don’t keep phones charged anymore,” he insisted angrily, shoving it back into his pocket.

It was probably just his dad calling to ask where he was. Stiles would be home soon, he figured his dad could survive a few minutes without panicking. Hopefully.

When they got back into town, Stiles headed for the Preserve so he could drop Merrak off first, hoping he felt better. He seemed better, at any rate, so Stiles counted it as a win.

“Hey, I just realized,” Stiles said with a small smile. “You didn’t hear.”

“What?” Stiles insisted. “Maybe they need help.”

“They can call a tow truck,” he insisted.

“Don’t be such a dick, it’s almost midnight.” Stiles eased to the side of the road and pulled up behind the other car. It looked generic, just a grey four-door Sedan, with bags in the back seat and someone muttering angrily from the hood.

Unbuckling himself, Stiles turned to look at Merrak while pushing open his door. “Wait here.”

“Wasn’t planning on moving,” Merrak informed him grumpily.

Stiles resisted the urge to roll his eyes again—seriously, the Hales were going to have him roll
them right out of their sockets—and climbed out. He shut the door and walked towards the other car.

“Excuse me?” he called loudly, since the man was still grumbling to himself. “Hello, sir? Did you need any help?”

When Stiles came around the front of the car, he froze in his steps when the man straightened and aimed a gun at him, feeling all the air rush out of his lungs. There was a cocky smile on his face, which was weathered and craggy, and the malice in his eyes suggested he’d been waiting for this day for a long, long time.

Five years, in point of fact, if Stiles’ math was correct.

“Hello Stiles.”

Stiles’ gaze lowered to the gun, trying to calculate his chances of deflecting a shot. He could do it. After all, he was young and spry, unlike the motherfucker holding the gun. Gerard Argent was anything but young or spry.

“Ah ah,” Gerard said, forcing Stiles’ gaze to snap back up to his face. “I would re-think that plan, if I were you.”

Stiles heard a grunt and turned to look back at the Jeep, his hands slowly curling into fists at his sides. Merrak was out of the car, looking furious, Kate Argent pressed up against his back with one hand wrenching his head back by the hair, and the other pressing a gun to his temple. Her lips were at his ear, and Stiles didn’t need to be a Werewolf to know what she was saying.

If Stiles so much as twitched, Kate would blow Merrak’s head off. If Merrak misbehaved, Gerard would shoot Stiles. They held all the cards, and Stiles was pissed he hadn’t just listened to Merrak. They should’ve just kept going on their way, ignored that someone needed help, but the problem was Gerard knew Stiles wasn’t like that. He knew that Stiles would stop, no matter the time of night, to help a poor old man on the side of the road.

Where was that fucking royal guard detail when he needed it? They’d only been around while Stiles had been in San Francisco, but apparently in Beacon Hills, them running the perimeter and watching his house was sufficient.

Apparently fucking not.

“I heard a rumour, Mr. Stilinski,” Gerard said, Stiles’ teeth grinding angrily while he turned back to the old man. He was moving closer, gun held almost lazily in his hand, like he knew he held all the power here. Which he did. “You see, while I was in prison, my friends kept me apprised of what’s been going on out in the world. Apparently the Hale heir had found himself a bitch. Imagine my surprise when the name reached me. A name I knew well.” He grinned, his teeth yellow and smile cruel. “Stiles Stilinski. All this time, I could’ve ruined him if only I’d killed you when I had the chance.”

“Don’t fucking touch him!” Merrak shouted.

Stiles cast a glance at him and saw he’d tried to struggle free, but Kate just yanked his head back by the hair and pressed the gun harder into his temple. Merrak’s hands were free, gripping at both her wrists, but he was only a sixteen year old kid, and Kate was a seasoned Hunter. Even if Merrak could get free, she’d probably shoot him.

These were very bad odds for them. For both of them.
“I’m not going to kill him,” Gerard said loudly, looking at Stiles but speaking to Merrak. Stiles turned back to him, gritting his teeth hard enough his jaw was aching. “See before, I could’ve killed him to ruin the Hale heir, but now? Now I can use him.”

Stiles stood his ground while Gerard approached, the man pressing the side of the barrel against Stiles’ cheek. It was cold against his skin, but he didn’t take his eyes off Gerard.

“You’re going to be very useful to me, Mr. Stilinski.”

“Let him go,” Stiles said quietly, “And I’ll go wherever you want.”

“You think you have any room to bargain?” Gerard let out a small chuckle. “You’re adorable. But you see, I can’t let him go, because I need him. He’s my leverage against you. If you misbehave, he’s the one I’m going to hurt. Can you imagine how her Majesty Queen Talia would feel about you if her favourite son were to be injured?”

“Fuck you!” Merrak shouted, then let out a sharp cry.

Stiles’ eyes shifted in his direction, Kate having kicked his knees out so that Merrak was on the ground, now. He grit hit teeth, hazel eyes flashing murderously, locked on Gerard. Merrak looked like he was two seconds away from wolfing out and tearing their throats out.

Except he couldn’t do that. Because while he’d grown up with wolves, he was still only human. Just like Stiles.

“Let him go,” Stiles said again, locking eyes with Gerard and putting as much feeling into the words as he could.

“That won’t work on me,” Gerard said with another cruel twist of his lips. “You may be able to control Werewolves, but I’m no Werewolf. Here, you listen to me.” Gerard took a step back, aiming the gun a little lower. “Turn around.”

“Stiles, don’t listen to him!”

Stiles clenched his jaw, trying to think of a way out of this that wouldn’t leave one of them with their brains all over the road, but he couldn’t. He just couldn’t risk them hurting Merrak, and while he was sure neither of them would fare well with what was coming, he would at least have more time to think. More time to plan.

So he obediently turned around, ignoring Merrak’s angry cursing by the Jeep. When Gerard told him to put his hands behind his back, he obeyed. He knew the gun had been holstered when he felt Gerard’s hands by his wrists, but Kate still had a firm grip on her own gun, pressing it hard to Merrak’s temple, so Stiles just forced himself to stay still while he felt a zip-tie wrap around his wrists. He let out a small grunt when Gerard tightened it off, the plastic digging painfully into his skin, but he made no other sounds.

Gerard slammed the hood shut, grabbing something off the edge that Stiles realized was some kind of miniature smoke machine. Smart.

Or it would be, if Stiles hadn’t fucking fallen for it. He appreciated the genius behind it less when he was the one it was used against.
“Walk.” Stiles’ shoulder was shoved and he obediently moved forward, Gerard’s hand shifting to grip his arm tightly and directing him to the trunk. He popped it open, and then shoved Stiles inside.

He landed awkwardly, unable to break his fall with his hands and smashing his nose into the bottom of it. He grit his teeth, feeling blood on his face, but just made sure all his various limbs were inside the trunk so that Gerard wouldn’t slam it shut on anything.

Stiles could still hear Merrak putting up a fuss outside, and when he turned his head to see if he would be joining him in the trunk, he was instead met with Gerard leaning over him, gun in his hand again.

“Nighty night, Stiles.”

The butt of the gun hit him in the temple so hard he was positive his skull had cracked wide open. And because Stiles’ luck was so, so awesome, he didn’t pass out on the first hit.

Oh no! No, that would’ve been much too merciful.

So instead, Gerard had to hit him a second time before he was knocked unconscious.

Because his life was just super.

“Wake up.”

It felt like every single nerve-ending in his entire body was on fire. For a few agonizing seconds, Stiles had absolutely no fucking idea what was going on, and it wasn’t until his muscles began to spasm and he managed to force his fingers to uncurl that he realized what had just happened.

Inhaling was almost more trouble than it was worth, the sound ragged and awful while he struggled to suck in oxygen. He didn’t know how many volts they’d just hit him with, but enough that his insides felt like they were liquified and he couldn’t stop the tremors that assaulted him as if he were still being electrocuted.

When he opened his eyes, everything seemed to be moving, like he was trying to look through rain-covered glass. It took much too long for his vision to focus on anything, and he kind of wanted to put his head back down and go back to sleep when his eyes caught sight of Merrak.

He wasn’t sure where they were, the area dark and dingy, but it was large enough to be some kind of basement. Merrak was across from him with his wrists cuffed to what looked like a radiator.

Stiles had to take a second to determine what his own captivity felt like. He shifted his hands, struggling to sit up, and realized he had actual cuffs around his wrists with chains looped through a chain-link fence that was bolted to the wall behind him.

Seriously? Manacles? Jesus, what was this, the dark ages?

“Good, you’re not dead,” Gerard’s voice said from somewhere to his left. He sounded like he was underwater, the words slow to register in Stiles’ brain, but he attributed that to the obvious concussion he had. Everything seemed to be coming to him slowly, and he let out a grunt when the front of his shirt was grabbed and he was forcibly hauled to his feet. When he was shoved back into the fence, he almost lost his footing, but managed to hold his ground, blinking rapidly to clear his vision, despite not really wanting to look into Gerard’s ugly, craggy face.
“Can’t have you dying on me now, can I?” Gerard looked amused while he spoke, like the idea of murdering someone didn’t bother him in the slightest. Stiles knew he didn’t care about killing others, but usually they were monsters. To realize Gerard was sick enough to kill people who were only involved in the Supernatural without being one was a little concerning.

More concerning for Merrak, though, given his mother was a Werewolf. Stiles was going to hope his purely human status would be enough to save his life to the point where he could keep the focus on him and away from Merrak.

It was his fault Merrak was in this situation to begin with, and that really bothered him. He hated that Merrak had said to be a dick and keep driving, but Stiles had insisted they couldn’t do that. He was going to listen to Merrak going forward, clearly he had more experience in this sort of thing.

Stiles’ head was turned to one side roughly, and he grunted, hands trying to come up and grab at Gerard’s but the chains weren’t long enough to allow it. Gerard had wrenched his shirt down on one side, twisting his head almost painfully. He then turned it the other way and repeated the action, letting out a grunt.

“You haven’t been claimed. Does that mean you don’t want him, or did he decide he didn’t want you?"

Stiles let out a growl when Merrak jerked over by the radiator, the sound of his cuffs clanging against the metal. Gerard had almost turned, but Stiles’ noise had forced him not to. Stiles was going to have to hope Merrak would keep his mouth shut for once in his life. These weren’t people to pick a fight with, they weren’t like his high school buddies. These were experienced Hunters, who’d been arrested and were somehow out. He knew Gerard’s sentence had been steep, and while Kate’s hadn’t been quite as high, it was still up there.

They shouldn’t have been out before Stiles was well into his thirties, if they were released at all. The fact that they were here, in front of him, meant they’d escaped. Hell, maybe one of the cops in the prison they were being held at was also a Hunter and had just let them walk out. Hunters had all kinds of professions, after all.

“I don’t want him,” Stiles bit out, seeing the flash of hurt across Merrak’s face. He’d explain later, but for now, it was safer for everyone if he pretended Derek meant nothing to him. “I didn’t sign up for this.”

“But you were driving his brother home.”

“I can’t like his human brother?” Stiles asked coldly. “Sorry, did I miss the memo where spending time with my own kind was no longer allowed? Are there rules about who I can and can’t hang out with? You got a pen and notebook, I can write it down for next time.”

Gerard backhanded him across the face, Merrak letting out an angry shout across the room, but Stiles was too busy trying to keep his footing to pay attention to what he was saying. His vision swam and when Gerard took a step away from him, Stiles almost crumpled. He grabbed desperately at the fence behind him, managing not to fall to his knees, and turned to glare at Gerard.

“If I didn’t know better, I’d think you have a crush on me, what with how often you kidnap me,” Stiles bit out. He could taste blood in his mouth, which meant the vicious smile he sent him was probably bloody.

“I want you alive, not in one piece,” Gerard reminded him with a cold smile. “You don’t need your
tongue, so if you’d like to keep it, I would suggest you stop using it.” He turned to Kate then, motioned the stairs, and the two of them headed up. “Sweet dreams,” he called back down at them both, then the lights went out.

Stiles had to blink hard to try and get his eyes adjusted to the pitch black. Wherever they were, it wasn’t close to any street lights, because he could vaguely tell there were two windows across the room, and neither of them were illuminating the area they were in.

It was silent for a few seconds, and then Merrak spoke.

“You just had to stop and help out, didn’t you?” he asked coldly.

“I didn’t mean to drag you into this,” Stiles admitted quietly, not wanting Gerard, Kate and whoever else they had upstairs hearing them conversing. Anything they said could be dangerous, no matter how small. Something innocent to them might be another tidbit for the Hunters to find the rest of the Hales and eradicate them.

“Shut up,” Merrak snapped. “Better to have me along than for you to be here alone.”

Stiles didn’t know that he agreed, but he didn’t argue. Merrak already sounded like he was close to losing his mind, his voice strained and his breathing a little too fast. For all his bravado, he was still only sixteen, and Stiles hated that this probably happened to him a lot because of who his family was.

“I’m sorry,” he said again before he could stop himself.

“Didn’t I tell you to shut up?” Merrak demanded, voice still tight.

Stiles’ fingers flexed on the fence behind him and he slowly eased himself down so he was sitting on the ground. The chains weren’t long enough that he could put his hands on the floor, but they reached his bent knees so he rested them there.

“What did you see of the place while they brought us in? What can you tell me?”

Merrak was silent for a moment, breathing still a little a little faster than Stiles was comfortable with, but eventually he recounted what had happened while Stiles had been unconscious. It was obvious they hadn’t accounted for taking two people, because they didn’t seem to know how to proceed with Merrak there. They ended up tying his hands the same as Stiles and shoving him into the trunk with him.

Merrak had heard the Jeep start up and disappear, so they’d obviously moved it out of the way so people wouldn’t immediately find it abandoned on the road. When they’d started driving, it had been a long way. Merrak wasn’t sure how much time had passed since the Argents had ditched both of their phones before slamming the trunk shut, but he estimated well over an hour, suggesting they were out of town somewhere.

When they’d finally stopped and he’d been let out, all he saw was trees. It wasn’t the Preserve, because he knew that area intimately, but it was just as dense. The house they were in was more of a cottage, and he’d caught sight of three other people besides the Argents when being dragged downstairs.

Stiles asked him to describe them, but none of them sounded familiar. A part of him had wondered if maybe Chris was among them. The man had long ago left this life behind him, at least, from a killing-everything-on-sight perspective, but Stiles didn’t know if his father and sister knew that. If Chris was around, he’d find a way to inform the Hales, or at the very least, his dad.
“What do they have to gain from taking us?” Stiles asked, annoyed. “It’s not like your mom is going to do anything they ask just because they threaten us. For all she knows, we’re both already dead.”

“I’m her kid,” Merrak said quietly. “And you’re her son’s mate. You have no idea how this is going to affect not only her, but Derek.”

That didn’t bode well. “Are they going to go crazy or something?”

“You ever watch the Discovery Channel?” Merrak asked. “Seen nature shows and shit?”

“Sure, sometimes.”

“Ever seen how wolves react to their young being approached by an enemy?”

While he couldn’t say he’d specifically sat and watched an entire show about wolves, he did have some idea on how they reacted to their pups being hurt or threatened. They went insane, every bit the dangerous animals they truly were. Usually wolves were fine with being left well enough alone. If nothing approached them, they didn’t usually bother with chasing after something except in situations where they were hunting for food, or teaching their young how to do the same. But when something perceived as a threat approached, the viciousness depended on whether or not there were pups.

While Stiles wasn’t her child, he was in her pack, and he was important to one of her children. Merrak himself was her son. Basically, the Queen and her heir were both going to be freaking out. Talia because of Merrak, and Derek because of Stiles.

“We need to get out of here,” Stiles said.

“No shit, Sherlock,” Merrak spat. “Got any bright ideas, or you just gonna sit there and state the obvious?”

“Working on it.”

He tugged at the chains, but they didn’t budge. He tried to pull at the fence behind him, but he didn’t have the strength for it. His head hurt, he had blood trailing down from his temple, and his cheekbone still stung from the smack. He wasn’t in the best shape right then, and thinking was almost more trouble than it was worth.

“Can you do me a favour?” Stiles asked, Merrak grunting in response. “Next time someone comes down here, can you please just let me handle it? The more you react to anything they do or say to me, the worse things are going to be for both of us. They’ll hurt me by hurting you, and I don’t want them to remember you’re even here, as much as possible.”

Merrak seemed to think about it for an exceptionally long time before grunting out, “Fine. I’ll do my best.”

“Thanks.”

“Don’t thank me, just get us out of here.”

“Yeah.”

They both sat in silence for a long while, and Stiles hoped he wasn’t the only one trying to think up a plan.
Bella Swan never got fucking kidnapped.

Stiles didn’t sleep much. To be fair, he probably shouldn’t even have tried, given his concussion and, oh yeah, being chained up in a crazy Hunter’s basement. Merrak managed to get some sleep, which Stiles was grateful for. He’d heard him having small panic attacks throughout the night, Merrak evidently trying to keep quiet but definitely freaking out.

He didn’t know if Merrak’s panic was about their current situation, or fear for his family. Stiles still wasn’t entirely sure what the Argents and their Hunter friends were trying to achieve. Were they hoping the Hales would go insane and suck up somewhere along the way? Did they even tell them that Stiles and Merrak were their captives?

Stiles had to wonder what his dad had been calling him about. He hoped it was nothing urgent, though now he wondered if maybe it had been about Gerard. After all, if Gerard had broken out of prison, it stood to reason the county sheriff who’d been involved in putting him away, and who was aware of what the man was after—in other words, the McCall pack—would be notified. If they thought Gerard was coming back to finish what he started, they’d notify the authorities closest to the end goal.

If only Stiles’ phone hadn’t lost its charge. It had to be because of all his crotch-dialling. Maybe when he got a new phone he’d buy himself a case for it. One of those wallet cases that closed so the screen was covered. Harder to crotch-dial someone with a covered screen.

He put that on his to-do list, right underneath ‘get out of here alive.’

Priorities. He had them.

The sun had risen and Merrak had woken up long before anyone else came downstairs. It was a man Stiles didn’t recognize, and he just dropped a bottle of water beside Stiles, then threw another one at Merrak before heading back up the stairs. No food, but that was to be expected. Food meant they’d have a bit of energy, and no one wanted that.

Though water also meant having to piss, and Stiles really needed to take a leak right now. He was sure Merrak did, too, but it wasn’t like they were being offered potty breaks.

Gross as it was, Stiles just chugged the bottle, then pissed into it, turning away from Merrak. He could tell Merrak didn’t like it, but he eventually did the same, and Stiles just grinned and insisted it was a good thing neither of them were girls. He couldn’t imagine Cora doing that, let alone Lydia. Lydia would hold it until her bladder exploded, he was sure.

No one else came to visit for the rest of the day, and Stiles mostly only heard one set of footsteps above them, as if the Hunters were out doing Hunter stuff and had only left one person behind to keep an eye on things.

Stiles heard Merrak’s stomach growl horribly a little after midday and he felt guilty again. Sure, it was entirely likely the Hunters would’ve tried to snatch the easiest Hale to get a hold of, but Stiles felt bad that Merrak was in this situation because of him. If he’d just driven him home before stopping to help an old man on the side of the road, Gerard only would’ve gotten him.

Merrak was suffering because he happened to call Stiles and ask for a ride.

When the sun started going down, an argument broke out above them, loud enough for them to overhear bits and pieces. Stiles frowned when he distinctly heard the name Deucalion, and he saw Merrak straighten. Either they were working together, or Deucalion had touched base when he
found out the Hunters had Stiles. Man oh man did Stiles hope it was the latter, because if they were working together, it meant Deucalion was coming and Stiles would not survive that encounter, he was sure.

Not after blinding the Werewolf. Then again, maybe his eyes had healed? Maybe he could see again?

“I miss school,” Stiles said when the arguing died down, because if he didn’t talk and distract himself, he would start panicking about Deucalion showing up. “School was so simple. Go to class, do homework, bitch about teachers.”

“Teachers suck,” Merrak agreed quietly from across the room. “Harris is the worst.”

“Oh my God, Harris is the worst!” Stiles agreed. “What a dick! Is he like that with you, too?”

“He finds reasons to give me detention,” Merrak said bitterly. “I corrected him in front of the class once and he gave me a month’s worth of it.” An angry scoff and Stiles saw Merrak shift, trying to get comfortable. It was probably killing his arms having them raised the way they were. At least Stiles could rest his on his knees, Merrak had to alternate standing and sitting to give them a break.

“Harris doesn’t like smartasses. Probably explains why we both hate him.”

“I miss home,” Merrak admitted, almost too quietly for Stiles to hear.

“We’ll get out of here,” Stiles promised. “I’m not—”

“No, I mean, New York.”

“Oh.” Stiles knew that Beacon Hills was home to all the Hales except for Merrak. He’d only been around nine when the Hales had left, and Stiles knew he didn’t remember much from that age himself. To Merrak, most of his formative years had been spent in New York, so leaving it and coming back to a small town like Beacon Hills had probably been a huge shock for him.

It was probably why he was such a little shit all the time. He’d likely had a lot of attention in New York, what with the Council being right there and all of his Werewolf family members being involved with it. They’d probably coddled Merrak every chance they got because they didn’t see him much. Now that they were here, and less involved in the Council, really the person they seemed to coddle the most was Stiles.

It was strange, in a way, to realize that Merrak liked him so much. Then again, he probably only did because he knew Stiles could relate to him. A human in a wolf pack. Always seen as the weakest, as the one needing protection, as the easiest to hurt.

Well, Stiles knew that wasn’t true. This still would’ve happened regardless of who he’d had in the car with him. Eric, Cora, Jackson, whoever. Hunters weren’t like other people, and Stiles himself felt he was pretty good at holding his own.

Besides, he had a plan, now. He just needed someone to come down so he could execute it, that would be convenient.

“Tell me about New York,” Stiles said, wanting Merrak to talk so he’d keep his mind off how hungry and scared he was. “Did you guys live in an apartment?”

He couldn’t clearly see Merrak in the dimming light, darkness falling outside, but he knew he’d gotten a look for that.
“We’re the royal family, we had a house.”

“Oh, forgive me.” Stiles rolled his eyes. “How could I dare suggest you lived in an apartment.”

Merrak let out another scoff, and was silent for a moment before obediently telling him about his life in New York. He sounded really nostalgic, and he spoke a lot about friends he’d had. Some from school, who were humans, and some from the Council’s children, who weren’t. It was obvious the thing he missed the most about New York was his friends, and Stiles felt like he could understand why Merrak had such a hard time in Beacon Hills.

He was about to go into his third year of high school with people who’d known one another since diapers. Being the new guy was never easy, and someone like Merrak had too much pride to be relegated to the ‘losers’ group. But Stiles himself had been in that group, and Merrak seemed to like him well enough. He told him so, and explained that maybe the reason the ‘losers’ were considered as such was simply because they were different.

Which was fair, considering his group had originally consisted of Scott, who was a Werewolf, and had grown to include a Kanima-Werewolf, a Banshee and a Kitsune. Granted, by senior year they weren’t really the ‘losers’ anymore, they just weren’t popular.

“I think you need to stop worrying about what other people think of you.” Stiles shrugged. “If I cared about what people thought of me, I wouldn’t live my life how I want. People are dicks, and they always will be. Just do what makes you happy, spend time with people who are worth it, who are real friends, and forget the rest. Once high school is over, you’re going to meet some great people in university, and you’ll forget all about the bullshit from high school.”

Merrak was quiet for a moment. “There’s this guy in my English class who seems pretty okay,” he said grudgingly. “He likes Pokemon, plays Pokemon-Go all the time during lunch. People make fun of him for it.”

“I’ll tell you a secret,” Stiles said with a small smile. “Everyone plays Pokemon-Go, they just don’t admit it. The most popular guy in your class probably has the most Pokemon, but he’d never tell anyone. People are weird that way, they think liking something everyone else does makes them seem less cool.” Stiles shifted to get comfortable again. “You ever talk to PG dude?”

“No, not really.” Merrak let out a small sigh. “He seems lonely. I don’t ever see him with anyone.”

“Maybe you should talk to him.”

“What?”

“Pokemon? Movies? TV? I mean, you don’t have to have identical interests to be friends. Scott and I are proof of that, he’s never seen Star Wars.”

Merrak made an affronted noise. “Who the fuck hasn’t seen Star Wars?!”

“Right?!” Stiles started to flail his arms up but the chains stopped him. “My point is, he’s lonely, you’re lonely even if you won’t admit it, and he’s probably actually a really cool dude. You should give him a chance. That, and while you’re still on summer break, talk to your mom about visiting your friends back in New York. I’m sure she’d be okay letting you go out there for a few weeks.”

“Not with all the shit going on,” he muttered.

“Your dad can go with you.”
“That’s even worse.”

“Just talk to her. You never know, maybe—”

He cut himself off when the door above them opened and then winced and recoiled slightly when the light flicked on. He’d been getting used to the darkness and having the bright florescent bulbs assaulting his eyes was unappreciated.

Squinting to get his eyes to adjust, he turned and saw Kate wandering down the stairs. The lack of footsteps above them suggested everyone else was gone and she was the one on guard duty. Perfect. She was really the only one stupid enough to come down when no one else was around.

“Look everybody, it’s Franken-Bride,” Stiles sneered. Merrak let out a snort at that, but Kate just smiled cruelly at Stiles, moving over to him and standing right in front of him.

For a few long seconds, she said nothing, eyes raking across every inch of him and making Stiles fidget uncomfortably despite his best attempts not to. He didn’t like being stared at, and she was staring exceptionally hard, like she was trying to figure something out and hoped it was etched on Stiles’ skin somewhere.

“You know, when I heard who Derek had chosen as his mate, I almost laughed myself unconscious.” She smirked at him, the smile not at all friendly. “You? Derek Hale, a veritable marble statue of a man, had chosen you as his mate. It was laughable, and ridiculous.”

“I didn’t know you saw past the Werewolf in people, Kate.” Stiles offered her his own vicious smile. “Should I tell daddy you like to fuck animals?”

She bent down to grab the front of his shirt, wrenching him to his feet with a lot more strength than he’d been expecting. He managed to stand without her ripping his shirt.

“You’re lucky that he found you before I sank my claws into him, because I was so close to making my move. Just three more years, and I could convince him I loved him, get him to trust me, tell me all his secrets, show me where his house was.”

Apparently the whole not-Secret-Keeper bullshit extended to humans, too. Good to know. Maybe that meant the Argents couldn’t find his house. Certainly explained why they’d ambushed him on the road instead of in his home.

“We would’ve burned it to the ground, with all those filthy Weres inside. I’d already been making my presence known, hanging around, being friendly. All part of the plan. But then you happened.” She scoffed, giving him a once-over. “We didn’t know it was you, not back then. We only knew something had changed, that he wasn’t interested anymore and that our plan couldn’t succeed. We didn’t realize it was because he’d found his mate, that doesn’t usually happen so early.”

“I’m a real inconvenience,” Stiles agreed. “Sorry I ruined your plans to kill a bunch of innocent people.”

“They are not innocent,” she insisted. “They’re monsters. An abomination.”

“Though still hot enough to fuck, right?” Stiles asked, grinning at her. “Derek is fine, right? Man, how badly would you like to get into his pants? Can you imagine how big his dick is? I mean, I haven’t seen it yet, but damn. His hands are huge. Dick must be just as impressive.” He leaned a bit closer to her, Kate’s hand still in his shirt. She was too far, he needed her closer. “You jealous? That I’m the one who’ll get to fuck him and not you?”
“You planning on fucking a corpse, because that’s what he’ll be by the time you get out of here.” She tilted her head slightly, eyes skirting away, as if pretending to think. “If you get out of here. But even then, he might not get to fuck you like he wants to.”

Stiles didn’t like those words. What did those words mean? Why was she saying those words?!

“After all, like I said, I almost laughed myself unconscious because why would anyone choose you?”

“My winning personality?” he offered, trying not to betray how much her words concerned him. The answer was a great fucking deal.

“You grew up pretty, Stilinski,” she said, leaning closer, but still not close enough. “You were a nuisance before, something unpleasant to look at, but now?” Her hands shifted then, the one clenching his shirt flattening and moving down so that she could drag both of them up his chest, shirt sliding up with them while she pressed her palms against him. “Now, I can see the appeal.”

Stiles had never really had an opinion on older women until this moment, and he now firmly believed that he was not the type to be a sugar baby. Because no fucking thank you!

When his shirt had ridden up enough to expose a good amount of flesh, Kate smirked, then bent down and licked at his stomach, his muscles contracting in an attempt to pull away from her. This was disgusting. She was disgusting.

And apparently, Merrak had reached his breaking point. Because he’d been quiet up until then, just as Stiles had asked him to be, but this was too much even for him.

“Don’t fucking touch him!” he shouted angrily from the other side of the room, handcuffs clanging loudly against the radiator.

Kate pulled away from Stiles, grinning up at him briefly before straightening and turning to look at Merrak. The smile on her face was menacing when she said, “Language, baby Hale. What would your mother say?”

“Get your fucking hands off him,” Merrak snarled, in a very impressive impersonation of a Werewolf. His chest was rising and falling rapidly, and he’d gotten to his feet at some point during Stiles’ distraction taunting Kate into moving closer.

“It’s fine,” Stiles managed to bite out through his clenched teeth. It really wasn’t fine, but he needed her to move closer.

That, and he would do anything to keep Kate’s attention on him. He hadn’t exactly missed the ages she’d referenced. If Derek had found his mate at thirteen, and Kate was saying she only had three more years to wait, that meant she was fine sexually assaulting a sixteen year old.

And Merrak was a sixteen year old.

Stiles would do anything to keep her away from Merrak.

“It’s fine,” he repeated, eyes shifting to look over at Merrak, Kate’s hands beginning to move against his chest once more.

Merrak looked livid. Not because Stiles was saying it was fine, but because he was over on the other side of the room and could do nothing but watch. Despite not wanting Kate touching him, this was working in their favour for the moment.
Provided things didn’t go any further...

“You are fine, Stilinski,” she said, turning back to him and grinning. “Who’d have thought after all these years? Too bad Derek didn’t claim you sooner.” She tilted her head slightly, her threat clearer this time than it had been moments before. “Wonder what he’d say if he found out he wasn’t your first? After all, wouldn’t you like to be a real man and fuck a woman before becoming some monster’s bitch?”

“Don’t you fucking touch him!” Merrak bellowed, straining so hard against his bonds Stiles was sure he’d damage something. “I’ll fucking kill you! You fucking bitch, I’ll kill you!”

“Aw, sweetheart,” Kate said in a pleased tone, turning to eye him with interest. Stiles’ stomach hit his feet. Oh no. No, no, no! “If you were feeling lonely over there, all you had to do was say so.”

When Kate started to turn away from him, Stiles saw panic flash across Merrak’s face, but it was nowhere near as much as was coursing through Stiles’ veins. No fucking way was he letting this bitch touch Merrak even one percent close to what she’d just done to him.

“He’s a minor!” Stiles blurted out, trying to keep his panic in check. “He is a minor,” he said more emphatically, Kate turning back to him.

Good.

Good, good, good.

He wanted her to focus on him. Leave Merrak alone. He could handle it. He was an adult. This was fine.

“Don’t worry, Stilinski.” She patted his cheek only slightly lighter than an actual slap. “Touching him wouldn’t hurt the future Alpha nearly as much as touching you would.”

Torture? Was she talking about torture? Stiles really hoped it was torture. He would much prefer torture over her rubbing her hands all over him.

He really hoped Gerard came back soon.

Words he never thought he’d think, but well, desperate times and all.

Kate’s hands slid up his chest again, then over his neck and into his hair. One hand clenched into the strands and wrenched his head to the side, and Kate took a step closer.

Exactly where he wanted her.

He barely registered her other hand coming up to pull at his shirt collar, too focussed on what he was trying to do without her noticing, that it took a few seconds before the feel of teeth on his neck registered.

He froze, heard Merrak inhale, and the teenager in the room barely had time to shout for her to stop when she bit down hard.

Stiles was more shocked than anything at the pain, feeling her teeth digging harder and harder into his skin. He redoubled his efforts while she was distracted, but the pain was starting to poke through his concentration and when he felt wetness on his skin, he realized she’d broken skin.

It hurt.
He didn’t know how Michael had acted so nonchalant showing him his own bitemark because even with blunt teeth—actually, probably especially with blunt teeth—it hurt like a motherfucker.

Stiles let out a loud grunt of pain, but he had what he wanted and he hastily shoved one hand into his pocket while bringing the other one up to push at Kate’s chest. She just bit in harder, Stiles actually worried she was going to tear a chunk clean out of his shoulder, but eventually she pulled back, blood on her lips and teeth stained red. She grinned at him, the junction between his shoulder and neck throbbing painfully, and licked her lips.

“By Werewolf rules, you belong to me, now.”

“You’re not a Werewolf,” he snapped.

“Doesn’t matter. He’s going to see that, and lose it.” She looked delighted at the thought. “If he lives long enough to see you again. Or if you do.”

“Fuck you,” he spat hatefully, just as a door slammed overhead and footsteps sounded.

“Maybe later.” She winked at him, then jerked his head back with the hand still in his hair before releasing him. Turning without another word, she headed for the stairs to go back upstairs, turning the light off before shutting the door, bathing them in darkness once more.

Merrak let out a wounded sound, as if he were the one with a bitemark in his neck.

Stiles slid to the floor, the position making it easier for his hands to rise up, one of them shifting to cover the injury. It was pulsing, and hurt a lot. Nowhere near as close as anything else he’d endured the past few months, but enough to make him feel like he didn’t really want to experience it again.

“How could she?” Merrak said, voice raw and broken. “How could she?!”

“It’s fine,” Stiles insisted, pressing harder. It was bleeding a lot, and he hoped she hadn’t bitten into anything vital. He doubted it, considering she hadn’t bitten him that hard, so it was probably just that it was a sensitive area.

“It’s not fine,” Merrak insisted. “Derek is... seeing that... he’s...”

“It doesn’t mean anything,” Stiles insisted. “She’s not a wolf, and I didn’t consent to it. It means nothing.”

Merrak said nothing, but Stiles could tell he was panicking. Honestly, as much as he insisted it meant nothing himself, he knew this wasn’t good. He might not know much about how the claiming worked, but he was positive having someone else bite his neck, human or not, was going to have Derek lose it.

The two of them sat in silence once more, Stiles waiting to see if anyone else was going to be coming down. It took a while, but eventually the noise upstairs ceased, and he knew they were all asleep.

His stomach ached with hunger, he was exhausted, in pain, he had blood on his face, and his piss bottle was getting full, which made no sense since he hadn’t had anything to drink since that morning. He was probably also dehydrated.
But they had an opening now, so he was going to take it.

Shifting so that he was on his knees, he widened his eyes as if it would help him see better, reaching into his pocket and pulling out the set of keys he’d taken from Kate when she’d stepped just that little bit too close.

“What are you doing?” Merrak asked from the other side of the basement.

“Quiet,” Stiles said, because the last thing he wanted was anyone upstairs hearing them speaking and coming down to check on them.

It was a bitch trying to find where the key went on the manacles, and he stabbed himself a few times while attempting to find keyhole, cursing viciously under his breath. Eventually, he managed to get a key into the slot, only for it to be the wrong key. He tried again, at least knowing where the key went, and he finally unlocked it on the third one. He carefully and quietly lowered the manacle so it dangled from the fence, then hastily got to work trying to unlock the other. He put that one down as carefully as the first.

Getting to his feet, he hurried across the room, Merrak jumping when Stiles bent down beside him.

“Wha—”

Stiles shushed him, flipping through the keys and feeling his heart sink when none of them were small enough for handcuffs. He wasn’t leaving without Merrak, and he could only assume Gerard had his key.

“Go,” Merrak insisted, clearly able to tell what the problem was when Stiles paused to think. “Get out. Just go.”

“I’m not leaving you here, so shut up and let me think,” Stiles snapped.

His dad was a cop, it wasn’t like Stiles hadn’t played with handcuffs his entire life. He knew how to get out of handcuffs, it was something he’d taught himself, but also something his father had helped him with when he’d been younger. He didn’t have a bobby pin or a paperclip, and the area around them that he’d seen while there had been light didn’t suggest anything small enough for him to push into the cuffs to trick the ratchet into disengaging.

That left only the last option he knew of. He’d never tried it, because it generally hurt and caused injury, but this was a life or death situation. He needed to find something relatively thin and metallic. If they’d been in a car, the seatbelt would’ve worked, but they weren’t, so he just quietly moved across the room towards the workbench and tried to feel around on it. His hand closed around what felt like a butterknife, probably left down there before their abduction. He honestly didn’t know if the metal would be strong enough, but after feeling around for a bit longer, he didn’t find anything better.

Moving back over to Merrak, he bent down beside him and felt around on the handcuffs to find the side with the double-bow portion. Slotting the edge of the knife into it, he pushed the cuff up Merrak’s arm until it was tight against his skin and over his forearm instead of his wrist.

Licking his lips, he said, “This is gonna hurt. It’s going to dig into your skin and—”

“Just do it,” Merrak snapped, his other hand closing around the radiator, as if to brace himself.

Stiles let out a slow breath, and then began to twist the knife. He really worried about the give, but it held up pretty well and slowly, a gap began to form. He could tell the cuff was tightening, and
the hitch in Merrak’s breath confirmed it was hurting him, but he just kept twisting until the gap widened and with a sharp snap, the rivet broke and pinged off the wall. Stiles hastily pulled the cuff off backwards, helping Merrak get the end through the radiator. He still had the other cuff around his wrist, but he was free. They could get the other one off later, no point in injuring both his arms.

“Let’s go,” Stiles said, helping Merrak to his feet, the two of them moving quickly to the closest window. It was high enough off the ground that it would be hard to get it open, so Stiles boosted Merrak up, heart pounding while the teenager cursed quietly and fiddled with the latch. Finally, he got it open, and Stiles waited for him to exit, except he didn’t.

He jumped silently back to the ground and laced his fingers together. “You first.”

“Uh, no. You first,” Stiles argued. No fucking way was he risking Merrak being stuck down here if someone heard them.

“I’m not risking you being stuck here,” Merrak hissed. “You get out first, or we’re both staying.”

“I’m a lot more stubborn than you,” Stiles informed him, crossing his arms. “I’m not risking leaving you behind if shit hits the fan. You leave first, or we really will both be staying down here.”

It was evident Merrak thought he could out-stubborn Stiles, because he waited for a good thirty seconds before cursing viciously.

“I fucking hate you.”

“Most people do, I think there’s a club,” Stiles informed him, lacing his fingers again.

“I’m the fucking president,” Merrak hissed, but stepped into Stiles’ hands and allowed him to help boost him up.

Merrak managed to squeeze through the window, and then turned and reached down with one hand. Stiles grabbed it to help lever him up, but jumped and grabbed the sill with his other hand, trying to pull his own weight up with Merrak helping.

Merrak grabbed at the back of his pants with his free hand to help pull him through the window and they were both out. Stiles allowed himself only a few seconds to breathe, then got to his feet, Merrak right beside him. They looked around, the waxing crescent moon offering very little light.

“Car?” Merrak asked, voice barely a whisper he was speaking so quietly.

“Might be too risky,” Stiles said, looking at the trees. “We’d probably have more luck in the trees. I didn’t hear any dogs, they won’t be able to track us.”

Merrak seemed to think about it, then motioned for Stiles to lead the way.

He had no idea which direction would be best, so he just went with his gut and headed off towards the closest set of trees, Merrak beside him.

This was going to be a long night.

Of course, because Stiles’ life was the best, things went wrong almost immediately.

They hurried into the trees, Merrak behind him and reaching forward to touch the back of Stiles’
shirt every now and then to make sure they were sticking together. They moved quickly and silently, not wanting to get caught this soon out of the gate.

Eventually, Merrak started speeding up, and he passed Stiles, moving quickly and evidently wanting to get as much distance between them and the house as possible. Stiles followed as quickly as he could in the darkness, the dense foliage making it difficult for him to see much.

He almost tripped over something, a metallic sound reaching his ears, and he had just opened his mouth to tell Merrak to stop when he heard a loud crunch.

Stiles flew forward, slamming into Merrak’s back, and had just barely managed to wrap one arm around his stomach to keep him standing and the other over his mouth when he screamed. His hands came up, nails clawing at the arm covering his mouth, and Stiles struggled to keep his panic in check.

They were still extremely close to the house, this was so fucking bad.

Glancing down, he just barely saw the metal glinting, Merrak’s leg caught in an leg-hold trap. Thankfully, it was the flat kind without any razor edges, though it still had a few sharp points to it. Regardless, he’d definitely broken his leg. Likely his fibula since it was smaller, but maybe the entire thing, given what had just happened.

So now Merrak was stuck, and his leg was broken. Fuck.

Fuck!

If Stiles had been faster when he’d stumbled over the chain, or if he’d stopped Merrak from rushing ahead... stupid. Fucking stupid!

“I know it hurts,” he insisted quietly into Merrak’s ear. “I know it hurts, but I need you to stay quiet. I need you to try and stay quiet. I’m going to open it, and it’s going to hurt even more, but I need you to try really hard to stay quiet.”

Merrak was hurting him with how hard he was clinging to his one arm, and he waited a few seconds before finally pulling his hand away. He could hear Merrak struggling to breathe, hissing air through his clenched teeth. Stiles pulled away from him with difficulty, and then grabbed at the bottom of Merrak’s shirt, lifting it up and pressing it to his mouth.

“Bite your shirt. I’ll try and be quick.”

Merrak shoved the entire bottom part of his shirt into his mouth, Stiles bending down beside him. He could hear Merrak struggling to breathe, hissing air through his clenched teeth. Stiles pulled away from him with difficulty, and then grabbed at the bottom of Merrak’s shirt, lifting it up and pressing it to his mouth.

“Bite your shirt. I’ll try and be quick.”

Merrak shoved the entire bottom part of his shirt into his mouth, Stiles bending down beside him. It was impossible to see much with the darkness, so he reached in and felt around it. Merrak’s hands had found his shoulders, digging nails into him through his shirt, thankfully managing to avoid the still aching bitemark.

He found the two jaws on either side of the trap, trying to get a good feel for where they were before getting back to his feet.

“Okay. I’m going to open it,” he said. “Once it’s open, I need you to pull your leg out. We’re both going to be off-balance, but hopefully we can keep each other standing.”

He waited for Merrak to nod, confirming he understood, and that he was ready. Stiles shifted, putting the end of one foot on either jaw, and then pushed his weight down hard. The trap snapped open and Merrak yanked his leg out. Stiles stumbled off it, hearing it snap shut again around nothing, then grabbed at Merrak desperately before he fell over and injured himself further.
Carefully moving to the side so he could press Merrak against a tree, he bent down and slowly lifted his pantleg up. He couldn’t see anything, but he gently touched it, Merrak letting out small, wounded sounds. It didn’t seem to be bleeding, suggesting his jeans had protected him from the small points, but he couldn’t walk anymore.

Which meant Stiles was going to have to carry him.

While exhausted, starving and dehydrated.

He loved his life. So much.

“Okay, come on,” he said, standing once more and turning around, bending his knees. “Let’s go.”

“Just leave me,” Merrak hissed through clenched teeth. “Get out, find mom. You can come back for me.”

“And risk them finding you and moving? Shut up and get on my back.”

He was so, so glad he was more stubborn than Merrak, because this was another short pissing match between them before Merrak finally growled and shifted to allow Stiles to pull him onto his back. Merrak wrapped his arms around his neck, which rubbed against his injury and hurt, but he managed not to react and just made sure he had a good grip on Merrak’s legs, hoisting him up a bit higher, and being sure they were both set for the longest piggy-back ride in existence.

“Okay,” Stiles said, breathing hard from the exertion. “Let’s go.”

He began walking, being careful about where he stepped, and almost dragging his feet in an attempt to ensure he would kick at a trap before stepping into it. If there were mines around here, they were both fucked, though.

Merrak was heavy, and Stiles was tired, but he forced himself not to think about it. They needed to get some distance, and hopefully find a road or a house or just something before they were either caught or attacked by some kind of predator.

“How’d you do it?”

“Do what?” Stiles asked, almost walking into a tree and slowly moving around it.

“Get the keys.”

“Kate got too close,” he said. “That’s the thing about humans. We’re always underestimated. For monsters and Hunters, they’re so used to going after dangerous things that they see a human and think ‘not a threat.’ Their arrogance makes them easy to deceive.”

“Is that how you got away from Deucalion?” Merrak asked. His voice sounded weird, like he was slurring, and Stiles worried he was in so much pain that he might pass out. He wasn’t a doctor, but he knew passing out while injured was always a bad idea. Talking would be good.

“Kind of. I think that was mostly just him thinking I was weak. He didn’t expect me to be able to get away from him, and after breaking my ribs, he probably figured I’d curl up in a ball and tell him everything he wanted to know.”

“You are kind of pathetic,” Merrak offered.

“Thanks, buddy.” Stiles shifted him a bit, Merrak letting out a sharp hiss. “Sorry.”
“Shut up.”

Stiles rolled his eyes a bit. Merrak was allergic to admitting when he was in pain. Or vulnerable. Or anything that made him seem not completely badass. “Bella Swan never had to deal with this shit,” he muttered, foot kicking something he wasn’t sure about and slowly moving wide around it.

“Bella Swan was a whiny-ass bitch,” Merrak said, almost sleepily.

“You’ve read Twilight?” Stiles asked, eyebrows almost disappearing into his hairline.

“Unfortunately.”

“Why?”

“Had a crush on a girl,” Merrak said into his shoulder. “She was in love with Edward Cullen. I read the books so I could be more like him.”

Well that was interesting. Merrak admitting to crushing on someone without immediately insisting he was amazing and awesome and loved instantly.

“What happened?” Stiles asked.

“Stopped having a crush on her.”

The laugh escaped him before he could stop it. Realistically, Stiles himself hadn’t liked Derek for a while because he was very Edward Cullen, so he supposed it made sense someone as smart as Merrak would read one of the books and promptly nope the fuck out of that.

“Good call,” he said with a smile. “He was a creepy stalker weirdo.”

“So’s my brother,” Merrak argued.

“Yeah, but he has an excuse.”

“Oh yeah? What’s that?”

“I’m fucking awesome, who wouldn’t stalk me?” Stiles turned his head to grin at him and heard more than saw Merrak snort.

“You’re so fucking dumb.”

“It’s a gift.”

“Can’t believe I’m stuck with you for a brother-in-law.”

“Says the guy who wanted me to marry Cora.”

“That was before I realized how dumb you were.”

Stiles just smiled and they continued in silence for a little while. He almost walked into multiple trees, tripped over roots countless times, and just barely avoided tumbling down a hill during the first ten minutes. He hated that there was no light, at least if the moon had been full there would’ve been something. But no, his life didn’t work that way, so he was fucking stuck in the pitch black right now. Awesome.

When Merrak’s arms began to loosen and he started to sag a bit more, Stiles realized he was falling
asleep and hastily jostled him.

“Stay awake,” he ordered.

“M’tired,” the teen muttered.

“You’re injured. I don’t want you going into shock or anything. Stay awake.”

“I don’t think that’s how shock works.”

“I’m the adult, here!” Stiles insisted. “Stay awake. Talk to me.”

“About what?”

“I don’t know, list all the characters in Harry Potter or something.”

“I’m not Eric, I haven’t read that.”

“Then list all the Pokemon you can remember.”

Merrak was silent for a moment, and Stiles wondered if he was trying to figure out how to insist he didn’t know any Pokemon, but he eventually relented and started listing them off by name. In alphabetical order.

He was a nerd at heart and Stiles loved it. They were definitely going to watch Star Wars together one day.

When Merrak started to lose steam, voice turning into a mumble, Stiles jostled him again and told him to keep going. When he was done listing all the Pokemon he could think of, Stiles made him start talking about his favourite TV shows, his favourite food, places he liked in New York. Basically anything he could think of to keep Merrak awake. To keep him thinking about something other than the pain he was in.

It felt like they’d been walking for hours, Stiles’ legs feeling like jelly, when Merrak was in the middle of a sentence and Stiles heard something snap to their left.

His head whipped in that direction and he hastily shushed the teen on his back, moving quickly to press against a tree, both of them silent. He could hear movement heading in their direction, and when he peeked around the tree they were hiding behind, two gold pinpricks stared back at him from the darkness.

His heart dislocated itself into his throat, panic crawling along his skin at the realization that there was a Werewolf here with them, and they were both injured and exhausted and Merrak couldn’t even walk and they were going to fucking die!

There was a loud howl from their left, and then pounding steps, the Werewolf heading in their direction.

Stiles didn’t stop to think about it, he just turned to the right and began to run. It was hard with Merrak on his back, but after a howl like that, he was going to try his best to get them as far away from the wolf as possible.

“Wait,” Merrak insisted. “Wait, that—”

“I’m not waiting to get eaten!” Stiles snapped.
“That howl wasn’t a threat, it was calling others to his location.”

“That isn’t better!” Stiles snapped.

“Will you idiots stop running!”

Stiles stumbled at the voice, managing to skid to a halt and turning slightly. The figure chasing them was closer than he’d anticipated, which made sense since it was a Werewolf. He held his hands out in a placating way, but when he moved another step closer, Stiles took a step back.

“Peter,” Merrak said, sounding relieved. “Is mom—”

“She’s coming.”

“How did you find us?” Stiles demanded. He didn’t trust Peter one bit, especially not after the conversations he’d had with Derek about the man trying to kill him.

_Twice._

“We’re Werewolves,” he insisted dryly. “We used our noses.”

Stiles still didn’t trust him, and when the sound of footsteps echoed through the trees behind the Werewolf, he felt extremely uncomfortable. Red eyes shone through first, and then suddenly Talia was _right there._

She said nothing, she just grabbed Merrak from Stiles and crushed him to her chest, holding him so hard she was probably hurting him, but he didn’t seem to care. He just held her tightly, keeping weight off his injured leg, and Stiles was sure she was pulling at his pain.

“Merrak!” Laura appeared next, crashing into her mother and brother. “Are you okay? Where are you hurt? Let me see!”

Peter was watching Stiles while he watched Talia and Laura fuss over Merrak. It looked like he was waiting for Stiles to be offended or insulted that no one was paying him any attention.

Honestly, he didn’t mind. The longer the focus stayed off him, the better. This had been _his_ fault, after all, and he was just glad real adults were here to take over now. He just wanted to sit down.

Actually, he _could_ now, so he turned to start to fall onto his ass, needing a break, but the next pair of eyes piercing the darkness were electric blue, and by the time he’d managed to blink, Derek was right in front of him, pulling him to his chest and holding him tightly. Stiles could feel him shaking, Derek rubbing his cheek against Stiles’ skin where he could reach it, and breathing so laboured it sounded like he was in pain himself.

Stiles wrapped his own arms around him, fingers clenched in the material of his shirt, and closed his eyes, letting himself melt into him. It felt so good to finally feel safe. Sure, they were still in the woods, and there were still Hunters out there who may have noticed their disappearance by now, but at least they weren’t alone anymore. They had others with them.

A few more people melted out of the trees, some of which he recognized, and others that he didn’t. Cora, of course, and Eric. They both raced to their brother, though he did see Cora shoot him a concerned look. Parrish was there, along with Boyd, and two other old schoolmates Erica and Isaac. Kincaid, of course, with the other four Council guards from their trip to San Francisco.

And others. A lot of others. They were coming slowly, all of them evidently in different areas.
searching for the two missing humans. Jackson was the first of his original pack to arrive, and Cora had to jump out and stop him from trying to pry Derek away from Stiles so he could look him over himself. He eventually just settled for moving up behind him and whining at not being able to touch him or make sure he was okay.

Scott reacted similarly when he showed up, Kira in tow. She was the one to hold him back, her mother helping once she showed up half a minute later.

It was all very emotional and weird and draining and Stiles just wanted to go home.

He could feel Derek pulling at his pain, but eventually he froze, and he shifted his head so he was nosing at the mark on Stiles’ neck. He pulled his face away as if he’d been slapped, eyes flashing and staring down at the mark. The whine that left him then had his mother turning to look at him, and Cora took over holding Merrak since Laura was still trying to make a splint for his leg.

She moved over, one hand on Stiles’ good shoulder and offering him a small smile, then shifted her gaze to what Derek had been looking at. She froze, the smile leaving her, and Stiles had to wonder about what Merrak had said. About how it meant nothing to Stiles, but meant something to Derek.

“It’s nothing;” he insisted, resisting the urge to reach up and cover it.

“Who...?” Derek’s voice was crossed between fury and agony.

“Kate Argent. She’s human, it’s nothing.”

“How dare she?” Talia said heatedly. “Staking a claim—”

“It means nothing,” Stiles argued, because he could feel the fury mounting around him.

His eyes found Merrak, who was looking right back at him while his sisters fussed over him. He managed a small shrug, silently saying, “Told you so.”

“I didn’t consent,” he tried again. “She did it without my permission. It means nothing, I promise.”

Derek looked devastated, almost like he didn’t know what to do with himself. Talia’s lips were pressed into a hard line, but she reached out and felt around the wound carefully. It didn’t hurt, since his pain had been pulled, but it felt weird.

“It’s not deep,” she said quietly. “It shouldn’t scar.”

“She bit him,” Derek hissed. “I’ll fucking kill her!”

He sounded like he meant it, too. His hands had tightened around Stiles’ skin, and the look in his electric blue eyes was half-crazed. Stiles honestly thought he was about to turn and bolt, try and find Kate and murder her.

Evidently, Talia thought that too, because she grabbed at his shoulder with one hand.

“Your mate needs you. You’re no good to him if you leave him.”

“She touched him!” he bellowed, the sound so loud and filled with Alpha power that everyone in the vicinity shrank back and whined.

Talia was the only one who stood her ground. Even Stiles tried to make himself smaller, the action chafing. He forced himself to straighten again, reaching out to grab Derek’s face and forcing his
“Hey. Listen to me,” he said, putting feeling in his voice. “It. Means. Nothing. She means nothing. She’s not even worth your time. Killing her will only prove to the Hunters that she got to you, and we can’t let that happen. I don’t care about her. I care about you.”

When Derek looked like he was going to say something, argue, insist he couldn’t let her get away with this, Stiles decided to shut him up.

Mostly, by proving Derek had nothing to worry about.

He yanked Derek’s head forward and practically smashed their lips together. It wasn’t exactly the first kiss he’d been hoping for, the one in the Camaro after their date would’ve been more ideal, particularly since they wouldn’t have had a massive audience, but it was still somehow perfect.

Derek’s lips felt soft against his, and he dragged his nails through his stubble, opening his mouth and coaxing Derek to do the same. Derek tasted amazing. Stiles didn’t know if that was just a mate thing, or a Derek thing, but he tasted like everything Stiles never knew he wanted.

He couldn’t even really pinpoint what the taste was, just that it was everything he needed right now. His exhaustion left him, his stomach stopped aching, every part of him was on fire.

One of Derek’s hands pressed into his lower back, pulling him closer while the other moved up to bury in his hair. It was like he was trying to merge them together, get Stiles so close that they could never be separated again.

Stiles felt like he couldn’t breathe, even though he knew that he could. Everything else melted away except for Derek’s hands on him, his lips pressing against his, his tongue, his taste, just... everything. God, why had he waited so long for this? Why hadn’t he just done this from the moment he’d learned they were mates?

Sure, mates was an inherently Werewolf thing, but still!

“Get a room,” someone muttered. It sounded suspiciously like Jackson.

“Seriously.” Cora.

Stiles didn’t want to pull away. He knew he should be more embarrassed, that they had an audience, that he and Merrak actually needed medical attention, that he still had blood caked on his face, and his neck. He probably stank, he needed food, his dad was likely beside himself with worry.

Thinking of his dad was the only thing that gave him the strength to pull back. Derek didn’t seem happy about it, if the way his lips followed was anything to go by, but he eventually let Stiles pull back completely, the hand in his hair shifting forward to lightly touch his cheek.

“Okay?” Stiles asked him.

“Okay,” Derek agreed.

“Good. Now get me out of here.”

Talia’s hand on Derek’s shoulder squeezed once, then she turned to tend to her human son, fussing over him even though Laura and Cora had already ensured he was okay. Derek pulled Stiles into his side, Jackson and Scott finally moving forward a bit more and eying him critically for
additional injuries.

“I don’t suppose anyone’s up for carrying me?” he asked with a small smile.

Derek had him in his arms before he could insist he was joking.

Predictably, his father was a wreck when he finally showed up at the hospital. He hugged him so hard Stiles actually thought he broke something, which was impressive considering the last person to hug him was a Werewolf. Thankfully most of Stiles’ injuries weren’t too bad, but Merrak’s were more of a concern, which made sense considering the trap that had snapped shut on his leg, and Stiles’ attempt to get the handcuffs off so he could free him. He still felt guilty about everything, because it was his fault, but Talia had come to see him while he was waiting to be released and insisted that everything was actually her fault, because of who she was.

As it turned out, he’d been right in assuming his dad’s calls before his phone had died related to him attempting to tell Stiles Gerard and Kate had escaped, and Talia was now determined to give Stiles a twenty-four hour detail. Which sucked, because he didn’t want to be watched every second of the day. But he also didn’t want to die or get kidnapped, so he didn’t argue with her.

Surprisingly, his phone and Jeep had both survived his kidnapping, both his and Merrak’s having been dumped in the passenger seat and poor Roscoe driven off the road and into the trees. The Jeep was driven home by one of his dad’s deputies, and while his phone was a little dirty, it was otherwise operational. Stiles decided he was going to follow through with his whole cover thing to avoid crotch-dialling people and having his phone die on him. He really didn’t want that to happen again.

Despite the conversation of him having a detail, Stiles still found himself in Merrak’s hospital room once he was discharged, along with his father and the entire Hale family. It was crowded, and Stiles had no idea how nobody had bitched them out for having so many visitors in one room at close to four in the morning, but he supposed money talked and they were mostly left alone.

Merrak’s cast made him feel sick, because he still felt responsible for it, but Cora bumped his shoulder and Derek wrapped one arm around him and kissed his temple, evidently sensing his guilt and trying to reassure him that it wasn’t his fault.

That was when Derek insisted he didn’t want to leave Stiles alone anymore. The idea was that Merrak and his father were safe because they lived in a house of Werewolves. Stiles lived in a house with his dad, who was often at work. If Gerard and Deucalion were working together, it meant there was a risk of them showing up together if the wards on the Stilinski house failed. Gerard could get the wolves in the door, and then it was all downhill from there.

So Derek wanted to stay with him. Of course, that proved to be a problem considering Derek also worked a lot, given he was in the same line of work as the sheriff.

“What if Stiles stayed with us?” Cora ended up saying after Derek and his mother had argued themselves into silence. “When Derek’s not working nights, he stays at Stiles’ place, and when Derek is working nights, Stiles stays with us.”

“Oh please God, can he?” Merrak demanded from the bed, sounding a little doped up. “I want him around always, he’s so fucking dumb, I love him.”

“Language, baby.” Talia insisted softly, brushing his light hair off his forehead.

“Okay, this resolves the problem for now, but there’s a bigger problem,” Stiles insisted, crossing
his arms and shifting his weight uncomfortably. “I mean, I feel like ever since you all returned, shit keeps going wrong. No offense,” he hastened to say, since he could tell they all looked uncomfortable at his words. Except Talia, who had the poker face of all poker faces. “I just—is this going to be how it is, you know, forever? Because I really don’t want to live my life like this.”

“It won’t,” Talia promised. “Deucalion has been a problem for years, he’s escalated now that he has more targets to get to in order to hurt me. The Hunters are trying to make their move now not only due to history with you, but also because of your status.”

“Derek’s mate,” he guessed.

“His unclaimed mate.”

“Wouldn’t it be more painful to Derek if something happened to me after I was claimed?” he asked, ignoring the interested shift beside him. Derek evidently liked the implications of his question, because it suggested Stiles was going to agree to make this official.

Ugh, Werewolf marriage. Bella never had to worry about this shit.

“You have more power once you’re claimed,” Michael explained quietly. “Not a Werewolf, but little things. Accelerated healing, for one, which I know you’ve already experienced, though you can control that yourself once you’re claimed instead of relying on Derek.” He stared pointedly at Stiles’ neck, where the bitemark was nothing but a bad memory.

As Talia had said, it hadn’t scarred, and Derek had been so, so relieved when he’d removed his hand from his skin to see it smooth and whole.

“Alpha power, such as controlling the pack with your orders. Some enhanced senses, such as hearing and eyesight.”

“And strength,” Talia said with a small smile, looking at her husband while continuing to brush Merrak’s hair back, like touching him was comforting her. “I’ll never forget the day after Michael was claimed and he broke the shower.”

“Not my finest moment,” Michael said with a small sigh.

“Oh.” Stiles didn’t know what to say. He’d obviously noticed changes since he and Derek had gotten closer, mostly being able to use the Alpha control over others, as well as the healing, but he hadn’t realized being a human mate almost turned him into a Werewolf. Just without the whole wolfiness aspects.

It was weird. He’d always felt jealous of the others in his pack because they had so much power, and while he was never mad to be human, it was still something of a sore spot when they thought he would get hurt if he joined them. To realize he could do that once he was claimed would be... strange.

“Can you... I mean...” Stiles motioned Merrak. “His leg. And arm. Can you help him heal that faster?”

“It doesn’t work that way,” Talia insisted softly, looking down at Merrak who still seemed a little out of it. “He’s my son. I would love nothing more than to heal him. But it isn’t the same thing. He isn’t a mate.”

“Does this happen to all human mates? Or, uh, you know, the royal mate?” It still felt so fucking weird and stupid when he brought up the royalty aspect of the Hales.
“It’s more of a Hale thing,” Laura confirmed, then clapped her hands once. “Speaking of Hales, Merrak needs his rest. Stiles, too. Everyone out.” She motioned for everyone to shoo, though Stiles suspected Talia wasn’t going anywhere. He was right when they all exited the room, Michael and Talia the only two to remain behind.

Cora wrapped an arm around Eric’s shoulders and kissed his temple before telling Stiles she’d talk to him tomorrow. The two siblings left together while Laura headed for the nurse’s station, presumably to see who was on duty for her brother.

Derek kept an arm around Stiles’ shoulders while walking him towards the exit, the sheriff following along behind them. When they hit the parking lot, things got uncomfortable since Derek was trying to pull Stiles towards the Camaro, and the sheriff very pointedly wanted him in the cruiser. They had a brief staredown before Derek reluctantly loosened his arm and the sheriff moved to take his place, one hand coming up to grip the back of Stiles’ neck comfortingly.

“We’ll see you at the house,” the sheriff said, and it occurred to Stiles that everyone had made decisions about Derek’s presence without his father’s input. Evidently he was fine keeping Stiles close to the wolves, since he would be safer with them than by himself at the house.

It probably still hurt him to realize that he was too human to protect his own son.

Stiles dozed against the window on their drive back to the house, and when his dad parked on the curb, he opened his eyes and found Scott sitting on his porch. He stood the second the engine turned off and Stiles smiled before pushing open the door, Derek’s Camaro easing to a stop behind them.

“Mom told me to go home,” Scott said when he met Stiles halfway across the lawn. “I couldn’t sit still. Jackson said you’d be fine and went home to crash, but I just...” He raked a hand through his hair. “Stiles I joined the pack.”

“I know,” he said with a small smile. “I felt it.”

“Yeah, but we were arguing before it happened. I was so–so mad at you. I said horrible things to you. And then I went and joined the pack, and then you were gone. Stiles, you were gone. The last conversation we had, I was a dick to you, and then I finally did what I had to in order to fix this, to fix us, and you were gone. I thought...”

He trailed off, and Stiles knew exactly what he thought. What if Stiles had died, thinking Scott hated him? What if Stiles had died never knowing about Scott wanting Stiles in his life more than he wanted to be in control? What if Stiles died without knowing how much he mattered to Scott?

“I know,” Stiles insisted, reaching forward and pulling Scott into a brief hug, pounding his back a few times. “It’s fine, Scott. We’ve fought before, we’ll fight again.” He pulled away, grinning. “I’d never think you hate me. We’ve survived too much for me to ever be that stupid.”

“You’re pretty stupid,” Derek insisted fondly, coming up beside him with his hands in his pockets.

“Seriously, what is it with Hales and calling me dumb?” Stiles asked with a sigh.

The sheriff reached them as well, looking tired and worn out. “You staying, Scott? Pretty late, you can crash on the couch if you want.”

Scott’s gaze shifted to Derek before lowering, and Stiles wondered if he’d finally been told who the Hales were, and just how lucky he was not to have gotten murdered for always being a dick to them.
“I shouldn’t.”

“Stay,” Derek said, surprising Stiles. “I think having you close will help Stiles.”

Scott was quiet for a minute, then nodded his agreement. The sheriff moved first, patting Scott on the back while passing him, and headed for the stairs. Stiles followed him, exhausted and needing a shower very badly. He didn’t know if he wanted to shower then sleep, or sleep and then shower. It was a hard battle, but by the time he reached the door, he decided shower.

He was gross and sweaty and he still had dried blood caked places. They’d cleaned him up at the hospital before bandaging his wounds—which Derek had un-bandaged, healed up, and then re-bandaged to keep things hidden—but they hadn’t gotten all of it.

He followed his dad into the house, then heard a grunt. Turning, he saw Derek and Scott still on the porch.

“Right.” He bent down to brush aside the mountain ash, and once both were in the house, he put it back into place.

He saw them shift uncomfortably, and figured being trapped inside made them anxious, but Stiles wasn’t willing to sleep without the barrier in place no matter who was in the house with him.

His dad followed him upstairs when he headed up there, grabbing a pillow and blanket for Scott while Stiles disappeared into the bathroom for the world’s shortest shower. He did little more than soap himself down before stepping out and drying off. When he stood in front of the mirror, he leaned forward and poked at the area where the bite had been. It was weird to realize he wasn’t a Werewolf, and could now heal just as fast as them.

Being a mate was weird.

When he opened the bathroom door after brushing his teeth and relieving himself, he started at having Derek right there. His eyes did a slow rake down, and then back up, and Stiles felt like the towel around his waist was wholly inadequate. He tightened his grip on it, clearing his throat.

“You, uh—guest room? Did dad...?”

“He showed me,” he confirmed. “I was just checking on you.”

Stiles nodded once, pressed his lips together, and motioned his room. “Can I, uh—pass?”

Derek took a long time to move out of his way and Stiles nodded in thanks before hurrying to his room and shutting the door. Derek was intense most of the time, but considering he’d been kidnapped and injured and was now naked, it seemed he was losing a bit of the control he’d been slowly gaining.

This whole thing with Stiles must’ve been fucking hell on his instincts. They were probably going haywire, he felt kind of bad for him.

After changing, he headed back into the corridor, where Derek was still waiting, and then went downstairs. He said goodnight to Scott, then hunted his dad down in the kitchen, putting away the bottle he’d pulled out and hoping the man hadn’t downed more than two glasses of it. He got another bone-crushing hug from his dad before he went back upstairs, Derek following him around like a loyal puppy following its master.

Once he was in front of his room, he turned to face him and nodded once.
“Um, good night.”

“Good night.”

They stood there for an awkward minute, then Stiles just thought, Screw it. He leaned forward and kissed Derek lightly on the lips before muttering another good night and shutting his bedroom door.

He waited until he heard Derek walk away and the guest room door shut before turning to his bed and falling onto it. Curling up in his blankets, he pulled them over his head to try and block out the light peeking through his blinds from dawn, and closed his eyes for sleep.

He woke up a few times after that, and the second time he shifted onto his side, eyes peeking open to find Derek sitting in his desk chair.

“Thought you were gonna stop being creepy,” he insisted, voice thick with sleep.

“I can’t help it. You were taken from me. I can’t let it happen again.”

Stiles just hummed, closing his eyes again. He was silent for only a moment before sighing and shifting over, pulling the blankets back.

“Might as well get some sleep,” he muttered, keeping his eyes closed.

Derek was in bed beside him in a heartbeat, pulling the covers over himself and settling comfortably against Stiles, holding him tightly.

Stiles thought he might get too warm before long, because if Jackson was a furnace, Derek was a fucking oven, but he didn’t worry about it. Derek held him like he was the most important thing in the world, and Stiles felt very loved and cared for.

Hilarious for him to realize a few months ago, Derek had been stalking him and Stiles wanted nothing to do with him.

Interesting how a little perspective could change someone’s mind.

Things calmed down after that, though Stiles was positive it was more of a ‘calm before the storm’ kind of thing. He spent time at the Hale house whenever his dad and Derek were on shift, and he spent time at home whenever they weren’t. Derek always started the evening in the guest room, and inevitably ended up in Stiles’ bed before the night was through.

His dad didn’t say anything about it, but Stiles did find a box of condoms on his nightstand one day after coming home from a day hanging out with Scott and he almost fucking died. He and Derek didn’t even really make out, they just slept. Mostly because Derek showed up after Stiles was already asleep, and by the time he realized he was being stared at and woke up to let Derek under the covers, he was too far into sleep to think about any hanky panky.

Besides, Werewolves didn’t get diseases, far as he knew, and Derek had been celibate his whole life because he was waiting on his mate. Stiles himself didn’t have the opportunity to lose his virginity, so the risk of either of them having an STD was in the negative numbers.

Unless his dad was worried about pregnancy, which meant he and Derek had to have a conversation because, as he kept thinking every time pregnancy came to mind, no thank you.
Before long, things returned to some semblance of normal. Not normal, given nothing in Stiles’ life had been normal since Scott had been bitten, but more normal than it had been the past few months.

To his relief, Scott was getting along with the Hales. Cora made the biggest effort, trying to include him in outings and inviting him over for movies whenever Stiles and Jackson were going to stop by, but Eric had been doing his fair share of trying with him, as well.

Scott also really, really, really liked Laura. He saw her a lot at the hospital whenever he went to see his mom, and they’d kind of bonded, which was helping bridge the gap a bit more since the two packs had combined. It was kind of a relief to know that everyone was getting along.

Jackson was more protective than usual, which was frustrating, since he seemed to feel it was his obligation to keep Stiles safe whenever Derek wasn’t around. Kira thought it was cute. Stiles thought he was brown-nosing, but he only said it in jest. He knew Jackson wasn’t doing it for brownie points, he was doing it because he cared, even if he didn’t admit it.

As predicted, Merrak asked his mother to go to New York for the end of summer, but she didn’t bite. With everything that had happened, she didn’t want to risk him being far from the pack, and while he’d been bitter about it, Stiles had insisted it was only for a little while. He told him to try again closer to Christmas, and severely hoped that shit would’ve calmed down by then.

There was still no word on Deucalion and his Alpha pack, and the Hunters who’d taken Stiles and Merrak had left their little cabin in the woods long before the police arrived. Two of them were known, which helped the police given they were known fugitives who’d escaped prison, but the others with them weren’t. Stiles could only describe the one guy, but Merrak managed to give a vague description of the others he’d seen when he’d been dragged through the house.

They spent the rest of summer mostly trying to get along and solidify their pack. Talia called pack nights twice a week for those who weren’t working, and Stiles got to meet more of the Hale pack. It was exceptionally large, which he supposed made sense given the Supernatural bullshit that Beacon Hills always seemed to attract.

They had so many different people, it was weird to realize the Hale pack was as diverse as the McCall one had been. Kitsunes and Chimeras. Hellhounds, Werewolves of course, Druids and other magic casters. Hell, they even had a Fae, which was super cool, though Derek had kept Stiles away from him because he insisted the Fae had a dark sense of humour and he worried about him turning Stiles into a frog or something.

Adding in Lydia’s Banshee and Jackson’s Kanima-Werewolf, they were probably the strangest pack in existence. But they were all happy, and it was clear the others who’d been part of the Hale pack for years loved each other and supported one another in all ways that mattered.

Stiles even heard a few of them helping Boyd plan his proposal to Erica on one of the nights she wasn’t around. It was really nice to see a pack of people so close to one another, so supportive.

He was really glad they’d finally merged, and he was even happier to see how well Scott was fitting in. He and Isaac were fast friends, and before long they spent so much time together that Stiles figured he understood how Scott had felt when he’d started becoming closer to Jackson. They were still best friends, but they didn’t hang out as much as they used to.

Which was fine, he supposed. They texted a lot, and saw each other at pack events, but Stiles spent a lot of time with Jackson and Cora, and whatever free time he had not spent with them was spent with Derek.
Time with Derek was good. They didn’t even do anything remotely sexual—“Seriously, dad, I don’t need any more condoms!”—but they just enjoyed spending time together. Going to movies, grabbing dinner together, spending time wandering through the Preserve.

It was actually kind of weird the first time Derek held his hand. He didn’t know why, it just felt really intimate somehow. They hadn’t done much other than kiss and snuggle while they slept, and holding hands shouldn’t have felt any more intimate than either of those things, but somehow it did.

They’d been walking in town, heading for the taco place down the street from the station since Derek was on duty. Stiles had been telling him about the most recent episode of Star Trek: Discovery since apparently Derek had no taste and didn’t like the show, and when he’d lowered his hand after flailing it about for a few seconds explaining a scene, Derek’s had slid into it.

It had taken a second for Stiles to notice, and when he did, he glanced down at their linked hands. Derek started to pull it away, like he thought he’d done something wrong, but Stiles just tightened his grip and stared him square in the face.

“Fucking commit to it.”

“Isn’t that a meme?” Derek asked with a sigh, but he held on anyway. Stiles was supremely pleased considering Derek knew very little about memes when they’d first started texting, so this meant he was trying to learn things for Stiles. This pleased him greatly.

They got a few looks, the sheriff’s son seen walking around with one of his deputies, holding hands, but Stiles didn’t worry about that. His dad knew they were heading towards something much more serious than hand-holding, and really, it was nobody’s business.

Stiles smiled a little at the realization that he was probably the envy of everyone who saw them. Lanky, gangly, weird Stiles Stilinski dating veritable sex-on-legs Derek Hale. Oh how the tables had turned. Though apparently, according to psychotic bitch Hunters, Stiles himself had also morphed into some form of not entirely gremlin-like and borderline desirable, so yay him!

After all the craziness, a bit of normalcy was appreciated, though it made the end of summer seem to pass in the blink of an eye. Not having to fear for his life on the daily and not staying up all night researching the newest big bad that was in town, it meant Stiles had time to go out and be a real boy, hanging out with friends, with his boyfriend, spending time with his future in-laws, catching up with his dad.

Who’d have thought spending time with people made things go faster than trying not to die. He supposed the act of keeping oneself alive felt neverending, so it made sense.

When school was looming, it was with much whining and groaning from those still enrolled. Merrak in particular was almost a nightmare, snapping at everyone and being downright intolerable to all his siblings. Stiles was basically the only person who could stand him, and even then, it was because he was used to being insulted so Merrak’s words fell kind of short.

When classes were slated to start up again, Stiles knocked on Merrak’s door the night before since he was staying at the Hale house and moved into his room despite the heated, “Fuck off!” he got in greeting.

“You’re gonna do something for me.”

“I’m doing nothing for you,” Merrak bit back angrily.

“When you get home tomorrow, I want to know Pokemon-Go kid’s name.”
“Then go be a creeper at school like Derek was to you,” Merrak snapped.

“Maybe you guys will even manage to eat lunch together.”

“Fuck you!”

“All right.” Stiles slapped his hands on his knees. “Good chat. Night.”

Merrak managed to hobble-stomp to the door after him on his crutches and slammed it so hard Michael shouted through the house about it. He was still working on his next book, so any kind of loud noises irritated him. Stiles felt like everyone was angry and on edge, and he could only surmise it was because soon they’d all be in different areas and it made them all uncomfortable.

After all, Stiles was going to be on a campus almost two hours out from Beacon Hills. Sure, he’d have Cora, Eric and Scott around if anything happened, and Kincaid and some other guards were going to be following him around like he was the fucking President, but still. Shit happened, and with Deucalion and Gerard gunning for him and the royal family in general, it made sense nobody was happy.

But, Stiles was determined not to live his life in fear. Tomorrow was a new day, a new semester, his last year of university. He was going to make it count. Things would be good. He had to believe things would be good, or else what even was the point anymore?

“Things will be good,” he said to himself, walking into Cora’s room so they could watch one more episode of Netflix before heading to bed. “Things will be good.”

“Shut up and get over here.”

“Your family is full of dicks.”

The next morning was chaos, which Stiles figured he should’ve expected in a house full of Werewolves. Because of the long drive to school, Stiles, Cora, Eric and Scott had tried to coordinate their classes around the same time as much as possible. This meant only one car had to go out and come back.

Scott’s schedule varied considering he also had work at the vet clinic, but for the most part they’d all attempted to keep things as close together as possible so they could drive to and from school together. Which meant three of them were up and about trying to get ready for school at the same time Laura was attempting to get organized for work. Derek came home from his night shift while Stiles was struggling to wake himself up with coffee, kissing his temple and wishing him a good day before going up to bed.

Merrak came down ten minutes later, managing to stomp while still using crutches, which Stiles thought had to be some kind of talent. Apparently they’d all woken him up since he could sleep for another hour, and now he was in a rotten mood, which Stiles anticipated would only worsen as the day progressed.

“When are you done?” Merrak snapped at Stiles while he stood from the table.

Stiles blinked at him, tired brain trying to decipher what he was asking him. He eventually gave up. “What?”

“Are you stupid or deaf? When are you done?”
“We finish at three today,” Cora said, clearly understanding her brother better than Stiles did. “Why?”

“Pick me up after school,” he ordered Stiles, ignoring his sister entirely.

“I won’t be back in town until closer to five.”

“Just pick me up!”

“Okay, okay.” Stiles held up both hands in surrender. “Let’s all calm down. Jeez, if I’d known this was what a morning here was like, I’d have stayed home.”

“Merrak, behave.” Talia said, moving to his side and brushing hair off his forehead before kissing it. He grunted, making a face, but didn’t push her away. Talia leaned forward to kiss Eric’s cheek, then Cora’s. When Stiles went to pass her, she stopped him with a hand on his cheek and kissed his opposite one.

“Have a good day at school.”

Something in his chest clenched when he stared at her. He’d forgotten how amazing it was having a mom there on the first day of school, packing his lunch, getting his bag ready, walking him out the door to the bus and wishing him a good day. Sure, Talia hadn’t done all those things, but even the small action of kissing his cheek and wishing him a good day meant more than he’d ever thought possible.

“Thanks,” he managed to get out before hurrying for the door after Cora and Eric.

They all got into the Jeep without a word and Stiles began the drive to Scott’s. Cora kept casting him confused looks, but his silence was the clearest signal of ‘I don’t want to talk about it’ he could possibly convey, so she wisely kept her mouth shut.

Scott wasn’t as smart, so when he was in the back beside Eric, they’d barely been on the road for two minutes when he asked, “What’s wrong?”

Cora turned to punch at him violently, but Scott just growled at her and very maturely kicked the back of her seat. Seriously, Stiles was surrounded by fucking children. How had he turned into the most mature out of everyone? He supposed it had to be a Werewolf thing. When around other Werewolves, somehow they forgot how to adult.

“I just forgot what it was like,” Stiles finally admitted after another ten minutes of silence.

“Forgot what what was like?” Cora asked.

“Having a mom.”

The car got uncomfortably silent after that, and Stiles felt bad about it, but he didn’t have the energy to try and fix it. He was already going to be out of sorts for school, and he needed to save what little reserve he had to get through his very long day.

When they got onto the highway, he noticed a car following them, but a quick check in the mirror confirmed it was just Kincaid and his group. He felt like he should learn the other guards’ names, considering he saw them around all the time, but it wasn’t like any of the guards ever interacted with him so it was hard to make friendly with them.

“I like having you around.”
It took a few seconds for the words to fully settle in his brain, but once they did, Stiles glanced in the rearview mirror at Eric. He was staring out the window, his hair a little droopy since he hadn’t had time to style it that morning. The sides were also getting a little long now, he needed to shave them back down again but he’d probably lost track of time over the summer.

“What?” he asked, not necessarily because he hadn’t heard him, but because he didn’t understand why he’d said it.

“I like having you around,” he repeated, shifting his gaze to catch Stiles’ eye in the mirror. “You make things calmer at home.”

“I don’t think that’s possible with Stiles,” Scott insisted. “He’s so high-energy, he can’t calm anything down.”

“Thanks Scotty,” he said dryly.

“He means Merrak,” Cora chimed in before anyone’s feelings got hurt. “He’s still angry and violent, but he’s... different. He likes you a lot. He’s liked you from the beginning, but it seems different now.”

Stiles shrugged. “We bonded over our humanity. And we got kidnapped together, tends to form a strong connection.”

“You’re really good for him,” Eric said. “I’m really glad you’re Derek’s mate. I think you’re going to be the only person who can make him less hostile.”

“Well, I do try.” He sighed. “Don’t you guys talk to him about his temper or anything?”

“Yeah right,” Cora scoffed. “We used to try, and then mom realized that if we tried to calm him down, he would get angrier, and we’d get angrier, and she’d end up having to replace furniture. She told us to give up after a while. Derek still tries every now and then, but he doesn’t have any luck, either. Merrak’s just... Merrak. He’s always been like that. We kind of tolerate it.”

“He’s been better lately,” Eric insisted. “Because of you.”

Stiles didn’t want to think about how Merrak was before if his current state was him better. Not that he had a problem with Merrak, he liked him a lot, he was blunt and funny, in his own way, but he was also very, very angry. About nothing and everything. It had to be exhausting being that angry all the time.

They moved away from Merrak after that, all of them waking up a bit more and whining about school. Scott and Stiles still had their usual morning break to grab a muffin and more coffee, but Cora and Stiles’ lunches didn’t line up this semester, though his did line up with Eric’s. He figured this would work out, since he wanted to get to know Eric better, and Cora and Scott could have lunch together and solidify their non-hatred of one another.

It felt really nice having everyone on the same team.

When they reached the university lot, it seemed busier than usual. It was always like this, though. People showed up the first week before they started skipping so the lots were always full the first week, during midterms and during finals. Otherwise, they were half-full, at best.

They parted ways to head to class and Stiles noticed Kincaid trailing behind him. He wished he wouldn’t follow him like a creeper and just walk beside him, but he knew he’d never convince him to do that.
He went to class, had his morning break with Scott, went to more classes, had lunch with Eric, went to more classes, and then let his brain melt out of his ears by the time he headed for the Jeep. He was halfway there when someone bumped into him, turning to apologize quickly before the words seemed to stick in their throat and their eyes widened.

“It’s no pr—” Stiles cut off when Kincaid was in front of him, one hand pressed to his chest to keep him behind him and stance defensive.

The other teen threw his hands up in surrender, stumbling back a few steps.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t—I didn’t know! I meant no disrespect, I’m sorry!”

“Leave,” Kincaid said, voice low and dangerous.

Stiles had never seen someone run so fast, which was saying something considering who he hung out with.

“What was that?” he asked slowly.

“Beta,” Kincaid said, still not moving, like he wanted to be absolutely sure the kid was gone even though Stiles could see him racing across the quad. “Smells like Talbot pack.”

“Hey, I know them,” Stiles said with a smile. “Well, sort of. Their Alpha came to my house with a gift. He seemed nice.”

Kincaid’s look was crossed between annoyed and exasperated when he turned to look at Stiles.

“Derek will be displeased.”

“Because someone bumped into me at school? Did you miss how many people I’ve walked into today?”

“Because another Were touched you.”

Stiles looked down and then emphatically motioned that Kincaid’s hand was still pressed against his chest. Kincaid gave him another look, this one a bit more scathing.

“I am a guard, and by extension, part of the Hale pack. Your packmates and the royal guard are permitted to have their scents on you. A Beta from another pack is not.”

“He barely touched me, how much of his scent can there possibly be that rubbed off?”

Kincaid leaned closer, Stiles struggling to resist leaning back, and inhaled pointedly. “Enough,” he finally said.

Stiles just stared at him and sighed. Damn fucking Werewolves. Couldn’t have fallen in with a group of Vampires, oh no. Had to be Werewolves. Territorial.

Then again, Vampires would’ve been way too close to Twilight, so he supposed it worked out better this way.

“Come on,” Stiles sighed, tapping at Kincaid’s wrist to get him to drop his hand. “Let’s get to the Jeep before a search party gets sent out.”

He turned and continued on his way, Kincaid sticking closer than usual. He probably didn’t want to risk another Were getting within arm’s reach of Stiles. He figured it was because he was still
unclaimed. Everything seemed to hinge on him not being claimed by Derek yet. He had to wonder if things would calm down if that changed.

“Hey, can I ask you something?”

“Can I stop you?” Kincaid inquired, sounding exasperated.

“Probably not.”

There was a slow sigh from behind him, like Kincaid was trying to find patience. That happened a lot when Stiles was around.

“Does it bother you? Having to protect a human?”

“It is my duty.”

Stiles turned to give him a look. “That’s not what I asked.”

Kincaid kept eye contact for a few seconds, Stiles stopping so he wouldn’t walk into anything, and Kincaid following suit. For a moment, he said nothing, and then finally admitted, “Yes. It bothers me.”

“Because I’m human?”

“You are fragile,” Kincaid said. “And stubborn. You don’t seem to understand the enviable position you are in.”

“Derek and I are pseudo-dating right now. We’re getting there.”

“You have no idea what your position is costing him.”

Stiles frowned, crossing his arms. “What do you mean?”

“They know,” he hissed, and for the first time since he’d been near Kincaid, he saw the resentment he held towards him. “Everyone knows. The Hale heir chose a mate, and his mate doesn’t reciprocate. It has been eleven years since his Highness has been bound to you, and countless others have approached him in an attempt to sever the bond.”

“Can you do that?” Stiles was under the impression Derek didn’t have a choice. Everyone made it sound like he didn’t have a choice, but Kincaid was suggesting he did. “I thought it was absolute.”

“It is absolute,” Kincaid said. “So long as the mate lives.”

Oh. So Kincaid was saying that because Stiles wasn’t claimed, theoretically if someone killed him, Derek could... move on? Maybe not move on, but at least choose to be with someone else instead of living out the rest of his life alone.

“If I died today, someone else could come in and take my place,” he said. “Not in the same way, and never with the same level of devotion, but Derek could choose to be with someone else.”

“Many have come forward to offer themselves, but he refuses every one because he is bound to you. No one can touch you because of your position, but if something were to happen to you, there would be fights to the death to gain his Highness’ favour. I have known him since birth, I know the man he is, and he would rather live the rest of his life in agony, separated from the one person he wants, than betray what the two of you could have. He would rather die than choose another. Because he wants you.” Kincaid gave him a very demeaning once-over. “A human who doesn’t
understand how much he stands to gain.”

“I’m not in this for what I can gain,” Stiles snapped. “Would you rather I let him claim me and then decide I don’t want him?”

“If you believe you do not want him, you’re not as smart as people say you are.”

Stiles didn’t know how to respond to that, so he just turned on his heel and continued on his way to the Jeep, mind racing. Things were moving forward with Derek. They were dating now, after all. Kind of. Sort of? No, they were dating. They kissed and shared a bed and went on dates. They held hands and everything! They were totally dating.

He felt like none of the wolves were looking at it from his perspective. Sure, he’d had a birthday and was twenty-two now, but he was only twenty-two! How many people got married at twenty-two?! Well, Bella was married fresh out of high school, but that wasn’t the point. Stiles didn’t want to do anything he would regret and end up causing more problems.

But then he had to consider how many problems not being Werewolf married to Derek was causing. Not to mention the progression of their relationship. Sure, it had started off rocky, but even Stiles could tell there was something different about this. He felt almost... connected to Derek. His skin was on fire every time Derek touched him, and he felt like he was losing his mind whenever he kissed him. He wanted to spend time with him, and he kind of loved him.

Maybe this was just the honeymoon stage of their relationship, but he had to admit they’d kind of overcome a lot of bullshit since this had all started. And given how much the Hales meant to him, and how close they all were, Stiles didn’t know that he’d ever stray from the pack. He didn’t think he’d ever go out and make friendly with other people anymore because the pack was just so big and so full of amazing people and he had everything he could ever want.

He had his dad, his pillar of strength, the most important person in the world to him. He had Scott, his best bro, who’d stand with him even if he didn’t agree with him. He had Jackson, who was an unexpected friend, almost rivalling Scott in the best friend category, always willing to put himself in between Stiles and danger. Talia, who was calm and patient, who was someone who wanted to give him what he couldn’t get from anyone else. Cora, and Merrak and Eric, siblings he never thought he wanted, but could suddenly have. Michael, who was the voice of reason, the calming presence.

And Derek.

Derek, who’d never once demanded anything from him. Who just wanted him to be happy, to be safe. Who’d wanted to be close to him after years of being apart. Who loved him not for any reason other than that Stiles was a good person, he was loyal, he was kind. Derek’s wolf may have chosen him because he’d protected one of his own, but Derek himself had chosen Stiles because he liked who he was.

“Are you okay?”

Stiles turned to Cora, who was giving him a weird look, then faced forward again before blurting out, “Holy shit, I’m driving!”

“Oh, yeah. Have been for a while. Did you just notice?”

He didn’t remember getting into the car. He definitely didn’t remember starting it and getting onto the highway. He was sure the others would’ve been screaming if he’d hurt someone, so he could
only assume he’d managed not to kill anybody while his mind had wandered.

Thank God for his ability to multi-task.

“Are you okay?” she asked again.

“Just thinking.”

“Okay.”

If anyone spoke to him for the rest of the drive home, he didn’t hear them. He just kept thinking about how to proceed, about what he wanted, about what Kincaid had said. Stiles being stubborn. And he was stubborn. The King of stubbornness.

He dropped Cora and Eric off first, then headed for Scott’s place. He asked if he was all right while they were alone, but Stiles promised he was fine and said he’d text him later. Then he went to the high school to pick up Merrak.

He was sitting on the front steps with a PSP in his hands, playing something that was holding pretty much all of his attention. Stiles had to blare the horn twice, and even that only earned him being flipped off. Merrak’s way of saying he knew he was there, but he was finishing something and Stiles could damn well fucking wait.

Jesus, he loved that kid. He was so refreshing compared to everyone else who treated him like he was something to be worshipped and protected.

After almost ten minutes, Merrak stood with difficulty and hobbled his way to the Jeep after sling his bag over his shoulder. The late hour meant virtually everyone else had already gone, but Merrak didn’t seem to mind the wait. Stiles had to wonder if he’d gotten detention on the first day of school.

Sadly, it wouldn’t surprise him.

“Hi honey, how was school?” Stiles asked with a grin when Merrak opened the door.

“Fuck you,” he muttered, tossing his bag into the back before hopping on his good leg and climbing into the front. He almost hit Stiles twice trying to wrestle his crutches in, but finally managed it and shut the door.

“What’d you tell people about your leg?”

“The truth.”

“You were kidnapped by crazed Hunters because you mom is a Werewolf Queen and after breaking out of their basement torture chamber you ran through the woods and stepped into a leg-hold trap?”

Merrak gave him an annoyed look. “An asshole put traps out where he shouldn’t have and I was unfortunate enough to step into one while sneaking out of the house in the middle of the night.”

Stiles just smirked at him, shifting into drive and heading back for the house.

They drove in silence for a majority of the drive, and it wasn’t until they were on the stretch of road that led to the turnoff that Merrak finally spoke.

“Tyler.”
“What?” Stiles asked, glancing over at him before facing forward once more and turning smoothly onto the road leading up to the house.

“His name is Tyler.”

It took a few seconds for Stiles to figure out what he was saying, but then he remembered his request the night before and his face broke out into a grin. Merrak had spoken to Pokemon-Go kid! Holy shit, maybe he’d actually made a friend!

“Shut up,” Merrak snapped, punching hard at Stiles’ shoulder when they pulled up to the house.

“I didn’t say anything,” he insisted, still grinning like an idiot. “Which is a first for me, actually.”

“I hate you.”

“Love you too, kiddo.”

“Fuck you!” Merrak threw open the door, and his attempt to storm away angrily would’ve worked much better if he hadn’t been struggling to get his crutches out of the Jeep.

Stiles showed him mercy and didn’t laugh about it, he just reached back to grab both their bags and then waited by the stairs for him to catch up before heading inside.

He’d completely forgotten about the Were bumping into him at school until Derek was practically on top of him the second he walked through the door, eyes flashing blue and fangs descending while snarling threateningly. Stiles just rolled his eyes, grabbed Derek’s hand, and rubbed it against the affected area like a rag trying to wipe away a stain.

“There, you big baby. Jesus Christ, I’m surrounded by children.”

He was never going to get used to this whole territorial thing.

The first week of school went by without incident. Stiles did homework at the last minute, and occasionally managed to focus in class to take notes that weren’t complete gibberish. Twice in that first week some members of the Hale family had rushed out of the house in the middle of the night, but Stiles hadn’t paid any attention to it until the third time on Tuesday of the second week of school.

It was early evening, and he’d been watching TV with Cora, Merrak and Jackson when Eric had burst into the house and said there was a Wendigo moving on the town. Cora and Jackson were on their feet instantly, and when Stiles followed suit, Cora shoved him back down and told him they would handle it before disappearing from the house.

He’d been a little disoriented for a few seconds, turning to look at Merrak.

“What just happened?”

“They don’t need you,” he said bitterly. “Your humanity is a liability.”

“So I get to sit here and watch TV while they stop the big bad?”

“Annoying,” Merrak muttered.

“Dude, how is that annoying? I am a-okay not getting injured for the bazillionth time this year.”
Not that he liked knowing there was a monster out there wreaking havoc on the town, but the pack was huge now and he knew they wouldn’t get injured. They’d deal with the problem and be back before bedtime.

Which they were. It was awesome. Stiles very much liked not being injured all the time. Sure, he missed being able to go out and be in the middle of the action sometimes, but every time he so much as stubbed his toe, it reminded him of how much pain sucked and how happy he was not to have broken bones every other day.

When he came home from school after picking up Merrak a few days later, Derek was home from work and asked Stiles to go out to dinner. They did, heading to a fancier restaurant than Stiles would’ve chosen, but Derek had insisted and they had a great time.

It was weird seeing the different sides of Derek. Sometimes he was closed off and defensive, like he didn’t want to show too much of himself and give Stiles more ammunition to destroy him. Other times he was so open Stiles wanted to tell him to put the hearts-eyes away because it was ridiculous seeing someone look at him like that.

Tonight was the latter, but he tolerated it, because Derek was in a good mood and Stiles felt happy, and everything was just... good.

When they finished dinner and got back into the Camaro, Stiles stared out the window while soft jazz music played on the radio. He didn’t know what station it was, and was wondering if maybe it might be a CD or something when Derek took a different turn than usual. He frowned and glanced over at him, but Derek resolutely stared straight ahead.

He didn’t say anything and just let him drive them wherever they were heading. A few minutes later, they pulled up to what looked like some kind of abandoned train station, Stiles cocking an eyebrow when Derek parked and turned off the engine.

“Have you gone all serial killer on me? Am I about to get murdered?”

“Yes, Stiles.” Derek rolled his eyes. “An officer of the law brought you to an abandoned building to murder you.”

“As long as you make it quick, I’m not into the whole torture scene.” Stiles climbed out of the car before Derek could say anything in response, shutting the door and looking up at the building.

Derek appeared beside him a moment later, taking his hand and leading the way to the door. He unlocked the deadbolt with a set of keys, and then pulled it open. Stiles winced at the screech, but obediently followed, the door slamming shut behind him and bathing them in darkness.

His free hand came out to clutch at the same one Derek was holding his other hand in.

“I can’t see in the dark,” he reminded him.

“That’s the point,” Derek teased. “Stairs.”

Stiles half-stumbled onto the first step, still clutching one of Derek’s hands with both of his, and walked up after him. It seemed to be a really long way up, but eventually the floor evened out and Derek walked them forward a few steps. Another door opened, this one sliding as opposed to on a hinge, and he was pulled forward.

The door shut behind him, and then Derek loosened his grip on his hand.
“I am not letting go of your hand,” Stiles informed him.

Derek laughed and Stiles jumped when he leaned over to kiss his temple. “Two seconds. I’m getting the light.”

Stiles squinted in his direction suspiciously, but reluctantly released his death grip on Derek’s hand. True to his word, he only took two steps and then lights clicked on. Stiles blinked a few times, eyes adjusting quickly since they hadn’t been bathed in darkness for too long, and looked around.

“Is this a loft above an abandoned train station?”

“Yeah.” Derek came back over to him, moving behind him and wrapping his arms around his middle, kissing at his temple. “I wanted to have a place for us. Your house is your dad’s, and mine is my parents’. I wanted this to be ours.”

It took a few seconds for things to click, and then Stiles’ heart started beating double-time. The loft was already furnished, and seemed to have two levels, a set of metal spiral stairs at the far corner leading up to what was undeniably the bedroom. It wasn’t huge by any stretch of the imagination, but it was homey. Derek had obviously tried his best to make sure it looked welcoming, and he even had a bookshelf in the corner that housed both books and movies.

Even from here, Stiles could see Star Wars and he loved Derek a little more at the sight.

“This is amazing,” he said without really thinking.

“Yeah?”

“Yeah, this is—wow. So it’s yours?”

“It’s ours,” Derek repeated. “Dad co-signed for it, but I put both our names on the land title. Fifty-fifty ownership.”

“I’m not contributing to it, though.”

“That’s okay.”

“No it’s not.”

“You can pay later, when you have a job. I just didn’t want us to keep having parents and siblings and pack around. I wanted us to have a place that was just for us.”

Stiles grinned, pulling away from Derek so he could look around. It was really nice, considering its location. Floor to ceiling windows overlooking parts of the Preserve, a small kitchen, a much larger living room, a reasonably-sized bathroom with shower and toilet.

He climbed the stairs, wanting to see the bedroom, and was not disappointed. The entire second level was just the bedroom, with the most ridiculous bed Stiles had ever seen. He didn’t even know beds came in that side, it looked bigger than a King, which was insane. There was a dresser in the corner, along with a closet, and when he walked past the bed to check them out, he saw some of his clothes in there, along with Derek’s.

He turned to cock an eyebrow at him and Derek shrugged, looking a little sheepish.

“Your dad gave me some stuff. Figured it would be best to have a few things available if we spent
the night and you had to rush to school the next day.”

“I love that my dad is encouraging our relationship.” Stiles rolled his eyes.

“He just wants you to be happy,” Derek said, moving closer to him and pulling him closer by the overshirt he was wearing. “I just want you to be happy.”

“Well, I get a full night’s sleep, monsters are being handled without me going out to hurt myself, and my boyfriend is pretty great. I’d say I’m lucking out.” He grinned, burying his hands in Derek’s hair and pulling him down for a kiss. Derek responded with enthusiasm, hands shifting to his hips and yanking him even closer, grinding into him.

Stiles let out a groan and punched at Derek’s shoulder a few times to make him back off a bit. “Bed. Bed right there. Bed.”

Obeying, Derek started walking backwards, and once he hit the edge of the bed, he pulled back so he could turn them and shove Stiles onto it. He did so with so much force Stiles almost bounced right back off it but managed to settle himself. Derek crawled up after him, eyes slowly bleeding blue. He looked like a predator right then, and for some reason, it was the hottest thing Stiles had ever seen.

He grinned, shuffling back up on the bed until he was lying down with his head on the pillow, Derek moving up on top of him quickly, hands braced on either side of his head. He looked a little crazed right then, and Stiles figured it was because he was usually half-asleep whenever they were in the same bed together.

Not this time.

“Who’s afraid of the big, bad wolf?” he teased, reaching up to lock his arms around Derek’s neck. “Not me.”

“You’ll eat those words.”

“Oh yeah?” Stiles smirked. “You gonna eat me up?”

“Every last inch of you.”

“Hot.” He pulled Derek down and kissed him hard.

Derek’s hands seemed to be everywhere at once, burning lines of heat along his skin through his clothes. He was rocking his hips down into Stiles’, grinding into him roughly and gasping for air between kisses, like he could hardly stand it.

Stiles wrapped his legs around Derek’s waist, pushing up into him, and his hands scrabbled desperately to get his shirt off. It took some doing, but Derek finally managed to pull back enough to raise his arms, letting Stiles get the shirt off. He tossed it across the room and then yanked Derek back down for more kisses. Derek’s own hands were alternating between pushing and pulling at Stiles, trying to get him upright so he could wrench his plaid overshirt off. He didn’t bother being careful when he got to his shirt, ripping it in half and yanking the ends off his arms.

“I liked that shirt,” Stiles breathed between wet kisses.

“I’ll buy you another one,” was Derek’s response.

Derek’s hips jerked down hard and fast, like he was chasing his release but also struggling to stay
in control. Stiles could feel fangs pressing against his lips, the kisses getting a little more violent. Derek pulled away after a few seconds, hips still stuttering but he turned his face away, breathing hard, and Stiles could see his chops grown out and his face a bit distorted.

“Like that fucking bothers me,” he insisted, grabbing at Derek’s face and pulling him back down. Sure, the kissing hurt a bit since fangs and all, but Derek was also careful not to break skin. And he seemed particularly happy when he realized Stiles honestly didn’t care.

It made sense he’d worry, Stiles was human, but he’d gotten over the Werewolf thing years ago. Not a big deal at all.

The harder Derek ground down, the closer Stiles was to his own orgasm, feeling it building in his stomach. Derek had lined their covered cocks up perfectly and the rough material of his boxers rubbing against him every time Derek moved was bringing him closer and closer to the edge.

He was trying hard to tip Derek over first, but it proved to be futile because after a few more hard thrusts down, Stiles bit into Derek’s lower lip before throwing his head back with an embarrassing groan, arms tightening around the other’s neck.

Derek was panting against the skin of his throat, hips stuttering slightly while he chased his own orgasm, and when it finally came, he bit down hard on Stiles’ neck. Not hard enough to break skin, but enough that Stiles knew he’d have teeth marks for a few hours, at least.

He could feel Derek trembling, and for a second, the pressure increased, like he was actually thinking of just doing it, of claiming Stiles despite the fact they hadn’t talked about it. But just as quickly as the pressure came, it slowly let up and Derek pulled his mouth away, still breathing hard and pressing his face into the pillow right beside Stiles’ head, his weight almost crushing him.

Stiles didn’t mind, despite how heavy a fully grown, muscled, Werewolf cop was, but he knew he’d start suffocating if they stayed like that for too long. Not to mention his pants had been soiled and he really didn’t want to let that sit and crust.

“I hope my dad gave you some boxers for me,” Stiles said, one hand pressed against Derek’s lower back and the other running light fingers up and down his sweaty spine. “I think I need some new ones.”

“They’re in the dresser,” Derek’s muffled voice said. “But you’re not moving yet.”

Stiles just laughed and stayed where he was—not that he had a choice—for a while longer. Eventually, he started getting hot, and crushed, and he managed to convince Derek to roll off him. He grabbed some clothes and headed down to the shower, kind of really liking how domestic it all felt. He had his own towel, there was a toothbrush for him, and a razor, and some of his preferred body wash and shampoo.

He’d only just seen the place and already he felt like they’d been living there for a long time. It was insane, and awesome, but insane, but also awesome.

Once he was done in the shower, he changed out quickly and brushed his teeth so he could let Derek have his turn. When he straightened and wiped his hands, he noticed the teeth marks on his neck. Leaning forward, he inspected them in the mirror, his conversation with Kincaid returning to him.

He remembered Merrak’s distress when Kate had bitten into him. Derek’s dismay at the sight of it. The way everyone kept having to keep an eye on him because he wasn’t claimed yet and thus his
bond with Derek hadn’t fully solidified.

He poked at the marks thoughtfully, digging his nails into his skin, then let his hand drop. When he opened the door, Derek was right on the other side and he jumped before punching at his chest.

“Asshole.”

Derek kissed him again before he could move away, and then headed into the bathroom, shutting the door behind himself.

Stiles waited until the water cut on before heading towards the kitchen. He knew there had to be a laundry room in there somewhere, and the kitchen was the only viable location. He was wrong, because he found nothing, and after a bit of exploration, he located the washer-dryer set in what he’d originally thought was a linen-closet beside the bathroom. He emptied his pockets out and dumped his clothes into it, but didn’t bother starting it since Derek had to add his, as well.

He went back upstairs, opening the case for his phone to check his battery. It would last long enough to go off in the morning for class, but not much longer than that. He texted Cora to ask her to bring his charger tomorrow so that he could charge it at school. When she asked if he was at home tonight, he took a picture of the dishevelled bed and she sent back a vomiting emoji. He sent back a middle finger.

Falling onto the bed, he stared at his messages for a long while before finally opening a text message with someone he’d only ever called. This wasn’t really a conversation he wanted to have out loud, though.

[Stiles]
Do you have a few minutes for me?

He opened a game while he waited for a reply, halfway through a puzzle when an alert appeared at the top of his screen. He closed out of what he was playing without bothering to finish it.

[Talia]
Of course

He stared at the screen for a few seconds, trying to figure out what he wanted to ask her. How he wanted to word it. He typed something out, and then erased it. He could imagine Talia sitting on the other end, staring patiently at her phone, waiting for him to get out what he was thinking.

Letting out a slow breath, and knowing how much this was implying, he finally typed out what he wanted to know.

[Stiles]
So with the claiming thing

[Stiles]
Is it the bite itself that matters

[Stiles]
Or the location of the bite?

He watched his screen and could see her typing, but it seemed to take a while for the response to come, like he’d stumped her.

[Talia]
To be quite honest, I’m not sure
[Talia]
No one has ever asked that before
[Talia]
Why do you ask?

Stiles stared at the question for a long while, thumbs hovering over the keyboard. He felt like Talia was sitting on the edge of her seat on the other side of the screen, holding her breath and shaking her phone, demanding Stiles type, type now. He knew she was much too calm to ever react like that, but he also knew everyone had been waiting for this for years, so even his asking about it probably had the whole Hale house reacting like that one dude in The Office screaming, “Oh my God, okay, it’s happening! Everybody stay calm!”

Stiles just sighed and typed out why he was asking.

[Stiles]
I just thought
[Stiles]
Maybe it would be beneficial
[Stiles]
You know, for everyone
[Stiles]
If people didn’t KNOW

He paused for a moment, took a breath, then continued.

[Stiles]
If people didn’t know that I was claimed
[Stiles]
If it was hidden a bit
[Stiles]
Might help us catch people
[Stiles]
Like Deucalion and his pack
[Stiles]
It was just a thought

He heard the water turn off downstairs, Derek finished with his shower, and his eyes shifted to the stairs. They snapped back to the phone when Talia replied.

[Talia]
I’ll find out.

[Stiles]
Thank you

He closed out of the message and locked his phone.

TBC...
WARNINGS: Gerard beats on Stiles and momentarily electrocutes him. Kate is involved in some non-consensual touching towards Stiles (nothing below the belt). Kate also makes comments about Derek when he was younger and eyes Merrak (16) with interest but Stiles pulls her attention back because we ain't into that here. Merrak ends up with a broken leg due to a trap during an escape.

Obligatory Copyright Crap:
- Teen Wolf (c) Jeff Davis
- Twilight (c) Stephenie Meyer
- Pokemon (c) Satoshi Tajiri & Ken Sugimori
- Star Wars (c) George Lucas
- Frankenstein (c) Mary Shelley
- Harry Potter (c) J.K. Rowling
- Star Trek (c) Gene Roddenberry
- The Office (c) Ricky Gervais, Stephen Merchant & Greg Daniels
Surprisingly, the next morning wasn’t as chaotic as usual. He chalked it up to not having an entire house of people flailing about trying to get ready at the same time. Derek was on the afternoon shift, so he didn’t even get out of bed. He also tried to stop Stiles from getting out of bed, groaning and pulling him into his chest and then refusing to let him go.

It would’ve been so much easier to just lie there and sleep the day away wrapped in Derek’s arms, but he had school, and he had people he needed to drive to school. Which was a problem since he was here, at the loft, and his Jeep was back at the house.

When he elbowed Derek and informed him of this, Derek just mumbled for him to get Eric to drive the Jeep over. Which would’ve been a great idea, except the keys were in Stiles’ pocket and thus an impossibility. In the end, he texted Cora to say they’d have to drive the Mustang and she texted back a thumbs up, followed by another vomiting emoji. He just flipped her off again and gave Derek’s address, which wasn’t so much an address as a step-by-step set of directions.

He changed out quickly, then headed downstairs to see if there was anything in the fridge. There wasn’t, which meant he’d have to grab food on the way, but Derek had a Nespresso machine set up in the corner so he popped a pod into it and made himself a coffee so he wouldn’t pass out on the drive to school.

Derek lumbered down the stairs before Stiles was about to head out, having texted with Cora so she’d grab his bag and applicable books. Derek stopped him before he could walk past him and pulled him in for a kiss.

“Our breath stinks,” Stiles informed him.

“You’re so romantic, no wonder I love you.”

“I still kissed you, didn’t I?” Stiles pressed his lips to Derek’s again, as if proving his point, then pulled back. “Have a good day at work.”

“Have fun at school.”

“This is so domestic and fucking weird.”

“Not weird.” Derek slapped his ass, Stiles retaliating by doing the same. When he started to pull away, Derek caught hold of his hand and tugged him back. He’d just opened his mouth to say he had to go when Derek flipped his hand over so it was palm up, and pressed a key into it.

Stiles said nothing for a long while, Derek closing his hand over it and kissing his knuckles.
“Have a good day.”

“Yes.” Stiles didn’t know what else to say, so he just smiled, then turned to exit the loft, sliding the door shut behind him.

It occurred to him now that he had the key in his hand that the loft didn’t have a lock, but that was probably because the main door downstairs did. He stared down at the key, feeling his heart tripping in his chest, then grinned and closed his hand around it once more, trying not to do a stupid excited dance.

He pulled his keys from his pocket and added this one to the set before replacing them, fingers brushing one of the many vials of mountain ash he had in all his pants, then headed for the stairs.

There was light streaming through the many windows now, illuminating the area he hadn’t been able to see the night before, and while there were still some parts and tracks, along with one full traincar, the rest of the area looked like it had been cleared out somewhat. He figured Derek had plans for what he wanted to do with it and was slowly working away at it.

When he got outside, he sat down on the curb to wait, Eric and Cora showing up a few minutes later. Eric went to sit in the back while Stiles got behind the wheel, and he found it interesting Eric wasn’t fond of driving. He figured maybe he’d seen the way the rest of his family drove and decided it was safer to let someone sane drive.

“Why were you and Derek staying in an abandoned building?” Cora asked, crinkling her nose at it. “What even is this place?”

“Ask Derek later,” Stiles insisted with a smirk.

“You smell like spunk.”

“You’re face is spunk,” he retaliated instantly. She slapped him in the arm and he punched her in the shoulder. “Oh no, I’m turning into you guys,” he said, mock-horrified.

She just slapped him again and he laughed while heading to Scott’s. He was thrilled to see the Mustang, and Stiles let him know in no uncertain terms that he was highly offended Scott wasn’t upset the Jeep wasn’t his ride today.

The other three tried to get him to talk about what had happened and what that place was and why Stiles smelled like sex—really, the last one should have been obvious—but he was surprisingly managing to keep things to himself. Besides, as enthusiastic as Cora and Eric were with their questioning, he was pretty sure if he started going into detail about how Derek had gotten him off the night before they’d both have their hands over their ears screaming for him to stop.

Siblings were weird that way, Stiles was glad he was an only child.

Then again, he kind of did have siblings now, considering how things had turned out for him.

They got to school and split for classes. Stiles noticed Kincaid sticking closer than usual, but he actually seemed a bit... content. Like he could tell something had changed last night and he was glad for it. It was weird having people so involved in his social life.

After his morning break with Scott, Stiles was heading to his next class when he got a text message. Pulling his phone out and flipping open the case—thank you, case, for stopping all the crotch-dialling!—he saw it was a message from Talia. He opened it, almost holding his breath, though he had no idea why.
It is the bite that matters, not the location

The neck is very vulnerable for a Werewolf

I would suspect the submission and trust is why it is the location of all marks we know of

It is also visible, clearly announcing someone has been claimed by an Alpha

No wolf could suggest they didn’t know someone was claimed given it’s staring them in the face

Stiles waited until he was in class before replying, sitting near the back while the previous professor spoke to a student from the last class, his own professor beginning to set up at the front.

He thought for a minute, tapping his phone against his thigh, then replied.

Do you think Derek would be offended if I wanted mine somewhere else?

It’s not about not having it noticeable

I mean, not in a ‘I’m ashamed’ way

I just figured hiding it would work out better for everyone

For now

He can bite me there later, if he wants

Do you think that would go over badly?

The response was instantaneous.

Stiles, if you let Derek claim you, I don’t believe he’ll care WHERE it is

All he cares about is you.

Stiles stared at the message for a few seconds, sent back a thank you, and put his phone away. He then pulled it back out immediately and texted his dad to ask if he would be home for dinner, since he had no idea what his schedule was like lately.

When he confirmed he would be, Stiles said he was coming home tonight and he wanted to have some father-son bonding time. His dad sent back a happy face and Stiles rolled his eyes, shoving his phone back into his pocket.

He had lunch with Eric, and had to find something for him to talk about since Stiles’ brain was kind of shut down right now. He managed to get him talking about Harry Potter and lunch passed quickly. He went to his last classes, then drove everyone home. He went to pick up Merrak in the Mustang, which he bitched and complained about the entire time he struggled to get into the front seat, given his crutches and the size of the car. Stiles insisted he should put them in the back, but Merrak was only slightly less stubborn than him.
It was why Stiles kept winning their battles. Merrak was almost at his level of stubbornness, but not quite there yet.

Once he drove him home, he traded out the Mustang for the Jeep, Merrak offended he was taking off again since that was two nights in a row where Stiles was ditching them for dinner. He promised he’d be back tomorrow, a hint of teasing in his voice, and Merrak flipped him off before insisting he hoped he choked on whatever he was having for dinner.

Stiles could feel the love.

He got home before his dad did and went through the fridge and pantry to figure out what he could make for dinner. They had some whole-wheat pasta and ingredients for a meat sauce so he figured they could have spaghetti. He texted his dad to pick up some Parmesan on the way home since that was the only thing missing, and went to work making the sauce.

He was almost done by the time his dad got home and the sheriff let out an appreciate hum when he walked into the kitchen.

“Smells good, kiddo.” He patted Stiles’ shoulder on his way past him, heading to the fridge to put the cheese away. “Do I have time to change?”

“Yeah, few more minutes before it’s ready.”

His dad nodded and headed out of the kitchen. Stiles heard him climbing the stairs a moment later and his door shut. He just focussed on finishing up what he was doing, stirring the meat sauce and then tasting it with the large wooden spoon just as his dad walked back into the kitchen in jeans and a loose shirt.

He cuffed him on the side of the head and told him to use a spoon. Stiles grinned and insisted he was using a spoon.

“Don’t be a smartass,” his dad said with a sigh.

“Can’t help it, I take after my pops.”

“I’ve never been as bad as you.”

“I’m sure grandma would disagree,” Stiles insisted. He got another light cuff to the side of the head for that and his dad told him to shut up.

They served themselves once Stiles turned the heat off and went to sit at the table with the Parmesan. His dad was only allowed a little bit, but Stiles practically drowned his own in it. He got a look for that but just grinned and shoved a bite into his mouth.

“How’s work?”

“Good. Mrs. Nelson called in about a party next door again.”

They talked shop for a bit, catching up on what they’d missed in the past few weeks since they hadn’t been seeing much of each other. Enough that Stiles didn’t miss his dad, but not as much as usual.

His dad asked about how school was going, and he told him about his classes, and about the drives, and about Derek’s new place. They spoke about that for a little bit, since his dad knew about it given the clothes he’d provided, which worked out because it segued perfectly into what he really
wanted to discuss with him.

Stiles stared down into his plate, pushing a noodle from one side to the other, debating grabbing a second helping. He waited until his dad was wiping his hands on his napkin before speaking.

“Hey dad?”

“Hm?” he asked, getting to his feet and picking up both of their plates, effectively deciding for Stiles that one helping was enough.

When he heard his dad at the sink, rinsing the plates, he finally said, “I think I’m gonna Werewolf marry Derek.”

The water shut off and Stiles waited a few seconds before turning to look at him. The sheriff was standing by the sink with a dish towel in hand, drying them while watching Stiles. For a long moment, they just stared at one another, saying nothing, and then finally the sheriff sighed and set the dish towel aside.

“Are you doing this because you want to,” he said, moving back to the table and easing into his chair once more, “or because you feel like you have to?”

“A bit of both?” Stiles admitted, shrugging and playing with the knife still at his spot, since he hadn’t used it to eat his dinner. “He feels... right. I can’t really explain it, but he feels like mine. And if I do this, it’ll solve a lot of problems. For everyone.”

His dad sighed, rubbing one hand over his mouth, and as much as Stiles knew he supported his relationship with Derek, he could tell he also had some reservations. Probably because Stiles himself had had so many before, but things had changed.

Things were okay now. And he’d been thinking about this a lot for months, and even more the past few weeks. He and Derek worked, they fit. So there was no point in hurting him by making him wait for something that would happen eventually.

He’d seen first-hand how hard it had been the night before. How much Derek had wanted to claim him, but he hadn’t. Because Stiles hadn’t said he could. Derek respected him, and cared about him, and really, wasn’t that the most important thing?

“I just don’t want you to do something you’ll regret,” his dad finally said. “Or resent him for.”

“We’re not actually getting married,” Stiles reminded him.

“You’re right.” He crossed his arms, leaning back in his seat and raising his eyebrows knowingly. “As I understand it, it’s more absolute. You can get a divorce if you get married, this isn’t something you can break off without consequences.”

Stiles lowered his gaze, staring at the knife he was still playing with. It reminded him of the fact he’d had to injure Merrak to get him out of handcuffs and he pushed it away, setting both hands in his lap instead. “I know.”

“I just want you to be sure.” He reached out to pat Stiles’ cheek. “It’s a big commitment.”

Stiles snorted and rolled his eyes, crossing his own arms and slouching slightly. “If Bella Swan was sure she wanted to marry Edward and be a Vampire at eighteen, I’m sure I can Werewolf marry Derek at twenty-two.”
“You and Bella have very different histories with your intended,” his father said, giving him a knowing look.

Stiles pretended to gag at the words ‘your intended,’ because gross. But also, hilarious. His dad clearly knew nothing about Edward Cullen.


“Royalty?” His dad countered, crossing his arms again. “Mates? She was madly in love with him from the start and you were avoiding him for a long time?”

Wait. Wait, did that... Did that mean what he thought it meant?!

Holy shit, it did!

Stiles gaped at his father, who just stared back at him without a word. He opened his mouth, closed it, then shook his head after a few seconds of letting that sink in.

“You know I’m trying to be surprised you’ve read *Twilight*, but somehow, I’m falling short on that.”

The sheriff rolled his eyes. “I haven’t read it,” he countered. “There’s movies, you know.”

Stiles squinted at him. “Somehow, that seems worse.”

“Stiles,” he said, exasperated. “I just want you to be sure.”

“I’m sure,” he insisted. “I’m sure.”

His dad eyed him for a few seconds, then sighed and dragged one hand down his face before nodding. “All right, then.”

Stiles nodded back, and they didn’t talk about it again.

“Why is your mom asking me to go to dinner at a restaurant with her and my dad?” Stiles asked, squinting at his phone while Merrak wrestled his way into the Jeep, like he always did.

“Because you’re fat and she needs to monitor your food intake.”

“Says the guy with a gut. How many pieces of pie did you eat yesterday, because it wasn’t one, let me tell you.”

Merrak punched him hard in the arm while slamming the door shut, but Stiles barely felt it considering he often got punched by people a lot stronger. He texted back that he was free for dinner and he’d meet her at the restaurant with his dad, then shoved his phone back into his pocket.

Shifting into drive, he eased away from the curb and started the drive back to the Hale house, Merrak still fiddling with his crutches beside him.

“So how’re things going with your new buddy?”

Merrak gave him a scathing look, but Stiles just waited to see if he’d actually admit he and this Tyler guy were getting along. Merrak wasn’t big on sharing, but little by little, Stiles was chipping
away at that brick wall he had up to keep people out.

“Fine,” Merrak finally muttered, slouching in his seat, then hissing and straightening since he’d obviously hurt his leg. “His dad’s taking him to see the new *Zombieland* movie next week. Might go with him.”

“You like Zombies?” Stiles asked, smiling a little.

“I like how ridiculous Zombie movies are. Very little in common with what real Zombies are like.”

“Yeah, maybe don’t, uh, tell him that.”

Merrak gave him a look that clearly said, “I’m not an idiot, unlike you,” and really, Stiles’ self-esteem was going to plummet with how often people called him dumb lately.

“How’s your leg?” he asked, just to keep Merrak talking, since he didn’t do much of it outside of insulting people.

“Hurts like a bitch, thanks for asking.”

“Healing up okay though? It’s been a while since it broke, cast should be due to come off soon.”

“Laura said it wasn’t healing right so she and mom re-broke it a few weeks back,” he muttered, reaching down to touch the cast absently. “It should be okay before Halloween.”

“That’s good,” Stiles said, though felt a little sick at the thought of Laura and Talia re-breaking his leg. He couldn’t imagine what kind of strength that required, seeing their brother and son in pain and forcibly snapping the bones again. He was sure they’d sucked his pain, but that didn’t last forever.

Stiles felt guilty Merrak had been the one injured during their kidnapping, considering he could heal, now. Sort of. Kind of.

Well, only with Derek’s help for now, but on his own once he was claimed.

Apparently.

They bantered a bit for the rest of the drive home, Stiles easing to a stop in front of the house and waving at one of the other pack members who was gardening. She waved back with a brilliant smile, and he watched Merrak climb out with his crutches.

“Try not to overeat tonight,” he said, snatching his bag out of the back. “Your fat ass won’t fit in the Jeep anymore.”

“Love you too, Merrak,” he called after him when he slammed the door and hobbled his way to the house.

Stiles backed out and headed home, arriving in time to walk into the house and see his dad standing in the hall struggling to tie his tie. He turned to give Stiles a look when he started to smirk.

“Not a word. It’s been a long time since I’ve had to wear one of these.”

“You wear one every time you get re-elected as Sheriff,” Stiles insisted, moving over to him and slapping his hands away so he could tie it for him.

“It’s a clip-on.”
“I’m ashamed of you,” Stiles informed him, finishing up and patting his dad’s shoulder before heading for the stairs to shower and change. “Do you know what this is about?”

“I was hoping you could tell me,” his father called up after him.

Stiles didn’t worry about it while he got undressed and hopped into the shower. He doubted Talia was going to be taking them to a fancy restaurant to drop another bomb about some monster in town trying to suck all of Stiles’ bone marrow or something.

He showered and dressed quickly, wearing some of the clothes Cora and Jackson had bought him when he’d been planning his first real date with Derek. Once he was ready, he and his father sat watching TV for a little while until they could reasonably make their way to the restaurant.

They took the cruiser, Stiles kind of happy for someone else to drive, since he’d been doing a lot of it lately. They spoke about work and school, catching up on the past few days since their last visit, and pulled into the restaurant’s lot with almost ten minutes to spare.

When they walked in, Stiles could tell his dad felt as uncomfortable as he did. It was one of the fancier places in the area, and everyone he saw was wearing really elaborate outfits that made Stiles feel underdressed. Even the host at the front gave them unimpressed once-overs while they approached, which Stiles hated but didn’t comment on.

They weren’t in Beacon Hills, so the man had no idea his dad was the sheriff, otherwise he’d definitely be more respectful.

“Can I help you?” he asked, still giving them a bit of the stink eye.

His dad didn’t seem to notice. Well, no, Stiles was sure he did notice, but he was too polite to say anything.

“We’re here to meet someone,” his dad said. The look he got said, “I doubt it,” more clearly than if the host had flat out spoken the words. The rudeness vanished the second his father added, “Reservation under Talia Hale.”

“Oh.” His entire demeanour changed, which pissed Stiles off, but he tried to reign in his temper while the man tripped over himself to get them menus and lead them quickly to their table. Stiles sometimes forgot that, while Talia was a Queen in the Supernatural world, she was also the richest person in the area and owned a majority of Beacon County. Everyone in the vicinity of their town knew who the Hales were, and how influential they could be.

When they were walked through the tables towards the back window, a nice view of an illuminated forest visible through the large floor to ceiling glass, Stiles realized Talia wasn’t alone.

She’d come with Michael, and Derek. No one else, though.

The host motioned their table with flourish and Stiles nodded awkwardly to Derek before taking a seat beside him. Derek just smiled, clearly as confused about the dinner as Stiles was, but happy to see him nonetheless.

“Michael,” the sheriff said, reaching across the table to shake his hand. “Talia.” He did the same to her.

“Thank you for coming, sheriff. I know it was short notice, but Michael and I have been talking about this for the past week and we didn’t want to keep procrastinating.”
“Not a problem, always nice to spend some time with you both.” He nodded to Derek. “Derek.”

“Sheriff,” he responded with a smile. “Been a while.”

“Whole two hours,” his dad teased. “Can’t escape you, no matter where I go.”

“I’d apologize, but it would be insincere,” he admitted.

Stiles’ dad laughed, shaking his head, and then picked up his menu, looking back at Talia and asking her what was good to drink. The adults chatted in low tones amongst themselves, leaving Stiles and Derek to each other’s company.

Which was fine, if not a little awkward, since Stiles wasn’t exactly interested in making out with Derek or anything with their parents right beside them.

“Rumour has it Merrak made a friend,” Derek said with an amused smile.

“You know, I think he did.” Stiles grinned. “Some guy in his class people make fun of for playing Pokemon-Go. He said he seemed nice when we spoke over the summer, so I told him he had to get his name on the first day. Sounds like they’re hanging out a bit at school, and might go out over the weekend soon, too.”

“You have no idea how huge that is,” Derek admitted quietly. “Merrak’s always been problematic, and when we came back, we all thought he’d spend the last two years of high school miserable.”

“I mean, it’s high school, you’re supposed to be miserable,” Stiles offered, smiling a little.

Derek laughed, fingers playing with the stem of his wine glass, eyes on the liquid inside. “True. But Merrak’s always been a bit quick to anger. I guess we’re all relieved whatever you two talk about has him calming down a bit.”

“I just don’t want him to be lonely.” Stiles shrugged. “It sucks. I would know, I’ve been there.”

Derek glanced at him again. “Not anymore.”

“Hard to be lonely with a pack breathing down my neck,” he teased. Derek smiled and took a sip of his drink.

When the waiter came around and introduced himself, he got Stiles and the sheriff’s drink orders before disappearing again. They chit chatted for a little while, catching up on things since they’d last met up, Stiles still super shocked at the fact that Michael and his dad went golfing every now and then with Chris Argent.

They talked a bit about Chris’ attempts to find his father and sister, since he’d been one of the first to find out about the escape. He’d called the sheriff only a minute after the prison had to notify him so that the pack would be safe.

It didn’t end up helping, but it was the thought that counted, and proved just how deep the Hunters’ influence went if Chris knew almost before the prison did about his father and sister.

When the waiter came back and took their food orders, Talia watched the man walk away before nodding and smoothing her napkin out on her lap, clearing her throat. Derek cocked an eyebrow, but Michael just waited for his wife to speak.

“This is very strange, given it’s being done out of order,” she admitted. “This is normally the
dinner where we explain who we are, what we are, what your son is to ours. But we’ve already discussed all of that.” She smiled slightly. “So I suppose the purpose of this dinner is more to ask for your blessing.”

Derek straightened instantly, and Stiles guessed he had no idea what the dinner had been about. And really, a heads up would’ve been nice, since Stiles had admitted to Talia that he was going to tell Derek about the claiming, he just hadn’t yet.

Not exactly procrastinating, but more just... trying to find the right moment. Though maybe there wasn’t a right moment for this kind of thing, and maybe tradition dictated that before it happened Talia and his dad had to talk or whatever.

Stiles very carefully didn’t look at Derek, even though he could feel his eyes burning into the side of his skull.

“My blessing,” the sheriff said slowly.

“Stiles has informed me that he is going to accept Derek’s claim.” Oh yeah, Derek was definitely about to lose his shit beside him. “As his father, it’s only right that we ensure you are in agreement.” She turned to Derek. “Derek?”

He seemed to start at being addressed and thankfully shifted his gaze off Stiles to look at the sheriff.

“I’ll be good to him.”

“Oh God.” Stiles covered his face with both hands. “If I’d known it would be this embarrassing, I would’ve stayed home.”

“Wolves have to prove their worth,” Michael said before Derek continued. “Cover your ears if you don’t want to listen.”

Stiles was actually tempted, but he managed to resist, covering his face and positively dying from the second-hand embarrassment. He listened to Derek talk about how he could provide for him, how he’d treat him right, how he wouldn’t ever let anyone hurt him again. He’d be cared for, he’d be loved, and cherished, and that he was Derek’s everything and he would lay down his life for him if Stiles asked him to.

It was sweet, but so, so embarrassing and Stiles just wanted to die. He had no idea how Derek could say it all with a straight face, but figured it was just one of those wolf things he’d never understand.

Derek had just inhaled to continue with this embarrassing ode to Stiles when his dad, mercifully, said, “Stop.”

Stiles peeked through his fingers and saw the sheriff holding one hand out. He looked as embarrassed as Stiles felt.

Letting his hands slide off his face, Stiles saw Talia and Michael looked stiff, and Derek’s face crumpled slightly, and he realized they had it wrong.

They thought his dad was rejecting this. They didn’t realize he just wanted Derek to shut up before they all died of embarrassment.

Thankfully, he continued relatively quickly, and Stiles saw Talia relax and let out a slow breath.
“Son, I have no doubt that you’re going to treat him right. I’ve never doubted that for a second from the moment your mother told me what he was to you. This isn’t up to me, it’s up to Stiles. He’s made his decision, and I’ll respect it. You’re a good man, Derek. If you think you can survive having Stiles for a mate, he’s all yours.”

“Hey!” Stiles insisted, punching at his dad’s shoulder. “You started out so nice, too.”

The sheriff smiled at him, reaching out to ruffle his hair, and Stiles just smacked his hand away, annoyed. He knew he was just joking, but still! Derek had—embarrassingly—poured his heart out, the least his dad could do was not ruin it by making it sound like he was happy to be rid of him!

Stiles jumped when Derek was suddenly out of his seat, watching him walk around behind his chair and hold a hand out to his dad.

“Thank you, sheriff. You won’t regret this.”

“I know,” he said, taking his hand and shaking it, then smiled and added, “but you might.”

Stiles let out another offended noise, but his dad just laughed and patted his shoulder once Derek released his hand. He sat back down in his seat, and he looked lighter than Stiles had ever seen him. Clearly, knowing Stiles did want him, truly wanted him, was like a weight had been lifted off his shoulders.

“Forgive my ignorance,” the sheriff said, looking at Talia who seemed pleased as punch, “but is there... a ceremony? Anything like that?”

“Well, normally the claiming occurs at the mate’s time of choosing, and once they’re bound it’s announced to the Council. The Council will either come here, or Derek and Stiles will go there so they can verify the claim, and once they’ve done that, they then notify the Alphas. The Alphas, in turn, will pay their respects by way of gifts.”

“Some have already started,” Michael added. “Which is against tradition, but I suppose nothing about this situation has been traditional.”

“Once the gift-giving has occurred, it will be up to Stiles and Derek if they want to get married or continue as partners. If there’s a wedding, it will have to be in New York with the Council in attendance. If not, they continue as normal here.”

“Why would the Council have to come to our wedding?” Stiles asked, and he noticed Derek shift with interest, like he was enjoying discussions of getting married.

Stiles was fine with the claiming, but marriage would happen way down the line. He wanted to at least have a solid career going before tying the knot with Derek. They could survive being common-law for a few years, he was sure.

“It’s a precaution,” Michael said, taking Talia’s hand and squeezing it. “If the Hale Alpha dies, the mate is in charge until the next Hale Alpha comes of age. It puts a lot of power into the mate’s hands, and they like knowing there is a commitment.”

“So wouldn’t not getting married be a bad sign?” Stiles asked slowly.

“They would frown on it, but that isn’t their decision.” Talia’s shoulder shrug was somehow elegant, and he wondered how long it had taken her to perfect that. “If you and Derek are happier unmarried, that is your decision. The only matter of importance is the claim.”
“So once they’ve completed that, you’ll notify the Council?” the sheriff asked.

“Not exactly,” Talia said with a small smile.

Derek turned to her, looking distressed and about to argue, but Talia held up her hand to silence him.

“Stiles made a good point when we spoke about it. If the claim were to occur, it would be an advantage if no one knew about it. Stiles would have some enhanced senses, but nobody else would know that. Deucalion is still a threat, as is Gerard Argent. Having a claimed mate and not knowing it would be advantageous for us.”

“But wouldn’t they stop coming for him if they knew he was claimed?” the sheriff asked.

“Not these people, no. It would force them to recalculate their plans, but they would still come. And in this manner, we would have the upper hand. It would be safer for Stiles.”

“So, he would be claimed, but no one would know about it.”

“As long as we can possibly keep it hidden, yes.”

“How are we going to do that when everyone will see it?” Derek asked.

“You’re gonna bite me somewhere else,” Stiles said. Derek looked surprised and Stiles shrugged. “It’s the bite that matters, not the location. For now, you bite me somewhere else. If you want to bite me in the neck after this is all over, then you can.”

“I don’t care where I bite you, as long as I get to.”

Talia seemed pleased with this answer, as if happy she knew her son well enough to have reassured Stiles of that very same thing.

Stiles just nodded once, and he could tell Derek was examining every inch of him, like he was trying to think about the best place to bite him. Stiles just hoped he remembered it was his body being scarred, and he definitely deserved some input on where said scar was going to be.

“Thank you,” Talia said after a brief silence. She was speaking to the sheriff, but was looking at Stiles when she said it. He figured this was her just being appreciative of the fact that Stiles had finally gotten his head out of his ass.

He nodded once, not sure of what else to say, and was thankfully saved from any more awkwardness by their food arriving. Conversation moved away from the Supernatural after that, Michael and his dad talking about golf and the next game they were scheduled to play, and Talia politely listening despite being clearly uninterested.

Derek’s hand found Stiles’ thigh under the table and squeezed. Stiles just rolled his eyes, but still moved one hand beneath the table as well and squeezed back.

Stiles knew that the Hale siblings were well aware something was going on. Derek was probably prancing around the house, throwing rose petals in his wake and singing a melody like some kind of embarrassing Disney princess. The second Stiles picked Cora and Eric up the following morning after having spent the night at home with his dad and Kincaid, since Derek had insisted being close to him right now was a bad idea given what he knew he could do, both of them were immediately suspicious and asking him what the hell he’d done to their brother.
He was sure they’d figure it out before long, but they wouldn’t see his mark so while they’d know he was going to be claimed, they wouldn’t know when. That was the important thing, since this entire plan hinged on nobody knowing when he was officially claimed barring him and Derek.

Even Talia had said she didn’t want to know. It was just safer that way.

Stiles knew Derek wanted to do it ohmyGodrightfuckingnow, but Stiles wanted to wait a little bit. He’d been a little blind-sided about the conversation at dinner, and while he knew Talia hadn’t done it for any reason other than because it was tradition, she seemed to recognize after the fact that Stiles hadn’t been brave enough to tell Derek yet.

For now, they were going to keep some distance between them in a more private setting. Stiles was still going to join him for dinner after school today, and they’d still see one another like normal, but no more sleeping alone at the loft, and no more sleepovers at Stiles’ place.

Just for a bit. Stiles didn’t have plans to wait too long, he just needed a bit of breathing room.

It took two days for the Hale siblings to stop asking, and even then, he felt it was either because Talia had told them off, or because they’d figured it out on their own. He suspected it was the former for Cora and Merrak, since they were grumpy and annoyed, but he felt like Eric had clued in fairly quickly. He was the smartest of all of them, and he always had these private little smiles on his face whenever he thought nobody was looking at him.

Laura had figured it out, too. Stiles knew this because of the day he’d walked into the house after school to spend the night and she’d rushed him, hugging him so tightly he thought she might break his spine and rocking him from side to side.

She didn’t say anything, but her reaction was enough.

When the weekend was looming, Stiles asked his dad when Derek was scheduled so he could determine the best day to do this. He figured it would be best right before bed, on a day where neither of them had to worry about commitments the next day since Michael had been kind enough to inform him it was a bit intense, but Derek was working nights the whole weekend.

He wasn’t sure what his dad got out of their conversation, because he called back an hour later and said he’d switched out Tara and Derek so that Derek was working the afternoon shift on Saturday and would have Sunday off. Stiles thanked him for it, and then promptly panicked before insisting he was being stupid.

Texting Derek to tell him he would see him at the loft on Saturday, he got a very curt, “I’ll be there,” in response, and figured Derek was struggling to keep in control.

Stiles spent Friday night with Jackson, Scott, Kira and Cora. They went out to see a movie, and then Cora and Jackson convinced Stiles to go to Jungle for a few hours. He decided to do it, if only to let loose a little bit, but was very firm that he would not get drunk. The last thing he wanted to do was have a hangover during whatever was coming.

He took longer than usual falling asleep that night, and spent a majority of his morning trying to occupy his mind with other things. Jackson and Scott had been keeping him up to date on the few monsters that had come into town—who knew they hadn’t known about them before the pack merge because the Hale pack was getting rid of them all?—and he decided to spend a few hours researching them and beefing up his collection of Supernatural weirdness.

He had lunch with his dad at the diner down the street from the station, and while he knew his dad
was positive today was the day, he very wisely said nothing and just hugged Stiles before heading back into the precinct.

Stiles headed over to the loft a little after four with some groceries and a few movies. He figured they could have a nice relaxing night in, and if things were as intense tomorrow as Michael was suggesting, it would probably be best to let Stiles not exist for a while, and movies helped with that.

Setting the movies and snacks down on the coffee table in the living room, Stiles went into the kitchen and started opening and closing cupboards in an attempt to find what he needed to make flatbread pizza.

He’d have liked to just buy a frozen one and eat that, but it felt like a cop-out and he needed something to distract himself until Derek got home, so making flatbread from scratch was the better option.

He’d finished with the dough and was in the process of putting the different toppings on the two flatbreads since he and Derek wanted different things when the loft door slid open. He resolutely kept his eyes on what he was doing, jerking and almost elbowing Derek when the Werewolf came up behind him, one hand pressed to his side and his lips at his temple.

“I could get used to coming home to this.”

“Don’t get sappy,” he insisted, elbowing him on purpose this time. “And get out of your uniform, it reminds me of my dad and I don’t need that.”

Derek just laughed and kissed him again before pulling away and heading out of the kitchen. Stiles heard him tinkering around for a little bit, and then the shower cut on. He figured Derek had the same thought as him earlier, since Stiles had also showered before heading over.

The flatbreads were in the oven by the time Derek came back out, Stiles sitting on the couch and watching the first five minutes of Avengers: Infinity War. Derek moved up behind him, bracing his hands on the back of the couch on either side of Stiles’ head, watching the TV over his shoulder.

“Why are you nervous?”

“You’re not nervous?” Stiles demanded.

“Terrified. But excited.”

“Hey, I’m excited,” Stiles insisted, turning to glare up at him. Derek took the opportunity to bend down and steal a kiss. “This year has just been a lot, is all.”

“Yeah. Sorry.”

Stiles shrugged and stretched, then patted the spot beside him. Derek vaulted over the back of the couch, settling in beside him and pulling him against his side, the two of them watching the screen while the beginning of the movie unfolded.

When Stiles’ phone timer went off, he headed into the kitchen to get the flatbreads out of the oven, setting them on two plates and bringing them back to the couch. Derek took his with a thanks and they both ate in silence while they watched the movie.

It was comfortable, and having Derek close to him was helping to ease his nerves somewhat. He didn’t even know why he was nervous. He supposed it was mostly about what was coming after.
He didn’t want to be a Werewolf, he liked being human, but being Derek’s claimed mate meant he would have some Werewolf qualities. Sure, it would be good ones, and he wasn’t complaining, but it would be weird. Different.

He’d spent his whole life being mocked for being weird, and different. He didn’t really want that to be literal, now.

When they finished their flatbread, Derek went to get dessert. Stiles had just bought ice cream since he didn’t know what else to get, and they ate it while they finished up the movie. Once it was done, Derek put in another one, though he needn’t have bothered since they got distracted halfway through anyway.

Stiles had leaned back into him and kissed his jaw, and that had led to Derek kissing down the side of his face and sucking on his neck, which had led to Stiles turning around so they could kiss properly, and it was all downhill from there.

They ended up making out and grinding on the couch with Scotty yelling about how he was ‘giving it all he’s got’ to Captain Kirk. The movie ended at some point during Stiles’ first and second orgasm, and he was starting to get annoyed about how often he seemed to soil his pants in Derek’s presence.

“You know this would be easier without the clothes on, right?” Stiles insisted.

“You trying to get me naked, Stilinski?” Derek bit lightly at his jaw, seeming pleased with himself since he’d only come once.

Showoff.

“I showered for this, you know.”

“Me too,” Derek insisted with a laugh. When he pulled back, Stiles watched him pull out his phone to check the time. He let out another laugh and shoved it back into his pocket, bending down and bracketing Stiles’ head between his forearms on the couch. “We should head up. It’s late.”

“Nine isn’t late, old man.”

“It’s almost eleven.”

“Oh.”

Derek laughed again, kissed him once, then stood. Stiles followed suit, wincing at the grossness in his pants. They headed upstairs, but Stiles knew he couldn’t stay like this, so he grabbed clean boxers and insisted he was going to clean up. He wasn’t planning on showering, just cleaning up so things weren’t gross in a few hours.

Cum was very unpleasant to get out of, well, anything.

He went to the bathroom and ended up in the shower, but only to rinse himself off and clean up downstairs before stepping back out and pulling on the fresh boxers, feeling much better. When he opened the door, Derek was there again, and said he should probably do the same since he didn’t want to sleep with cum in his pants.

Stiles dumped his clothes in the washing machine after emptying his pockets, then headed upstairs in his boxers and went to lie down. The bed was warm, and soft, something he’d commented on numerous times since Derek had brought him there. He really liked how the sheets felt against his
skin, and he rolled onto his stomach, pulling his pillow closer and hugging it beneath his cheek before closing his eyes.

He didn’t mean to doze, but Derek took forever and Stiles ended up in that weird state between being asleep and being awake. He grunted himself back into consciousness when a weight fell on top of him, Derek’s skin still damp like he’d been in too much of a hurry to dry off.

“T ook you long enough,” he muttered.

“ I was in there for five minutes.”

“ Nope. Lie. Ten thousand years.”

“You look great for an old man,” he teased, kissing the back of his neck, then resting more comfortably on his back.

They were both silent for a long while, but Stiles could feel Derek’s heart pounding into his back, and he knew how excited he was to do this. How long he’d waited for this moment. He didn’t want to delay it any longer, it would be a dick move, so he inhaled deeply, held it, then let it out.

“ S o. Any ideas?”

“O n where to bite you?”

“N o, on where I should get a tattoo, yes on where to bite me!”

Derek’s breathing was coming faster, and the way his heart was slamming into Stiles’ back made him wonder just how hard all of this must’ve been for him. Stiles had just been sitting back, humming whether or not he wanted to be the Alpha heir’s mate. Meanwhile, Derek had been forced to wait and hope for the best.

He felt kind of bad now.

He tensed slightly at the fingers brushing along his right shoulderblade, the action a little ticklish, and felt Derek’s breath on his skin there.

“Shoulderblade?”

“T oo close to the neck, might as well advertise it,” he argued.

Derek laughed, but kissed the spot he’d been breathing on, hands at Stiles’ waist. He kissed his way down his spine, squeezing at his sides, and pulled the blankets off. Stiles resisted the urge to squawk, because it was cold without a Werewolf heater, but he managed to stop himself. Derek’s hands slid smoothly from his sides, over his ass, and down along the backs of his thighs.

“Inner thigh?”

“I feel like that would be uncomfortable,” he admitted, though probably one of the more ideal locations, considering how hidden it was. If they didn’t find anything better, that would be it, he supposed.

Derek hummed his understanding, hands sliding back up and squeezing his ass. “Could always bite you in the butt.”

“I’m Werewolf divorcing you if you bite me in the ass,” he insisted, looking over his shoulder and glaring. Derek laughed, but let his hands rise, gripping his waist again, his body sliding up with it.
He ended up tilting his head so his chin was resting right above one of his hands on his side.

“What about here? On your side?”

Stiles thought about it, but then felt like any time someone lifted his shirt, even a little by accident, it would be seen. He wanted something kind of intimate, that no one should see except for Derek, but not on his leg where he would feel the scar since it would rub every time he walked.

Derek wasn’t allowed to use his healing during or after the bite, since it was supposed to heal up on its own. Michael assured him it would be healed up by morning though, since his own healing abilities would kick in by then, so maybe the inner thigh wasn’t a terrible idea. It was intimate, anyway, and he felt like maybe it would help Derek with the fact that he wouldn’t have a bite somewhere obvious like everyone else did.

He was about to concede defeat and say to bite him there when another thought occurred to him. He thought about the moment he’d fully decided to belong to Derek, about what had happened between them to make everyone know he’d agreed to be his mate, even though Stiles himself hadn’t realized it at the time.

“Let me roll over.”

Derek obediently lifted his weight, Stiles squirming around under him until he was on his back. Derek loomed over him, eyes electric blue, but the rest of his features human. Stiles waited for him to lower himself a bit so he wasn’t resting all of his weight on his hands, then grabbed his left hand and brought it down to press against his ribs on the right side. Derek’s eyes lowered to his hand, then back up to Stiles’ face.

“There? That’s going to hurt.”

“Not as much as the broken ribs did,” he countered, then shrugged. “It means something. It’s important. That’s the first injury you managed to heal for me, I like the significance of it.”

Derek seemed to hesitate, eyes shifting back and forth between where his hand was and Stiles’ face.

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah.” Stiles forced a smile and punched him in the shoulder. “Come on, big guy. Don’t tell me you’re chickening out.”

He got a real look for that, but then Derek bent down to kiss him. Stiles tilted his head up, trying to chase his lips when Derek pulled away, then eventually fell back onto the bed with a slow breath. He grabbed the pillow beside him, pulled it up over his face, crossed his arms over it and clenched his eyes shut.

Letting out a muffled agreement when Derek asked if he was ready, he tried not to tense, but knew he wasn’t succeeding. He was sure other human mates didn’t react like this, but in his defence, someone had already bitten him to the point of drawing blood, so this was his second time experiencing it. Others didn’t have that, they had the one time and boom, done.

Stiles felt Derek pulling at his skin a bit, like he was trying to get it away from his ribs a little, and then his breath ghosted over it. He tensed when Derek started to bite down, but forced himself to breathe through it.

Surprisingly, it... didn’t really hurt. Yes, it hurt, but nowhere near as much as Kate’s had, which he
found odd, but maybe it was another one of those weird Werewolf mate connection things. He and Derek already had weird shit going on, maybe this was another thing for him to just roll with.

He winced when Derek’s teeth sank in further, because yay, this was super fun and he totally imagined it being a lot sexier than this. It probably would’ve been if it had been his neck. Have a little happy time, maybe some actual frottling with their dicks touching for realsies, and then Derek just bit him in the throes of passion. But no, because Stiles had to have the brilliant idea of it being somewhere non-visible, he got to lie on his back with a pillow over his face trying to suffocate himself while Derek bit at his ribcage.

When the pressure eased off and Derek’s tongue laved over the wound, Stiles released his death grip on the pillow and slowly pulled it off his face, looking down himself. Derek had pulled back and tilted his head, staring down at it.

“That it?” he asked.

“I think so,” Derek said. “I think it’s deep enough.”

They sat in silence.

“I don’t feel anything,” Stiles informed him.

“Me neither.” He hesitated. “Maybe it’s—should I bite harder?”

Stiles shrugged expansively and Derek kept staring at the bitemark. Eventually, he reached out to run his fingers over it, Stiles’ stomach clenching at how ticklish it felt. He traced the pattern of his blunt teeth just above and below the bitemark, then shook his head and crawled up the rest of the way, falling down beside Stiles.

“Let’s just wait and see what happens. If it didn’t work, we’ll try again some other time.”

“Okay.” Stiles sat up, the wound twinging slightly, but not painful, and grabbed at the sheets Derek had yanked off him. He pulled them back up and then curled onto his side into Derek, closing his eyes and settling in for the night. Derek chuckled, wrapping an arm around his shoulders and kissing whatever part of his forehead he could reach.

They were both silent for a moment, Stiles slowly dozing off while Derek let his fingers brush across his bare shoulder, back and forth, back and forth.

“Thank you,” Derek finally said.

“No problem,” he mumbled. Then added, “For what?”

“Giving me a chance. Giving this a chance. I know it’s not what you were expecting when you protected Eric, and I know it would’ve happened regardless once you hit high school, but... thanks. For not cutting me out entirely, for seeing if this would work. I don’t even know how to begin to describe how happy I am right now.”

“Don’t get so happy yet, we don’t even know if it worked.”

“Doesn’t matter, you let me do it. That means a lot.”

Stiles hummed, but then his own words began to worm into his chest, filling him with doubt. Derek obviously sensed it, because his hand stilled and he asked him what was wrong.
“What if it’s me?” he asked, tilting his head up to look at Derek. He could see up his nose, and normally he’d joke about it, but the doubt clawing at his chest made it less funny than usual. “What if I’m the problem? Maybe I’m—what if you’re wrong? What if I’m not your mate?”

His head jerked back when Derek flicked his forehead, the action much more painful than a flick had any right to be. But then, Werewolf, so it made sense.

“It’s you. Don’t be stupid. It’s always been you. If it didn’t work, it’s because of me. Or maybe even because of where the bite is. Who knows? If it didn’t work, we’ll just try again.” He kissed him on the forehead once more. “Now shut up and go to sleep.”

“Bossy,” he muttered, but shifted back into a comfortable position, head resting against one of Derek’s arms and closing his eyes.

He wasn’t broken, he knew he wasn’t. It was just... taking a bit to click, that was all. By morning, it would have worked.

By morning, it would be official.

Stiles propelled himself out of bed, heart slamming against his ribs and eyes wide and panicked while he half-stumbled, half-fell out of the bed. He heard Derek say his name, clearly startled, but Stiles just kept looking around, trying to figure out what the fuck was going on.

It sounded like something was coming. Something big and—metallic? Yeah, no, that sounded like a monster truck or something. Or a tank?

“Stiles!” Derek insisted when he rushed for the stairs, going down them so fast he almost fell.

It literally sounded like there was a fucking crane or something outside, about to bulldoze through the building, killing them both. Jesus Christ, could Derek not fucking hear it?! He had bionic hearing, he was a Werewolf!

Stiles stumbled towards the large floor to ceiling windows, heart pounding so hard it was actually starting to hurt. His eyes darted back and forth, trying to find the threat, and then a fucking bird was right there and he shouted and stumbled backwards.

Derek had caught up to him by now and saved him from falling on his ass, but he didn’t understand what was happening, where the fuck was that noise coming from?

“Stiles!” Derek’s hands were on either side of his head and he gave it a rough shake, looking worried. “Stiles, listen to me. Focus on my voice.”

“What is that?” he demanded, hands clutching at Derek’s biceps, blunt nails digging into his skin. “Derek, what the fuck!”

“Just focus on my voice. It’s okay, just listen to me and focus. Listen to my voice. It’s okay.”

Stiles’ breathing was erratic and his heart was still pounding in his chest, but he just stared at Derek’s lips, forced himself to listen to the words coming out of his mouth, and everything else slowly faded into the background. The loud rumbling threat he could hear was disappearing, and eventually the only things he could hear were the fridge, the bathroom fan, and Derek’s calming voice.

They stayed like that for a few minutes, Stiles trying to get his breathing back under control, nails
still digging into Derek’s arms while his boyfriend continued to speak to him as calmly as possible.

When Stiles shifted his gaze from Derek’s lips to his eyes, it felt like he could see every individual speck of colour in his irises. It was like he’d been living his entire life in standard definition and woken up in high def mode.

Once he managed to calm down, his breathing less like laboured pants, he loosened his grip on Derek’s arms and said, “Well, I guess it worked.”

“Yeah,” Derek said, letting out a short laugh. “Yeah, I’d say so.”

“What was that noise? I swear the army was coming for us.”

Derek tilted his head, likely trying to locate the source. “Sounds like a garbage truck.”

He supposed it made sense, it had sounded huge and metallic. And now that Derek wasn’t talking, the noises were starting to get louder, and the outside world was getting smaller and he started smacking at Derek’s chest insistently.

“Keep talking. Keep talking!”

“It takes some getting used to, it’s why dad said you should have a day to recover,” Derek said, releasing his head and bringing his hands down to Stiles’ shoulders. “It’s only supposed to be this bad for the first few hours, the bond solidifying. Once that’s passed, you won’t be able to hear as much. It’ll be easier to control and tune things out.”

“Oh God, I’m like, the most obsessive person in the world, I’m going to focus on one thing and obsess over it forever, why did anyone think me being able to hear this well was a good idea?!”

“Stiles,” Derek insisted with a small laugh, giving him a firm shake. “You’re gonna be fine. You’re the most adaptable person I know, you can do this. And if you really can’t handle it, I’ll call dad. We can tell one person about this, if we have to, but I know you can do this.”

Stiles groaned, burying his face in Derek’s bare chest, and smacking him when he just laughed and hugged him tightly. This was going to be so fucking weird.

“What time is it, anyway?” he muttered, voice muffled.

“Just after eight.”

“Ugh.” Stiles whined loudly. “It’s Sunday. Sunday is for sleep. This is terrible!”

“Then let’s go back to sleep.”

“You seriously think I can sleep after that heart attack?”

“We can do something else, if you’d rather.”

Stiles smacked his ass, but didn’t deny him. Maybe he could try and sleep, and if it didn’t work, well, they could do the hanky panky. Or some version of the hanky panky, anyway.

They stayed in the living room hugging for a little bit, Stiles trying to keep his focus mostly on the fridge. It fluctuated a bit, trying to focus on things outside, but he managed to reign it back in fairly well, so that was comforting. He couldn’t imagine how crazy this had all been for Scott and Jackson, suddenly going from nothing to this. He really hoped Derek was right and it mellowed out in a few hours, because he didn’t like this, not one bit.
Derek kissed him lightly, then tugged to get him moving, the two of them heading back upstairs. Derek waited for Stiles to crawl back into bed first, then climbed in beside him, putting most of his weight on top of Stiles and turning his head so he had his ear pressed against Stiles’ chest right above his heart. Stiles brought his hands up and buried them in Derek’s hair, petting him while he stared at the ceiling, trying to keep his hearing under control.

He jerked slightly when his eyes went all weird again, like the ceiling was collapsing on him and the light right there, but he forced himself to take a breath and clenched his eyes shut. When he opened them again, the ceiling was exactly where it was meant to be.

Derek fell asleep on top of him, snoring softly, and Stiles just spent the next hour trying to get a handle on what the fuck was going on with him. Listening to Derek’s breathing—and snoring—as well as the fridge downstairs was helping him stay focussed, and he played around with it a little bit. He figured it was no different than a muscle, something he could control with minimal effort once he understood how it worked. His ears were easier than his eyes, because he had the hearing range down after the first hour. That, or it was already starting to mellow out, which it might’ve been since he felt like he couldn’t hear quite as far as he could when he’d woken up.

Which was fine, he didn’t need to hear for miles, just enough to know when someone was following him, or after him, or whatever.

His eyes were much harder. He kept squinting, like that would help zoom in and out, but it didn’t. It just stayed the same, or unexpectedly zoomed in like crazy and he couldn’t get it to zoom back out again. Eventually, the best he could do was clench his eyes shut between zooming in and out. When he did that, they seemed to balance a little bit and it allowed him to go from one to the other. Not ideal, but better than it had been.

Stiles was wide awake now, and in desperate need of the bathroom. It was hard extricating himself from Derek—apparently he was a Werewolf and an octopus—but he finally managed it and headed back downstairs.

Relieving himself and brushing his teeth, he was wiping his hands when his eyes caught sight of the bitemark in the mirror. He raised his arm, as if to help him get a better look at it, and poked at it with his other hand.

It was completely healed, an imprint of Derek’s teeth stark white against his already pale skin. Present, but still difficult to see. Exactly as they’d planned.

He poked at it for a few more seconds, then smiled a little at how official this all was. Shit, that meant when it all went public people were going to call him your Highness. He already couldn’t stand it the few times Kincaid had called him that, and he could see Scott and Jackson doing it just to piss him off.

Letting out a sigh, he dropped the towel back on the counter, then turned to wrench open the door. The handle ripped clean off.

“Oh sh—” Stiles covered his mouth with his free hand, staring down at the doorhandle that was no longer attached to the door. He’d literally ripped it right out of the wood.

Suddenly, Michael’s comment about breaking the shower made a lot of sense.

Man, being a Werewolf must be hard, he really couldn’t wait for the day to be over and for everything to just chill and calm the fuck down!
“Uh, Derek?” He knocked lightly on the door. “Derek, I’m—I’m kind of trapped? Hello? Derek?”

He heard him shifting in the bed upstairs, a little amazed at how well he could hear things. Footsteps padded across the floor and then down the stairs before moving over to the bathroom door. He heard Derek turn the knob on the other side and open it, and Stiles just winced and held up the broken handle.

“I think I broke the door,” he said lamely.

Derek’s face was expressionless, and Stiles was actually worried for a few seconds that he was pissed, but then he said, “At least it wasn’t the shower.”

Stiles smacked him in the chest, Derek smirking at him and taking the handle from his hand, setting it on the counter.

“Sorry.”

“Not your fault. Happens to everyone at one point or another. There’s a delicate balance to it, but you’ll be okay once it wears off.” He yawned widely then, and Stiles traded places with him so that Derek could brush his teeth and go about his morning business.

He did it all with the door open, since shutting it meant being trapped, and Stiles went to the kitchen so he didn’t see anything anyway.

He moved exceptionally slowly, being mindful of everything he touched while getting out what he needed to make pancakes. He’d just flipped the first one when Derek appeared behind him, sighing deeply and wrapping his arms around his waist, chin on his shoulder.

“This is nice,” he admitted quietly. “You and me, alone, doing domestic things. I like it.”

“Me too,” Stiles admitted, even if it was weird. He felt too young to be doing things like this. Owning a place, living there with his boyfriend-slash-Werewolf-husband, making breakfast. It was weird. Not unpleasant, just weird.

“You smell different,” Derek said, burying his face in Stiles’ neck and inhaling.

“Makes sense,” he said, carefully depositing the first pancake onto a plate and cheering internally at being able to get through making batter and one whole pancake without destroying anything. “I’m yours now, right?”

A pleased rumble slid up Derek’s throat at that, and he said, “Mine.”

“Okay, caveman.” Stiles rolled his eyes and dropped more batter into the pan. “You gonna be a leech or set the table?”

“Leech.”

“You’re kind of pathetic, you know.”

“You love it.” He kissed Stiles’ temple, but did manage to pull away so he could grab what they needed to eat.

He was done long before the pancakes were, and came back to continue pressing hard into Stiles’ back, seeming content to stay close to him. Stiles remembered Cora telling him about how Talia had been obsessed with being close to Michael for a time after the claim, but he didn’t think that
was what this was. After all, they’d done everything out of order. Derek’s obsession had happened long before they were even together. Hell, long before Stiles had even known what a mate was.

The only thing he could assume in this case was that Derek was just happy. That made his chest warm at the thought, because he hadn’t often seen Derek truly happy since they’d met. But he was now. And Stiles was, too.

If only they didn’t have Deucalion and Gerard Argent out there lurking about, things would be awesome.

He shrugged the thought aside, not wanting to think on it too much since it would kill the mood. When the pancakes were done, they headed to the table and Stiles broke the chair when he pulled it out too hard and had it slam back into the wall.

Derek laughed so hard Stiles thought he was going to hurt himself.

They ended up eating on the couch and Derek promised he’d get some more Stiles-proof chairs for the loft. Stiles punched him, a little satisfied at the knowledge that it had actually hurt, for once.

The majority of the day was spent lounging around, Stiles still trying to get used to his crazy new enhancements. By the time dinner rolled around, things had mostly settled into a more mellow version of Werewolf powers. Stiles could lift up the couch without too many problems, but he didn’t rip doorhandles off anymore, so that was a plus.

His eyes were still a bit of a problem, but his hearing was under control, and he figured his healing had to be good, too, considering the bitemark was a scar now.

Derek loved mouthing at the bitemark. During their day lounging on the couch in their boxers, Stiles on his back with Derek lazing on top of him, every now and then Derek would turn his head and mouth at it, like he was reassuring himself it was still there, that he’d actually done it, that Stiles was his.

That action usually led to a lot of making out, but Stiles put his foot down on shenanigans since he had a limited supply of boxers and he didn’t need to be soiling any more of them because Derek found it fun to make him cum in his damn pants.

They ordered in for dinner, the poor delivery guy probably terrified of the murder building he was being asked to approach, but Derek gave him a good tip, telling Stiles he was hoping it was a good incentive for the guy to come back the next time they ordered in.

Derek had bought them both spare chargers so that Stiles could charge his phone overnight, since it was his alarm clock for the morning. Derek was working at ten, but said he’d wake up with Stiles and head home to spend time with his parents before heading to work.

They went to bed a little after ten, but didn’t get to sleep until closer to midnight, since Derek couldn’t keep his damn hands to himself. Not that Stiles was complaining. Sleep deprivation because of hot makeouts with his boyfriend was much better than sleep deprivation because “Ah, something’s trying to kill us!” was in town.

When Stiles woke up half an hour before his alarm the next morning, he lay there for a good five minutes just staring at Derek and trying to figure out how his life had turned into this. It wasn’t as terrible as he’d originally thought.

Except for the fact that his staring woke Derek up, and the asshole made Stiles cum in his fucking boxers right when his alarm went off.
He was going to need to invest in more boxers.

“You and Derek are being gross,” Cora complained, climbing into the Jeep and slamming the door shut, her nose crinkled. “I swear, ever since you guys spent that weekend together, all I smell when I’m near you is cum.”

“Makes me jealous of Merrak,” Eric muttered in agreement from the back seat.

“Sometimes being human does have its perks,” Stiles agreed with a grin, turning the car around and heading towards the highway. Scott’s morning class was cancelled, so he’d texted Stiles to say he’d drive himself since he wanted to sleep in a bit. That meant it was just him, Cora and Eric, which was fine, because the two of them whining about the smell was getting funnier by the day.

“How is Merrak, by the way? Haven’t seen him since the cast came off. He walking all right?”

“Fine, but Laura keeps telling him to take it easy. Of course, to Merrak, that means try out for every sport he possibly can despite having missed tryouts.” Cora rolled her eyes. “Why are humans so stubborn?”

“It’s what makes us awesome.”

“I think you meant annoying.”

“Pretty sure I didn’t,” he insisted with a grin, turning to glance at her.

He noticed Cora’s eyes fly up and away from his neck, but didn’t comment on it. She looked a little put out and he wished, not for the first time, that he could tell her things were official. But he couldn’t, because that would defeat the purpose.

It had been almost three weeks since Derek had bitten him, and he had basically everything under control now. It was interesting hearing people like Kincaid and others talk about him behind his back. They were never malicious about it, just disappointed and angry, because Stiles had it so good and he didn’t even know it.

Except he did. They just didn’t know that.

His dad had been kind enough to put Derek mostly on morning or afternoon shifts, so Stiles spent the night at the loft with him more often than not. The few night shifts he’d had, Stiles had spent at home, because he missed his dad and he wanted to spend time with him.

Also, he was the only person Stiles could be completely honest with, since he was the one who’d re-arranged Derek’s schedule for the bite to begin with. He’d been really good about the whole thing, though he did get grumpy when Stiles heard the telltale crinkle of a chip bag from his room and shouted for him to put the junk down before he made him regret it.

Having enhanced hearing sure had its perks, even if he couldn’t hear nearly as well as the wolves could.

“So,” Cora said, stretching the ‘o’ out far longer than was necessary. “What have you and Derek been up to?”

“Why would you ask that?!” Eric demanded, sounding horrified. “Don’t answer that! I don’t want to know! Cora doesn’t want to know, either!”
“I mean, I kind of do,” she argued. “Not all the gory details, but just... relationship moving along, then?”

“Sure.” Stiles shrugged. “Still haven’t had sex, if that’s what you’re asking.”

“Gross. No. Not what I was asking.”

“Kind of what you were asking,” Stiles insisted with a smirk. “But no, things are good. He’s weirdly cuddly. I mean, it’s not bad, it’s just weird. You look at him and he’s all I-am-a-police-officer-murder-face, but once the door is shut he’s like some kind of weird octopus who follows me around the loft attached to me. Like a leech. An octopus-leech.”

“He’s just happy,” Cora insisted, shoving him lightly and smiling. “He never thought this would happen, especially after the whole creeper wolf thing and sneaking into your bedroom all Edward Cullen-like.”

“Man, that feels like so long ago,” Stiles admitted. “I still can’t believe imprinting is a thing.”

“It’s not imprinting,” she said, scandalized, and shoved him again, harder this time. “It’s a mate bond.”

“Imprinting, mate bond, same thing, different name. Maybe Stephenie Meyer knows Werewolves.”

“She better not, or I’ll be pissed she butchered us like that.” She rolled her eyes.

“Still unfair only mom and Derek can transform into wolves,” Eric agreed grumpily.

Stiles almost slammed on the brakes but he managed to refrain. He did whip around and swerve the Jeep dangerously to look at Eric so he could shout, “He what?!”

“Road! Road!” Cora forced him to straighten the wheel, Stiles facing forward once more. “Jesus, Stiles! Don’t crash the damn thing, you’re the only one in the car who wouldn’t survive that!”

One tiny part of Stiles’ brain wondered if that was true, but a louder part screamed, “Derek can what?!”

“What do you mean Derek can transform into a wolf? Since when?!”

“Like, twelve?” Cora offered, cocking an eyebrow at him. “Why?”

“Because!” Stiles insisted, grinning from ear to ear. “I’ve always wanted a dog! Now I have a boyfriend, and a dog.”

“Oh my God,” Eric moaned from the back seat, covering his face with both hands.

“Yeah, don’t tell Derek that. He’s not a dog. He’s not gonna play fetch or anything.”

“I don’t know, he might depending on what I give him.” He waggled his eyebrows at her and she let out a disgusted sound, shoving him again.

“I liked you better before you were dating my brother.”

“Imagine what they’ll be like if Stiles is ever claimed,” Eric muttered. “Derek’s going to want to fuck him all the time.”

“Wait, is that a thing?” Stiles asked, looking at Eric in the rearview mirror. “Like, once I’m
“claimed, he just wants to defile me all the time?”

“Gross,” Cora insisted.

“I don’t know,” Eric said, wrinkling his nose. “I’m just guessing. Derek’s held himself back for a long time, wouldn’t surprise me if he finally lost control. He’s a healthy almost twenty-five year old male who’s never gotten laid because he’s been waiting on his mate to accept him. Pretty sure the day he claims you, you won’t leave the bed.”

Cora let out another groan of disgust, telling Eric to stop talking because that was their brother he was making theories about. Stiles didn’t really hear them, thinking about their first day together. Derek hadn’t acted like that at all. He’d been snuggly, and happy, and just pleased to be close to him. Even now, no matter how much time passed, as long as he was close to Stiles, he was happy. Maybe it was truly because of the backwards way this entire thing had gone. Maybe if they’d done it right, done it properly, in the correct order, Derek would’ve really been like a caveman and had his dirty way with him. But they hadn’t done things in that order.

Maybe Derek’s wolf was just so relieved it hadn’t lost its mate that it was just pleased to be in the same space.

“What’s sex with a Werewolf like?” he asked before really thinking about it.

Cora gave him a horrified look and Eric winced in the back seat. Stiles found Eric’s reaction interesting, and suspected he wasn’t a virgin anymore but that nobody else knew that. When their eyes met, Eric flushed, cleared his throat, and turned to look out the window.

Cora didn’t notice.

“You can’t just ask me what Werewolf sex is like! That’s my brother!”

“Yes, and we will eventually be fucking, and it’ll probably be mind-blowing.”

“Why are we friends?” Cora wailed, covering her ears. “You’re horrible. Don’t you have human friends you can ask?”

“Actually, you’re right. Kira and Lydia would be better suited to answer since both have been with Werewolves.”

He didn’t know if he could talk to either of them, though. Kira was dating Scott, his best friend, and she would probably get extremely embarrassed trying to talk to him about it. Lydia would probably be more detached and keep everything factual, but she’d had sex with Jackson. That wasn’t exactly ideal, either, considering he and Stiles went out clubbing all the time and he didn’t want to think things with Jackson all up in his business.

Especially if he was bound to Derek. Mated to Derek? He didn’t know how this shit worked.

“I’ll figure it out,” he decided with a sigh.

All he knew was that there was no way he was asking Michael.

Some things were really better left unknown.

“Your posse is obnoxious, don’t they ever go away?” Jackson demanded while they walked from the back lot towards Jungle’s entrance, Kincaid and another guard whose name Stiles couldn’t
remember following a few steps behind them. “It’s not like they’re not recognizable. If someone’s coming for you, they’ll take them out first.”

“This is their job, pretty sure the point is they won’t get taken out.”

“Whatever.” Jackson pulled a small vial from his pants pocket, scowling at it before putting it back. Stiles hadn’t really gotten a good look at it, but he suspected it was Aconite. Jackson and Cora had gone out a few times during nights Stiles was cuddling with Derek. Derek was working tonight though, and it was a Saturday, so he figured he’d keep Jackson company since Cora was at home studying for a quiz she had on Monday.

Stiles was pretty sure she wasn’t studying, but since her mother knew about the quiz, she’d probably been the reason she wasn’t allowed to leave the house. Jackson didn’t seem to care either way, though Stiles suspected he’d missed hanging out with him and was too proud to say so.

When they reached the bouncer, he let them in, Jackson motioning that Kincaid and the other guy were with him, even though he didn’t seem particularly happy about it. Stiles just patted his back while they headed further in, wincing slightly at the loudness of the bass. It was already hard for him to handle before he had enhanced senses, so he was glad he had more control over that side of himself now, or he’d have run out screaming with his hands over his ears.

It also helped him understand how the wolves could tolerate it. He hadn’t really understood how everything worked. He had a general idea, of course, but unless he was a Werewolf, he’d never fully understand it. Except now he kind of did, because he was mated to an Alpha. To the Alpha.

And god, it was so weird to realize he was actually Derek’s now. Even though it had been a month since the bite, it was still surreal for him to realize he’d given himself to Derek. He didn’t regret it, and he doubted he ever would, but it was weird having a secret like this hanging over him.

Jackson was going to be pissed when he found out. Cora moreso, probably. He just had to hope they listened to the explanation before they started coming after him with sharp objects.

Stiles and Jackson fought their way through the sweaty bodies to the bar where they could grab some drinks. Stiles was planning on sitting this one out and letting Jackson find himself a hot date like a good wingman, but he was sure he’d end up on the dancefloor before long. He liked to dance, it was a thing.

Jackson called out for drinks over the sound of the music and after exchanging money, Stiles waited for him to move so he could put his own order in. Turned out he didn’t have to, because the bartender set ten shot glasses on the counter in front of them and began filling them with tequila.

“Don’t you think you should take it easy?” Stiles asked him. “I don’t want to have to carry you home like last time. And you drove, so...” He let that hang in the air, since Stiles wouldn’t be driving if he had five shots, and Jackson looked like he was planning on using his Aconite, as far as he could tell.

“I have plans tomorrow,” Jackson called back, effectively nixing the Aconite theory. “Drink up, buddy.”

Stiles rolled his eyes, but at least he had a ride home. He wouldn’t want to ask Kincaid to drive him back to the Hale house, otherwise he was liable not to make it there.

When all the glasses were filled, Stiles reached for one at the same time as Jackson. His friend smirked, holding it up in toast, and then downed it. Stiles followed suit, wincing at the burn and set
“You gonna tell me what we’re celebrating?”

“Nope.”

“Did you finally get laid?” Stiles teased, almost choking on his next shot since Jackson punched him. He managed to swallow it down before coughing, punching Jackson back and seeing him frown, like he’d used a bit too much force.

Whoops.

Stiles grabbed his next shot, and once he was on his fourth, it occurred to him that usually he’d be feeling this by now. Three shots of tequila should have him already in his happy place, and he was about to take his fourth and he felt... nothing.

Oh shit, he felt *nothing*!

“I swear to God, if you ruined alcohol for me, you’re fucking dead,” he hissed to his fourth shot glass before downing it.

“What?” Jackson asked, distracted by someone who was making eyes at him.

“Nothing.” Stiles shoved him once. “Go, have fun, make good choices.”

“Try not to end up on the floor,” Jackson said, downing his last shot and disappearing into the crowd. Stiles just rolled his eyes and took his own last shot, severely concerned about the lack of intoxication he was feeling.

Seriously, if Derek claiming him had ruined alcohol, he was going to throttle him. Sure, he could use Aconite like the wolves, but he was positive it wasn’t the same. Stiles was still human, dammit! He shouldn’t be getting the downside of being a Werewolf as a human!

Thankfully, by the time ten minutes passed, he was sufficiently tipsy, so he assumed it had just taken a little longer than usual for the alcohol to hit, which was a relief. He ordered himself a beer and then sat at the bar nursing it for close to an hour watching Jackson make out with various guys who were showing him an interest.

None of them seemed to tickle his fancy, though, because he kept moving on to other people, occasionally casting glances Stiles’ way whenever someone got too close to him. Stiles could take care of himself, thank you very much, and he just chatted amiably with a few guys who approached him, dropping hints early on that he was already taken. Most of them fucked off after that, but one guy hung around for a while since he was also taken and had come as a wingman for his own friend. They got into a lengthy argument about the pros and cons of homeschooling, for some reason, and when his friend came around to collect him so they could head out, Stiles was left alone again.

Eventually, Jackson grew bored of the people he’d gotten close to and made his way back to the bar. He took the beer bottle from Stiles’ hand while he was in the process of drinking from it, and deposited it on the counter behind him, ignoring Stiles’ noise of distress.

“Come on, we’re dancing.”

“I was drinking that,” he argued, but didn’t resist when Jackson yanked him to his feet.
Stiles figured he was just looking to finish off his night with a bang without having to punch someone who wasn’t taking no for an answer. It had happened once.

It had been glorious.

Hard to explain to his dad when he showed up, though.

Jackson dragged him towards the middle of the floor, the crushing weight and heat of bodies packed together almost suffocating. But Stiles was used to it, so he just let himself move along to the loud music, Jackson yanking him closer to him so the guys behind him didn’t get any ideas.

Which he appreciated. He really did. He and Jackson had danced like this tons of times. So, so many times. They’d been doing even worse in San Francisco, Jackson had been rubbing his fucking boner into Stiles’ ass. So really, this was nothing. This was innocent, almost *vanilla* by comparison. Just two bros dancing together to finish off the night.

But something felt wrong.

Every time he took a step back, and Jackson yanked him closer since he was getting to close to the guys eyeing him behind him, Stiles’ throat closed up and he felt... weird. Itchy. He felt really itchy. Everywhere Jackson touched him made him feel like he had to peel off his skin, and when he leaned closer to ask why his heart was racing, Stiles jerked away from him.

Jackson gave him a weird look, grabbing at him when he went to pull away, but his hand around his wrist felt like acid and Stiles shoved him.

Hard.

Much harder than Stiles *should* have been able to shove him.

Jackson stumbled back into a group of people, looking both angry and worried—it was actually impressive he could sport two very different expressions at once. Stiles felt like he was going to be sick, maybe it was the alcohol.

Turning, he shoved his way through the crowd towards Jungle’s gross, piss-covered bathroom. Beggars couldn’t be choosers, and if he was going to vomit, he would prefer to do it in private and not in the middle of the dancefloor. Imagine someone slipped in it? Embarrassing.

Slamming through the bathroom door, he coughed once at the smell—because public bathrooms in clubs were definitely *not* the height of cleanliness—and braced himself against the closest stall, hands on either side of the stall door.

His head was spinning and his lungs hurt, and he felt like he needed a shower. Which made no sense, because there was no reason for him to need a shower given nothing had even happened. Nobody had even *touched* him except Jackson, so what the fuck?

What the *fuck*?!

“What the fuck, Stiles?!” Jackson demanded, slamming through the door. He grabbed at his shoulder and Stiles smacked his hand away, stumbling back a step towards the sinks, the nausea rising again. “What just happened? What’s with you?”

“Can you just—I need a second.” Stiles dug the heel of both palms into his eyes, rolling his shoulders as if it would get the gross feeling to go away.
“What’s going on with you?” He heard Jackson take a step closer and stumbled sideways without even looking, almost slipping on something wet on the floor and hitting the wall hard.

“Please, just—just one second!”

Jackson had never been one for realizing when to let something go, so instead of backing up and giving him one fucking second, he closed the distance and grabbed at Stiles’ wrist again. It literally felt like acid burning into his skin, and not in a fun way. Not in a “ha ha, you have a fever and now you’re gonna hallucinate, dope!” kind of way, but in a literally skin peeling off kind of way.

“Stiles, what is going on?”

“I don’t know!” he shouted, yanking his wrist free and stumbling sideways, hitting another stall door and grabbing the edge for balance. This time, Jackson didn’t follow him, probably because if he tried Stiles was liable to climb right onto the toilet. “I don’t know, Jackson! But I feel weird, and sick, and like I need to scrape away my skin everywhere I was being touched, which makes no sense, because it’s you, and we’ve done this, but the idea of that is making me want to vomit and I need—” Stiles cut off, breathing hard and trying to finish the thought. He needed. What did he need? What did he— “I need—I need him. Jackson, I need him, he has to erase this, he has to take it back, and I can’t, I fucking can’t!”

Jackson stood in front of him for a long while, Stiles struggling to control his breathing and resisting the urge to tear his own skin off. He had no fucking idea what was going on, only that he felt like he’d done something wrong, it was wrong, all wrong, and he needed Derek. He needed him now.

Before he could react, Jackson closed the distance, and he let out a startled shout when his head was wrenched to the side and his shirt was practically ripped off him Jackson yanked at the collar so hard. When he saw nothing, he checked the other side, and of course, saw nothing there, either.

Jackson took a step back, anger replaced with worry, and Stiles had never seen him like this. He looked lost, and confused, and terrified. Like he didn’t know what was happening, but at least it would make some sense if Stiles was claimed, but he wasn’t.

Not that Jackson knew, anyway.

“I’ll get Kincaid,” he said, turning to do just that, but Stiles grabbed at his shirt and wrenched him back.

He did it so hard Jackson’s sleeve ripped at the seam and the Werewolf paused, staring down at Stiles’ hand, and then slowly looking back up at him.

“Fuck. Fucking shit, fuck,” Stiles hissed, banging his head back against the stall. He let out a few more laboured breaths, hand still tight on Jackson’s sleeve, then reached down with one hand and lifted his shirt up.

Jackson’s eyes snapped down, locking onto the bite instantly, and Stiles felt sick all over again. Fuck, he wasn’t supposed to tell anyone, but something was wrong and he needed to get the fuck out of here before people who really couldn’t know found out.

“You can’t tell anyone,” Jackson said when Jackson’s eyes finally rose back to his. “You can’t.”

Jackson didn’t move for a few seconds, then he closed the distance again and grabbed Stiles’ shirt, hastily yanking it back down. He looked pissed, just as Stiles knew he would be, but luckily they had more important things to worry about.
Like what the fuck was wrong with him!

“Who else knows?” he asked, making sure Stiles’ shirt was covering every inch of his chest properly.


“How long?”

“End of September.”

Jackson’s head turned towards the door, and when Stiles focussed, he could hear Kincaid and the other Were talking, moving closer. They, rightly, thought something was wrong because it was taking too long.

“Come on.” Jackson started to reach for him, then paused and retreated his hand. “Let’s get you to the station.”

He turned and stalked to the door, opening it just as Kincaid was about to do the same.

“Can’t a guy piss in peace?” Stiles demanded, still half-hidden inside one of the stalls. He forced himself to take a few slow breaths before pushing out of it, moving up behind Jackson, who was waiting for him by the door. “We’re done,” he informed Kincaid, brushing past him. “We’re going home.”

Kincaid said nothing, but he followed exceptionally close behind him all the way to the door. Somehow, it didn’t feel wrong having him do it, so if Stiles couldn’t hang out with Jackson anymore, he was going to hurt Derek.

Being a mate fucking sucked.

“Come on,” Jackson said once they were outside, motioning where the car was parked. Stiles wasn’t drunk, he could remember where the damn car was.

Jackson opened the passenger-side door for him and Stiles practically fell into it. His stomach hurt, and he really hoped he didn’t hurl all over the Porsche. Jackson evidently had the same thought, because he warned Stiles against it while sliding behind the wheel.

He flew out of the lot so fast that Kincaid and the guard had to run to their own vehicle, still trying to catch up by the time Jackson was driving them back towards the heart of town.

“Why didn’t you say anything?” Jackson demanded, eyes forward and hands clenching the steering wheel. “Why wouldn’t you tell me about it?”

“We’re just... We’re trying something.”

“And I can’t know?”

“Jackson, no one knows. His parents and my dad—they knew we’d do it, they just didn’t know when. We’re trying to keep it quiet.”

“Well?”

“Because it’s an advantage,” he insisted, fumbling for his phone. “Because if they think I’m not claimed, they’ll underestimate me more than they did last time.”
“The wolves,” Jackson bit out, “or the Argents?”

“Both.”

“You’re gonna get yourself killed,” he snapped, turning to level him with a glare. “Stiles, you are going to fucking die if you bite off more than you can chew!”

“I’ve got it under control.”

“Yeah, sure looks like it,” Jackson bit out, slowing when they neared a red light.

Stiles finally got his phone out of his tight pants and flipped open the cover. He scrolled through the contacts with his thumb, other hand clenched in the material of his shirt above his stomach, as if that would stop him from projectile vomiting all over the interior of the Porsche.

That and his inner mantra of, “Don’t throw up, don’t throw up, Jackson will make you lick his car clean, don’t you dare throw up!”

Finding the number he wanted, he hit the call button and put it to his ear. It rang. And rang. And rang some more. And if there was no answer Stiles was going to—

“Stiles. This is a surp—”

“Something is happening and I don’t know what it is and it fucking sucks,” he spat out. “I’m not like, going into heat or anything, right?!?”

A brief pause. “That’s not a thing, Stiles. Tell me what happened.”

“I don’t know! I was out with Jackson, I was drinking, we started dancing, and now my stomach hurts and I feel like I need to peel off my skin and everything is wrong and I need Derek to like, cleanse me, I don’t know!”

“I’ve heard about this,” Michael said, which was a relief, at least. “It’s never happened to me, but it’s common in Werewolves because of the pack. Your claim is still fresh, so you have an internal chemical reaction whenever you start getting too close to another Werewolf in a sexual nature.”

“In a what?!” Stiles demanded. “I wasn’t—”

“I know, Stiles. But you and Jackson are very close friends, and the bond with Derek is still new. As I said, it usually happens with mates who are Werewolves, because as I’m sure you’ve noticed, they don’t really have any boundaries. It’s like an internal reminder to you that you have a mate, and that what you’re doing needs to stop.”

“We were just dancing!”

“It doesn’t last long, two months at best. But I would suggest perhaps avoiding the partying and dancing for the next little while.”

“Well, can Derek fix it?” Stiles blurted out, because this was extremely unpleasant!

“He should. I’ll call Talia, she’ll know more. Just get to Derek.”

“Yeah, working on it,” Stiles snapped, hanging up. He felt guilty almost immediately, but he’d apologize to Michael later. He just couldn’t believe this was happening. It was just one horrible thing after another since this whole thing started, Stiles wanted a vacation.
Maybe when he graduated he’d go live on a deserted island for a few weeks and just... chill.

Jackson made another turn and Stiles glanced in the mirror to see where Kincaid and the guard were. Thankfully nowhere close, since he hadn’t exactly been quiet about his conversation with Michael. Hopefully they hadn’t overheard anything they shouldn’t have.

“On a brighter note, at least you’re not carrying your boyfriend’s mutant Vampire child that’s going to get ripped out of you like one of those things in *Aliens,*” Jackson offered conversationally.

“They’re called Xenomorphs, and Derek said I can’t get pregnant,” he insisted. “If pregnancy is on the table, I am *out* of this relationship!”

“Just sayin’, could be worse,” Jackson insisted.

“Since when are *you* the optimistic one?” Stiles demanded.

“Well, I could panic and crash the Porsche, if you’d rather that,” he snapped, turning to give him an annoyed look. Stiles flipped him off with the hand still holding his phone and checked on where they were.

By the time they were pulling into the back lot of the station, Derek and Parrish were waiting for them and Derek hurried towards the car before Jackson had even fully stopped it. Even the sight of him was easing some of the discomfort in his stomach, and when Derek wrenched open the passenger-side door, Stiles felt ridiculous for his damsel-in-distress type of reaction, practically falling into his open arms. He hugged him tightly, Derek’s arms wrapping around him, and just breathing him in made Stiles feel better.

“Are you okay?” Derek asked, concerned. “Dad said he couldn’t reach mom but that you needed me. What happened?”

“Not here,” Stiles mumbled into his chest.

“Okay. Come on, I’ll drive you back to the house.”

“Text me later,” Jackson grunted and Stiles heard him climb back into the car. Derek’s hand left him for a moment, but only long enough to slam the other door. Jackson pulled out just as Kincaid was following behind them.

“What happened?” Derek asked.

Okay, well first off, I *wasn’t* cheating on you.”

Derek gave him a weird look at that. “Okay?”
“I don’t know.” Stiles flailed slightly, feeling better by the second. Having Derek close to him, inhaling his unique Derek scent, was making the weird itchiness dissipate and his stomach calm down. “When I spoke to your dad, he said it happens. I was out dancing with Jackson, and we were getting close, you know, like we always do. He’s my bro, and we get handsy, it’s just how it is.”

“Cora told me about San Fran,” he admitted, a small smile teasing his lips, like it amused him as opposed to concerned him. “So what happened?”

“I don’t know!” he insisted again. “Your dad said it’s like—a Werewolf thing, usually. Like a chemical signal reminding me I’m taken, or whatever. So when we started getting closer in our dancing, it just felt... off. Weird. Wrong. I don’t know.”

“Oh,” Derek said, a little startled. “Mom told me about that.”

“Does it happen to you, too?” he asked slowly, eying Derek.

“It happens to Werewolves,” he admitted. “Because of pack. But it’s more the mate side than the Alpha side. My devotion to you is absolute, but as the mate, you don’t have those same feelings.”

“Hey!”

“You know what I mean.” Derek rolled his eyes. “You can walk away whenever you want. But the thing with wolves is we’re all very open and touchy-feely. Some packs get involved all around, sexually. There’s no real relationships outside the Alpha and their mate, everyone else is just kind of in a relationship with the rest of the pack.”

“So like... polyamorous?” Stiles asked.

“Something like that, yeah. Not to say it doesn’t happen, two people getting together and settling down. Most packs are like that, look at ours. Everyone’s monogamous, and most people tend to be, but some packs are small and only have a few Betas, and they don’t discriminate.” Derek shrugged one shoulder. “The feeling it supposed to be some kind of reminder for the first stretch of the claim. Like a gentle nudge to say ‘hey, you’re taken, remember?’ to a Werewolf who might be in a pack where... well...”

“Sharing is caring?” Stiles offered.

Derek laughed a little and nodded. “Yeah. I know you weren’t doing anything with Jackson, and honestly, I had no idea it could even happen with a human. But I guess you two got a little too close, and the bond decided to remind you that you were taken.”

“Well the bond is an asshole,” Stiles informed him. “I was having a perfectly enjoyable night before I wanted to tear my skin off with my fingernails.”

Derek winced. “That sounds pleasant.”

“Right?” Stiles groaned and leaned his head sideways, resting it on Derek’s closest shoulder. “Whatever. You’re here, my stomach calmed down, my skin isn’t trying to crawl out of itself. All is well with the world, or whatever. Being claimed sucks, by the way. All I want to do is be around you.”

“Can’t say I’m complaining,” Derek said with a small smile. “It’ll pass. It’s not even really about me, it’s about pack. You want to be closer to the pack.”

Stiles just let out another aggrieved sigh, head still resting on Derek’s shoulder. His radio went off
a few times while they drove, but nothing urgent, and nothing requiring Derek’s attention specifically.

When they pulled up to the house, Stiles muttered a thanks and started to open the door, but Derek pulled him back and kissed him lightly.

“Shower and wear some of my clothes. You’ll feel better.”

“Don’t get kinky, dude, we’re not there yet,” Stiles insisted, but he kissed Derek once more before climbing out of the car. Slamming the door, he waved once before heading for the porch steps, reaching the front door in time for it to open, Michael giving him a brief once over.

“Are you all right?”

“Peachy.” He winced. “Sorry.”

“It’s fine.” He offered him a small smile and moved aside so Stiles could enter. “It takes some getting used to.”

“No kidding. How long did it take you?”

“I think it might be best I not tell you.”

“Awesome.”

Bella Swan never had to deal with this shit! She got married, had a weird hybrid baby, turned into a Vampire, and got to live out the rest of her life.

If babies growing inside him were in his future, Stiles was out.

Stiles was going to be late to his next class. He knew he was, because his last class had run late, and his next one was across the damn campus. It wouldn’t be so bad if not for the fact that the door leading into class was at the front, which meant everyone would see him trying to subtly sneak in while the professor was giving his lecture.

Whose dumbass idea was it for classroom doors to be at the front? People didn’t know why other people were late! What if Stiles’ Jeep broke down? What if he’d stopped on his way to class to help some poor woman in labour deliver a baby? What if his last class ran late?! Ridiculous. It was just another way for professors to lord their power over the students, and it irked him.

And it wasn’t helping that his enhanced hearing made it possible for him to hear Kincaid on the phone behind him. That was just souring his mood right up.

He’d been hearing him a lot lately, given it was well into November by now and news of him and Derek dating had reached the Council months ago. No sign of the Alpha pack, so the claim was still kept under wraps with only the parents and Jackson being aware of it.

Which was working out, except Kincaid was keeping the Council up to date and now his worth as mate was being questioned because he ‘wouldn’t commit.’ Kincaid’s exact word choice. They obviously couldn’t do anything about it, because Derek had chosen and it was absolute, but the more days passed of him on the phone when they were away from other people and Kincaid didn’t know Stiles could hear him, the more concerning the calls became.

Basically, the Council was suggesting Stiles get strong-armed into it. Because, “No Hale has
ever been rejected! It will undermine their authority, he must accept the bond!”

If Stiles hadn’t already been claimed by Derek, he’d actually have been a little worried about it. He’d admitted it to Talia a few days back, and while she’d been furious, they couldn’t act on it since it would mean explaining how they knew, and while Stiles liked Kincaid all right as a guard, he definitely didn’t trust him not to tell the Council. And then the whole point of doing this in secret was wasted.

Still, hearing him badmouth him from literally thirteen steps away was infuriating and it was taking a lot of control Stiles didn’t even realize he had not to whip around and snap at him. Because Stiles was human, and he shouldn’t have been able to hear him.

When he deked to the side to pass between two buildings in an attempt to cut through the area and reach his next class faster, he was almost halfway between them when Kincaid abruptly cut off.

Stiles would’ve assumed he was done with his conversation, if not for the fact that he’d been in the middle of a sentence.

Without really thinking about it, he turned to see what was going on, and the anger melted off his face instantly.

Kincaid still had the phone up by his face, but he was staring down at his own chest. His chest, where a large red patch was beginning to spread, staining his shirt around a small bullet-shaped hole.

“Kincaid!” Stiles raced for him just as the Werewolf fell to his knees and toppled over onto his side. Stiles skid to a halt beside him, rolling him onto his back and lifting his shirt up with a curse. The wound wasn’t healing, which could mean only one thing.

Stiles froze at the feel of cool metal against the back of his head, gritting his teeth angrily.

“You’re ballsy for you,” he bit out. “We’re in public.”

“You’re hidden,” Kate sneered. “We’ve been watching you. Whenever you run late to this class, you cut between these two buildings. We’ve been experimenting for a long time, nobody seems to ever hear anything amiss here.”

Kincaid’s hand wrapped around Stiles’ wrist, squeezing hard. Stiles shifted his gaze back to his face and he could see how scared the Werewolf was, but also how desperate. It was his job to protect him, and he was failing at it, and Stiles could see the silent order in his eyes.

“Run, run, run!”

But he couldn’t run. He couldn’t, because Kincaid was down, and he needed to stop this once and for all, and he had the upper hand even if no one knew it.

Even if this wasn’t exactly how things were meant to be playing out.

Stiles’ eyes shifted to Kincaid’s phone. It was silent on the other end, but the call was still connected, which meant whoever was there had muted themselves in the hopes of listening in without letting that be known.

At least it meant Kincaid would get help.

“So that’s why you Argents took so long to show yourselves after your crushing defeat last time,”
Stiles said, trying to work exactly where he was into the conversation so that help would come. If not for him, then for Kincaid. He didn’t want anyone to die because of him. “You just sat on your ass and watched my routes, and figured out that the scarcely travelled path between the Chemistry and Anthropology buildings would be the perfect place to make your move.”

He winced when she pressed harder, voice cold when she said, “We underestimated you. We won’t do it again.”

“Seems to go around,” Stiles bit out. “Deucalion tell you about that, too.”

“He’s eager to get his hands on you.”

Stiles could see panic flit across Kincaid’s face, his own heart tripping in his chest, but it wasn’t like he had a lot of options. Sure, he could scream, call for help, but Kate could also just blow his brains out if he did that.

“I thought Hunters didn’t work with Werewolves.”

“We have a common goal.” She tapped the gun against his skull. “Up. Let’s go.”

Kincaid’s grip tightened and Stiles shifted his hand so he could squeeze him back. Then he stood, the Werewolf holding on for everything he was worth, but Stiles just pried his hand off his wrist. It was easy, given the wolfsbane clearly coursing through him. He really hoped someone came for him quickly.

Kate turned him forcefully, Kincaid still trying to reach for him, a choked sound escaping him. Stiles had to struggle not to turn around, because he didn’t know if he could walk away. But staying wasn’t an option, either. More people would be at risk, and while the pack hadn’t planned for him to be so far from Beacon Hills when the bad guys came for him, well, he was sure they could improvise.

They weren’t going to kill him, at any rate. They needed him.

Kate looped one arm into his, then unzipped his hoodie with the hand holding the gun, slipping it into his sweater so that it was hidden, but still dangerously located.

“Don’t we make a cute couple?” she asked with a vicious smile.

“Are you gonna talk me to death?” he snapped. “Or are we getting out of here?”

“So eager to meet your maker.” She leaned in close and Stiles winced, leaning away when her lips brushed his ear. “I like a man who isn’t afraid of death.”

“You like anything with a dick,” he spat back.

Her expression darkened then, playtime clearly over, and she tugged on his arm hard, forcing him to walk. They moved out from the safety of the secluded area between the buildings and Stiles looked around at the people still milling about. Most of them were rushing to class, while others meandered leisurely, talking on their phones, or with friends. Some people were hanging around texting, and one couple was having a rather heated argument on the other side of the quad.

Kate just pulled him along, smiling brightly and resting her head against his shoulder in a mocking display of affection.

Stiles just slowly reached his free hand into his pocket, thankful she was on his right side since it
meant he could get to his phone. He had to be careful, because if he moved too much, she would see what he was doing, so he very carefully wiggled one finger between the case and the screen, hoping against hope that he could crotch-dial someone, then let out a grunt when a hand wrapped around his wrist and squeezed, hard.

“None of that,” a hard voice said, his hand ripped from his pocket. Stiles turned and saw one of the twins beside him, eyes forward while he and Kate marched him across the campus.

“You guys are pretty confident, thinking you can just take me right off campus,” he said, stumbling slightly when he missed a step down, too busy trying to catch someone’s eye so they would know something was off.

Everyone was looking down at their fucking phones.

God damn phones.

“The only help available to you here would be the two Hales and your bitten monster,” Kate said jovially, head still on his shoulder. “All three of them are accounted for, sitting in class as they should be. To anyone else, we’re just three people walking across campus.”

“You don’t look enough like me to be my mom,” he bit out.

“I’m your girlfriend, Stiles.”

“No one would believe a grandma like you is my girlfriend, but whatever makes you sleep at night.”

He let out a grunt when the Werewolf’s hand tightened to an almost dangerous degree around his wrist.

“Stop talking.”

“Aiden doesn’t like unnecessary chatter,” Kate informed him. “It’s something I’ve been learning to ignore since our alliance.”

“And once the Hales are dead, then what? You turn your guns and claws on each other?”

“Something to think about when the time comes,” Kate said pleasantly, like they were discussing what to watch on TV that night as opposed to the imminent battle to the death that would follow the fall of the Hales.

When they reached the parking lot, there was a windowless van near the edge that had Stiles’ skin crawling. How had campus security not taken one look at that and thought, “Hm, that’s suspicious”? It was screaming paedophile trying to lure unsuspecting children into the back with candy!

As they approached it, the sliding door opened and the woman, Kali, jumped out. She looked just as menacing as he remembered, still barefoot, and furious.

His chances of survival plummeted when she reached out to help someone else out of the back, Deucalion taking her hand and stepping down. He had a white cane in his free hand, and once Kali released him, both his feet on the ground, he held it in both hands in front of himself, waiting for Kate and Aiden to bring him over.

Stiles couldn’t help pulling back, trying to slow their pace, but Aiden just dragged him along with
Kate doing her best to help, and before long, he was right in front of Deucalion. The Werewolf smiled, his eyes open and glassy behind the shades he wore.

Jesus, Stiles really had done it, hadn’t he? He’d actually legitimately blinded an Alpha Werewolf, holy fucking shit.

“Stiles,” he said pleasantly, as if greeting an old friend. “It’s been so long.”

“Could’ve been longer,” Stiles offered, then winced when Aiden’s grip tightened. He was dangerously close to a broken wrist.

“How are your ribs?” Deucalion reached out for his side and Stiles instinctively tried to pull away. Aiden’s grip on him tightened, shoving him forward so that Deucalion’s hand could press against his healed injury.

Stiles didn’t like how close his hand was to his claim mark. He just knew they didn’t have a reason to take off his shirt, so it was the safest place for it, but he didn’t know if Deucalion could feel it. Probably not over his shirt and hoodie, but still.

“Healed well, it seems. I suppose you were lucky. Some of us, not so much.” He motioned his face.

“Yeah, I’d say sorry, but Werewolves can tell when you’re lying so I figured I’d save my breath.”

Deucalion’s hand shot out, gripping his jaw tightly, claws lengthening slowly and pricking against his skin but not drawing blood.

“When this is over, I am going to enjoy killing you slowly while your Alpha watches, unable to stop it. He’ll go mad long before I’ve put you out of your misery.”

“Big talk for someone who had to kidnap me with Hunters. What’s wrong, Alpha pack not strong enough to nab one human kid?”

Deucalion’s grip shifted, his claws dragging down the side of his face lightly enough that they didn’t break skin, but hard enough to be a threat. “We’ll see how smart you think you are when I take from you what you did me.”

Stiles’ heart stuttered in his chest when Deucalion’s thumb tapped lightly against his temple, claw dangerously close to his eye.

“Ah. Finally. An honest reaction.” He took a step back, nicking Stiles’ skin this time when he pulled his claws back. It took all Stiles’ energy to remember how to stop the wound from healing. He never thought he’d be so glad to learn something so awful in his life.

“Let’s get moving, shall we?” Deucalion asked.

Kate made a big show of shoving her hands into his pockets, pulling out his keys and wallet, and letting them fall to the asphalt. She let one hand slide suggestively across his stomach to his other side, pulling his phone out and letting that fall, as well. Sadly, she went back into both pockets for a second check, and pulled out the mountain ash he always had in there, letting that fall to the ground. The vial cracked when it hit the ground, but didn’t shatter.

“That it?” Aiden grunted.

“Looks like,” Kate sneered. If nothing else, at least it was clear they didn’t like each other.
“In you go.” Deucalion stepped aside and motioned the van. Stiles struggled then, feet skidding across the asphalt, but before he could even open his mouth to shout for attention, Aiden threw him so violently into the back that his head slammed against the opposite side and he momentarily saw stars.

Kali and Deucalion stepped back in, and Stiles’ heart beat a staccato rhythm of fear against his ribs when Kate winked at him before sliding the door shut, bathing them in darkness.

Stiles had stopped mouthing off the moment it became clear they would remove his tongue before long if he didn’t. While sick and twisted, he trusted Gerard not to go that far despite threatening it. Stiles was human, after all, and even he had his limits, as evidenced by the last time Stiles had been chained up in a basement.

The Alpha pack wasn’t like that. It was very, very clear only five minutes into the drive away from the university that they saw humans as nothing more than prey.

Deucalion proceeded to re-break the same ribs he had last time, adding in two on the other side to, “Even out the pain, Stiles, I’m not heartless.”

It was only ten minutes after that that Deucalion threatened his tongue, and a minute after that where Kali was on top of him trying to pry his mouth open. He got the message loud and clear then and Deucalion seemed satisfied with knowing he’d shut him up for good.

He didn’t know where they were taking him, but they seemed to be driving for hours. They turned a lot, which suggested to him that they weren’t going far, they were just trying to keep him disoriented. Evidently his reputation preceded him though, to be fair, he’d escaped the Alpha pack once, and the Hunters once. They probably didn’t want to take any chances.

When they finally stopped and the door was wrenched open, he winced at the sunlight assaulting his retinas and was forcibly pulled out of the van and dragged towards a cabin. The area looked different from where he and Merrak had been held, and he could see another house through the trees to his left, suggesting this was a more populated area.

Once inside, he was dragged to a room in the back where his trusty manacles made a reappearance. Seemed his little trick had earned him higher security, because there was a loop in the ceiling, the chains passed through them so that his arms would be raised above his head this time. No way for him to sneak keys out of anyone’s pockets if they got too close.

It also made his sides scream with agony, given the position was not kind to his newly broken ribs. If he had more control over his pseudo-Werewolf abilities, he’d have tried to heal his ribs and keep the scratch on his face open. As it stood, he couldn’t do that, so it was heal one or heal both, and he wasn’t willing to risk it.

For now, he still had the upper hand.

Maybe. He hoped.

Once he was strung up, barely supporting his weight on the balls of his feet and breathing hard through his clenched teeth, everyone left him except the twins. The one he didn’t know was named Ethan, and he and his brother stared at Stiles with disgust while the others went out to concoct their nefarious plans.

Eventually, Gerard and Deucalion re-entered, with Kali close behind. Gerard’s expression was pleased, like he’d learned from his mistakes and wasn’t going to let Stiles slip away a third time, in
his case.

“You’re a hard man to get a hold of,” he said conversationally.

“You too, apparently. The police miss you terribly,” Stiles grit out, almost losing his balance and feeling another stab of agony spike up his side.

Gerard just kept smiling at him, moving forward and taking his chin. He twisted his head this way and that, then tugged the collar of his shirt down on one side before doing the same on the other. Stiles hadn’t realized the old man was holding his breath until he let it out.

“No claim. You must really be making Derek work for it.”

“What kind of moron doesn’t get claimed by the Alpha heir?” Ethan muttered. Or maybe it was Aiden, Stiles wasn’t sure which was which.

“Be thankful he’s still human,” Gerard said. “He would’ve been a formidable force if he were claimed.”

“He managed to make the pack pause,” Deucalion reminded them, evidently talking about his order to release Jackson that had allowed his friend to escape and find safety behind the mountain ash barrier of his front door. “We should count ourselves lucky he was too foolish to follow through.”

“That’s me, moron of the year,” Stiles bit out, letting out a shout when Gerard poked at his ribs, trying to shy away from his touch on his tip-toes.

“Shall we begin?” Deucalion asked, pulling out what appeared to be a phone and holding it out in Gerard’s general direction. He took it, aiming it at Stiles after taking a step back, and he heard a soft beep. They were probably going to take a video before ripping out his insides.

Lovely.

“You didn’t make any home videos the last time you kidnapped me,” Stiles said, well aware the video was recording. “Forgot about that part of your master plan?”

“The plan was different,” Gerard informed him. “This one is more direct.”

“I can see that. Very James Bond villain of you.”

“Shut up,” Kali snapped, and Stiles cried out again when she punched into his ribs. He heard something crack, and was actually worried this time about severe damage.

If things kept up like this, he wouldn’t have a choice but to heal himself.

“He’s alive,” Gerard said, clearly speaking to the video. “For now. How long he stays that way depends on you, your majesty.” He said the words with so much condescension Stiles felt like he deserved an award for it. “We’ll be in touch.”

The video ended and Stiles stared at him.

“That’s it? Four broken ribs and suspension just to say ‘we have your human, we’ll be in touch’? Worst Bond villain ever.”

“Does he ever stop talking?” Deucalion asked with a deep sigh.
“Not in my experience, though I hear you came close by threatening to remove his tongue.”

“Something we’ll revisit if he doesn’t shut up.”

Stiles decided to keep his trap shut this time around.

“We should go over the plans again,” Gerard said, turning to Deucalion. “I know how they operate, and we’ll need to be ready when the time comes. If we don’t take out the Alpha and her son immediately, it will complicate things on your side.”

“We have a plan for the heir, it’s the Alpha’s mate we’ll need to worry about,” Kali said, giving Gerard a look of disgust, like it pained her speaking to him. “Get to the mate, and we get to the Alpha. We’ve already got one, so getting the other is our priority.”

“Perhaps not a conversation to have in front of Mr. Stilinski,” Deucalion said with a wicked smile that was all teeth. “Come. Let us discuss.”

The other three left the room, shutting the door behind them. Stiles tried to listen in, but it was hard to concentrate with all the pain he was in from the suspension with four broken ribs. Maybe five, given Kali’s hit.

While risky, he knew he couldn’t do much if he didn’t get the agony under control, so he clenched his eyes shut and concentrated on releasing the hold he had on the healing. He was still human, and his Alpha wasn’t there to speed up the process, but he knew they would heal within a few hours. When he felt the wound on his face slowly close up, all he could do was hope the twins didn’t notice.

He still couldn’t focus on the conversation outside his room, still in way too much pain despite starting the healing process, but something about what they’d said bothered him. About taking out Talia and Derek first, but that Derek was under control. It made sense, considering they had Stiles, but they’d also mentioned Michael being a problem.

It took a lot of slow and steady breathing, trying to control how much pain he was in, for the realization to kick in.

Gerard had said Talia and Derek would complicate things on their side, meaning the wolves. And Kali had agreed that Michael would also be a problem.

And the only reason Talia, Derek and Michael were a problem was because of the thing they kept threatening to cut out of Stiles’ mouth.

They could talk.

And talking meant giving orders. And being the Alpha meant giving orders others had to obey.

Deucalion had said it himself, they were lucky Stiles was unclaimed, because even when he and Derek were barely speaking, he could already control the Alpha pack enough to make them pause.

But now... they didn’t know... and if he’d been a threat before...

“Did he pass out?” one of the twins asked—Stiles thought it might be Aiden, his voice was a bit scratchier. “Or is he dead?”

“His heart’s still beating, of course he’s not dead,” Ethan snapped back.
“It’s going really fast. Probably not passed out, then.”

“Probably just scared.” He could hear the sneer in Ethan’s voice when he said it.

“I’d be scared too, with what Deucalion has planned for him.” Stiles heard Aiden’s steps approach, his eyes still shut and trying to breathe calmly in through his nose, out through his mouth. A sharp slap to his face jerked him out of his attempts to remain calm. “Hey.”

Stiles opened his eyes and turned back to face Aiden, glaring up at him. The smirk on Aiden’s face slowly slid off, and for half a second, he almost looked afraid.

“You will release me,” Stiles said, with feeling.

Aiden’s hand twitched, his spine snapping ramrod straight, and he saw Ethan shift uncomfortably a few steps behind his brother.

“You will release me,” he said again, clenching his fists and pushing all the Alpha power he could muster into his voice.

Aiden’s jaw tightened, his teeth grinding together, and then he turned and walked out of the room. For a second, Stiles thought maybe it hadn’t worked, but then Ethan moved forward and ripped the chains out of the wall, letting Stiles’ feet hit the ground again.

He supposed if he’d been left to his own devices, he could’ve tried ripping them out himself, but it looked like he didn’t have to go that far. Besides, his strength wasn’t that good, he didn’t think he’d do much more than injure himself.

Aiden returned moments later, looking almost constipated, and he reached up to slot a key into the lock, undoing one manacle. When his hand was free, Aiden moved to the other one, doing the same thing before taking a step back, the chains hanging limply from the hook in the ceiling.

Stiles rubbed his right wrist with a wince, since it was the same one Aiden had been trying to break earlier, but it would stop hurting before long. His ribs would take forever, but at least he wasn’t suspended anymore.

“Thanks,” he said automatically. Then he realized he’d totally Rey’d them from Star Wars: The Force Awakens. He’d have laughed about it if things weren’t so dire for him.

Sure, he was free, but now what? His room didn’t have a window.

“I don’t suppose you can just lead me to the door, can you?” he asked quietly, still rubbing his wrist.

Neither of them moved, and Aiden looked pissed. Ethan just looked a little shell-shocked, like he had no idea why they were actually obeying him, but Stiles didn’t know how long this lasted and he wasn’t a Jedi, so he just glanced at the door.

He hadn’t seen any exits other than the one he’d been pulled through, and the window in the bathroom he’d passed was too small for him to squeeze out of. That meant he’d have to find a way to get to the door or, at the very least, another room with a window. Not ideal.

“Okay.” He turned back to the twins, and inhaled deeply before putting on his Alpha voice again. “Protect me with your life.”

They jerked again, and it occurred to Stiles that it must feel the same way to them as joining the
Hale pack had felt to Stiles. Painful. Cora had said once that orders caused people to snap straight, and he’d seen it himself numerous times. People always looked disgruntled, but not in pain.

These orders they didn’t want to follow, so he could imagine how much it hurt them to be doing so, how hard they were trying to fight them. But he knew from Derek that they weren’t forever, because his uncle had been ordered to stay away from him, and then tried to kill him again not long afterwards.

“This is gonna be fun,” Stiles muttered, motioning for Aiden to move towards the door. He obeyed, pulling it open and stepping out first. Stiles followed with Ethan on his heels, and they’d barely taken one step out of the room when Stiles saw Deucalion, Kali and Gerard still in the corridor less than two steps away from them.

Kali and Gerard turned to him instantly.

“Restrain Gerard!” Stiles blurted out, stumbling back the opposite way as Kali and a blind Deucalion hastened to obey, and bashing into Ethan. “Get me out of here!”

Ethan grabbed at his arm so hard that he thought maybe his order had fallen short, but he was dragged through the house to the door at the end. What happened next was a lesson to him on how to phrase his orders going forward, because he hadn’t been specific enough, and Ethan had obviously tried to find the loophole in it to stop Stiles from escaping.

That presented itself in the form of doing what Stiles asked, and getting him out of the cabin. How he did that, however, was by hurling Stiles clear through a set of glass double-doors in what looked to be the master bedroom.

All the air left him when he landed, glass and wood breaking skin across his body. He was pretty sure he blacked out, but thankfully it wasn’t for long, because while it took a while for his vision to clear, he managed to stumble to his feet before Ethan could vault out after him.

“I said protect me with your life,” Stiles shouted back at him, pointing an accusatory finger while he stumbled towards the van. “Get back in there!”

Ethan disappeared from the window while Stiles struggled to hurry for the van. His leg was in agony, though he didn’t think it was broken. When he glanced down, he saw a large piece of wood imbedded in his thigh.

“Awesome!” he shouted to no one, reaching the driver’s side of the van and wrenching it open—and almost clear off. “Terrific!”

Bending down, he cried out when he pulled it out, knowing he shouldn’t do that, but fuck it. Accelerated healing, he was sure he’d be fine.

Climbing behind the wheel of the van, he ducked when shots were fired from somewhere to his right, slamming the door before any of them could hit him. Great. Werewolves he could control. Hunters, not so much.

“Keys, keys, keys!” Stiles hastily checked the visor and ignition, but then remembered this wasn’t a movie where keys would just conveniently be laying around for him to use when he needed them.

He let out a shout when Kali landed on the hood and smashed a fist through the windshield. He covered his face with his arms, leaning back to avoid her sharp claws, and shouted.
“Stop, stop!”

She did, breathing hard and claws inches from his throat. He could hear Hunters shouting from inside the house, and wondered how much damage the twins had to be doing to keep them all in there.

Then again, the two on his right were struggling to make their way through the trees, shouting to each other and occasionally shooting at the van. He was pretty sure one of them had shot out the tires.

Didn’t matter, van would still move, just badly.

“Give me the keys,” he ordered.

Kali didn’t move, and for a second, he thought maybe she didn’t have the keys. But then she slowly ripped her arm back out of the windshield, and with the most intensely burning hatred look he had ever seen before, she reached into her pocket, and held the keys out to him through the hole she’d made.

“Cool. Thanks,” he said, heart somewhere up in his throat. He nodded towards the approaching Hunters. “Take care of that for me?”

She was gone in a second and he let out a slow breath before hastily flipping through the keys and jabbing the appropriate one into the ignition. Shifting into reverse, he slammed on the gas and shot backwards, almost braining himself on the steering wheel.

Once he exploded out onto the small dirt road that had led to their cabin, he shifted back into drive and floored it, the van bouncing roughly over the uneven terrain and kicking up dirt behind him. He had no idea where he was, or how to get home, but for now all he had to do was get as much distance between him and the bad guys as possible.

He hissed and reached down to grip at his thigh, the pain not diminishing in the slightest, and he wondered if maybe he’d overdone it with the not-a-Werewolf healing. He chanced a glance down and saw a lot of blood. Shit. No time to worry about that right now.

Rounding a bend too quickly, Stiles almost lost control of the van before managing to straighten it out, just in time to see someone in the middle of the road. He slammed on the brakes just as he recognized that it was the guy from his house.

Ennis.

Stiles had just shifted to hit the gas again with his foot, but he’d closed too much distance and Ennis flew at the van and slammed both fists on the hood, the back wheels coming clear off the ground and Stiles almost flying through the front.

“Oh fuck! Jesus!” He managed to keep himself in his seat, yelling at his brain to shut up about the importance of seat belts, and cried out when the van was on solid ground again, the rough action jarring his ribs.

It was extremely hard to breathe and he really hoped he hadn’t punctured a lung.

He let out a shout when the door was ripped off and tossed away, scrambling over the partition to get to the passenger seat, but Ennis grabbed his closest ankle and yanked him back, grabbing the front of his shirt with his other hand and hauling him out of the car.
“Let me go!” he ordered. “Let go!”

Ennis dropped him, but only so that he could rearrange his grip from Stiles’ shirt to his throat. He slammed him back hard against the side of the van, then lifted him off his feet, hand tight and blocking off his airways.

Stiles clawed at his hand, struggling to inhale, and noticed the guy had something stuffed in his ears.

Great. Ennis had been out running errands and one of the Hunters had probably called to say all hell had broken loose because Stiles could Mate Talk—as the Hales called it.

A pathetic sound escaped him, the edges of his vision going dark while he choked. He punched at Ennis’ shoulder, but it didn’t look like he even felt it, tilting his head and tightening his grip further, Stiles’ mouth opening in a desperate attempt to inhale.

If he passed out, he was fucked. They really would rip his tongue out after what he’d just pulled, and they probably knew he was claimed, now. He was sure Hale mates couldn’t just order Alphas around willy nilly if they weren’t claimed.

Brain dangerously low on oxygen and vision swimming and growing darker, Stiles struggled to come up with a plan with his failing mental faculties and did the only thing he could think of.

He kicked Ennis in the balls.

The Werewolf dropped him immediately, Stiles crashing to the ground and coughing roughly, inhaling sharply and clutching at his throat while he struggled to replenish his oxygen supply. He didn’t give himself more than two large gulps of air before scrambling to his feet. His leg burned from the injury, and he felt like his larynx was crushed, but he turned and forced himself to run.

Ennis was still on the ground, but he wouldn’t be for long.

Stiles could see a house through the trees to his right and he pushed through the pain, racing towards it as fast as he could, still coughing and struggling to breathe. He tripped on his way up the short steps and then banged on the door urgently, glancing over his shoulder to check for someone following him.

“All right, all right, I’m coming,” a man’s voice said impatiently.

When he opened the door, Stiles shoved past him into the house, ignoring his squawk of indignation.

“We need to call the police! We need to call the police right now!” he insisted, rushing through the man’s house and looking around for a phone.

“Son, are you all right?”

“What part of ‘we need to call the police’ makes you think I’m all right?!” Stiles demanded, borderline hysterically.

The man looked to be somewhere in his fifties, with close-cropped hair and a large build. Like some kind of retired military. Normally, Stiles would feel much better at the sight of him, but this guy meant nothing to Werewolves. They would barrel right through him, and Stiles had to call the cops and get out before he got the poor guy killed.
“Calm down, it’s okay,” he insisted, quickly pulling a cell phone out of his pocket and holding it out. “Take it, I’ve got a gun. Give me a second.”

Stiles snatched the phone from his hand while the man hurried down the corridor to another room.

Hands shaking from adrenaline and freaking terror, Stiles dialled nine-one-one.

When the operator answered, he asked where he was, because he had no idea which dispatch he’d reached. When the woman confirmed he was in Fairview County, only an hour out from Beacon Hills, and about forty minutes from campus, Stiles gave his dad’s name and badge number, as well as Derek’s and Parrish’s for good measure, and said he’d been kidnapped and to notify them immediately.

The retired marine or football player or whatever came back while he was still telling them to notify his dad, and he gave the address of the cabin they were in so that cops could be sent from the closest station.

Stiles knew it wouldn’t do any good, these weren’t regular bad guys, they were Werewolves and Hunters, but he wasn’t going to say no to more guns.

They were still on the phone with the cops when the guy whose cabin he’d invaded—retired marine, definitely, from the way he held his gun—moved to the window and said, “There’re people coming up the path.”

“Shit!” Stiles hung up the phone, the operator in the middle of a sentence, and dropped it on the hall table. “Do you have a back door?”

“You can’t go out there, you’re safer in here. I can keep them out, they’re not armed.”

“Oh yes they are!”

“I have training they don’t. Trust me, it’ll make a difference.”

“Nope, it sure won’t!” Stiles insisted, turning so quickly his head spun and he stumbled. He shook his head and managed to make his way quickly to the back of the house, still clutching at his leg. It was similar in layout to the one he’d been in, so it was easy to find the master bedroom with the French doors. Except when he hobbled into the room, someone was already flying through them and Stiles backtracked quickly.

“Oh fuck! Oh shit!”

He really should’ve tried to plan this better, because now he was playing cat and mouse with a whole bunch of angry Werewolves and heavily armed Hunters in a poor man’s vacation home and causing thousands of dollars of property damage.

Oh, and might get the poor guy killed. That too.

Stiles had just exited the bedroom to race back down the corridor since, man with a gun, gun was better than nothing, when he choked at someone grabbing the back of his shirt and wrenching him off his feet.

He expected to hit the ground, but was instead pulled back into a hard, broad chest, whipped around, and shoved forcefully at someone else. He stumbled, vision swimming and head spinning before slamming into another body, and then a roar so loud exploded through the cabin that all the windows shattered.
“Wha—” Stiles turned his head and just barely saw a Beacon Hills County Sheriff uniform before it disappeared from sight around the corner.

Two shots went off before Derek’s voice said, “Police, don’t shoot!”

“Wha...?” Stiles looked at who was clutching him and saw that it was Cora, her eyes gold and features morphed. “Am I dead? Am I hallucinating?”

“Stiles, your leg—!”

“Here,” Boyd said from the broken doors, motioning Cora over. “Give him here. I’ll get him to his dad.”

Stiles felt like a ragdoll, Cora yanking him off his feet and practically hurling him out the window at Boyd. He caught him with ease, threw Stiles over his shoulder, and then started running. Stiles could see beige pants in his peripheral and looked over to find Parrish beside them with a gun in both hands, and smoking.

Not with a cigarette kind of smoking, but literally smoking, cracks in his skin showing off lines of white light and deep red. Stiles supposed that was what a Hellhound looked like.

“What is happening?!” Stiles demanded, because he honestly wasn’t sure he hadn’t passed out from the pain and was hallucinating all this.

Except, yup, still in pain. Shoulder against his broken ribs definitely causing an extremely large amount of pain. Also vision swimming, a lot of unsteady sights all around him.

Boyd skidded to a halt after a short pass through a set of trees and Stiles was once again handed off to someone else, wobbling horribly when his feet hit the ground and almost crumpling, but the new person grabbed at him and saved him from falling.

“He’s bleeding!” a familiar voice said, and he glanced up to see his dad, looking terrified and ashen-faced.

“Pops.”

“Here, get him inside.”

Stiles turned and saw Kincaid helping to pull him towards the open back door of the cruiser.

“Oh shit, I really must be dead, because you were dead.” Was he slurring? He felt like he was slurring. And man was he tired. It had been a long day. Also, he was dead. “Totally dead,” he said, falling hard onto the back seat of the cruiser. “You got shot and everything,” he informed Kincaid, as if he wasn’t well aware of his deadness. “Fuck, we lost the battle and everyone died. Man, we suck.” His eyes slid shut.

“Stiles!” Something hit him in the cheek, stinging and painful, and his eyes snapped back open. His dad’s hands were on his face, nose inches away from his own. “Stiles stay with me.”

He grunted when something tightened around his leg.

“This is bad,” Kincaid hissed, then, “Get Princess Laura, now!”

“Stiles, stay with me!”

Man did he want to. He hadn’t seen much of his dad lately.
But he was in a lot of pain, and he was clearly dead since nothing was making sense, and he felt like he deserved a nap after finding out he hadn’t survived the day.

When his eyes closed this time, no amount of slapping woke him up.

The first thought that passed through Stiles’ mind when consciousness returned to him was, “Oh, not dead.”

That was closely followed by his second, which was, “Ow.”

The overhead lights seemed a tad too bright when he finally managed to peel his eyelids apart, and for a few seconds he just lay there staring up at them, wondering if maybe it was the bright light coming to take him to the afterlife.

Except no way the afterlife hurt this much, so still not dead. That hadn’t changed in the past ten seconds.

He kept perfectly still while he tried to take in his surroundings, wondering if this was all some elaborate ruse to make him let his guard down. Then again, he’d literally been unconscious so he didn’t know how much more ‘down’ his guard could possibly be.

Doing a mental inventory from the bottom up, he wiggled his toes, determining they were all accounted for, and his ability to feel them suggested he still had his legs. Fingers, hands, arms, check. He pressed his tongue against the back of his teeth, relieved to find everything as it should be.

He felt a little weak, but otherwise not too bad. In some pain, but not an excruciatingly large amount of it, so that was good.

A large snort to his left had him jump and he finally turned his head. His dad was sitting in a chair beside him, head bowed at an awkward angle that was definitely going to give him a crick in his neck. On the next inhale, another snort escaped him, his dad snoring in small, aborted sounds.

“Look who decided to join us.”

Stiles jumped again and turned to look the other way.

Laura was at a small table by the door, chart open and pen in hand. The door was shut, so she’d obviously been there the entire time he’d been waking up and assessing his situation.

The smile on her face was relieved, and he could tell how exhausted she was. He pawed around for the control for his bed and she moved forward to take it, raising him into a seated position. Once he was upright, she passed him a cup of water, which he drank greedily. Once it was empty, she refilled it and he downed it again. The third time he only drank about half of it before setting it back down with a small cough.

“You’re the miracle of the hospital,” she informed him, taking a seat on the edge of his bed and smiling slightly. “When we brought you in, everyone said you weren’t gonna make it. Lucky for you, you have accelerated healing or they might’ve been right.”

Stiles reached up to poke at his ribs, but they felt fine. Laura grabbed at his hand to stop him from jabbing in too hard.

“Don’t aggravate it, your body worked hard to heal you up. Derek, too. Melissa and I have had to
take turns making sure we’re the only ones checking in on you, considering.” She winked at him.
“Those X-rays they took mysteriously disappeared before anyone could look at them, haven’t a
clue how that happened. The last set managed not to get misplaced and things look really good.”

“Why do I feel like I went ten rounds with a gorilla?” he asked, exhausted just from sitting up, and
the bed had done most of the work!

“Ah, that would be the blood loss.” She placed one hand carefully on his closest thigh. “Derek’s
still working on that one, there was a lot of damage. Your body was trying to alternate between the
two most severe injuries so this one is taking a bit longer.”

“You’d think broken bones would take longer.”

“You would, but if the bones broke first, your body was already working on those. Would’ve taken
it a while to shift gears.” She flicked him in the forehead. “You’re not a Werewolf, remember?
Accelerated healing or not, you have limits. Didn’t anyone ever tell you not to pull anything out
when it was wedged in like that?”

“Yeah, but who has time to think about that?” Stiles insisted with a small smile, despite the fact he
had, in fact, remembered even as he’d been doing it.

An automatic reaction, he supposed.

“Mm hm.” She gave him a look, then stood once more. “You’ve had transfusions, so you should be
okay after some rest, but don’t do anything stupid for the next few hours. I can’t handle Derek how
he was earlier again. I almost throttled him.”

Stiles smiled slightly, looking around the room. He was actually surprised Derek wasn’t glued to
his bedside, and it must’ve shown on his face, because Laura answered his unspoken inquiry on
where he was.

“He went to grab some coffee. Mostly for your dad, I think.”

“What time is it?” he asked, realizing he didn’t have a clue. It was still light out, so couldn’t have
been more than an hour or two.

Laura checked her watch and when she replied, Stiles’ stomach bottomed out.

“Just after ten.”

“In the morning?”

His dad woke with a startled snort and Laura gave him a look, then motioned the sunlight
streaming into the room. “Well it sure isn’t the middle of the night.”

“Stiles.” His dad’s hand found his and squeezed tightly. “Son, are you—”

“How long was I out?!”

“A while,” Laura said cautiously, like she didn’t understand why he was reacting like this.

The door opened then, Derek hurrying in with a drink tray in one hand. It held two coffees, one
much larger than the other, and the relief on his face would’ve been sweet any other time, but
Stiles had a one-track mind right then and he just barrelled on.

“What happened? With Deucalion and Gerard and—and all of them?”
“They’ve been taken care of,” his father insisted. “After you passed out, the pack and police handled it.”

Stiles turned to him incredulously, feeling exhausted, but still having enough energy to be horrendously offended. “What do you mean you all handled it after I passed out?! You mean I lost a little blood and missed all the action?!”

“I mean, it wasn’t exactly a little blood,” Laura said slowly, glancing at Derek. They both looked confused, but his dad actually looked relieved, like seeing him this fired up about something that was probably stupid to everyone else meant he was going to be fine.

“How did you even find me?”

“Tracking device,” his dad informed him.

“What?” he demanded. “Where?!”

“In your shoes.”

“Who said you could put tracking devices in my shoes?!” Stiles demanded, half-flailing his free arm. A full flail would’ve cost too much energy, so he settled for a half-flail. He ignored that the tracking device was the only reason he hadn’t been murdered after his botched escape attempt.

“How many shoes did you do that to?!”

“All of them,” his dad said calmly.

“Invasion of privacy!”

“Are you seriously mad right now?” Laura asked, seeming crossed between confused and shocked. “If he hadn’t done that, we wouldn’t have reached you for hours. You probably wouldn’t have been breathing anymore.”

Stiles flailed his free arm again, feeling tired and a little lightheaded. He should probably stop with the flailing, considering the recent blood loss.

“This is some Suzanne Collins bullshit right here!”

“I don’t know who that is,” Derek said, turning to Laura for help.

“Seriously? You need to read more, dude.”

“Oh, he reads.” Laura looked amused. “You’re just more in the Eric realm of books right now.”

“Katniss,” Stiles said to Derek, stabbing his finger against the bedspread. “Katniss led the revolution, made it all the way into the city, was almost at the bad guy’s house, and then got knocked out until the whole war was over!” He pounded the fist of that same hand against his sternum, Laura making an aborted move as if to stop him before realizing he’d only hit himself once. “I’m Katniss here! I’m the hero, and I get knocked out during the climax?! I basically slept through the whole final arc of my own story, this is bullshit!”

“You did the most important thing.” Derek insisted, finally moving closer to the bed and taking a seat in the abandoned chair on Stiles’ other side. “Stiles, you escaped. We wouldn’t have been able to win if they still had you, but somehow you managed to get away. Your part was done, you deserved a break.”
“That’s just you trying to make me feel better I missed all the action,” Stiles insisted, resisting the urge to scowl. Unfair. Entirely unfair!

Derek smiled at him. “I thought you liked missing out and sleeping in.”

“That’s being taken out of context!”

“Okay.” Laura moved forward and grabbed at Stiles’ flailing arm. “Let’s all calm down before I sedate you. Your body is struggling to heal and replenish all the blood it lost, can you maybe not make it work itself towards a heart attack?”

“Tell me everything,” he ordered, turning to his dad. “Everything.”

As it turned out, there wasn’t much to tell. After Kincaid had been shot and Stiles had offered up his location, the Council member he’d been on the phone with had immediately called Talia. She in turn called Cora, Eric and Scott to go and find Kincaid. The problem with the situation was that it was a delicate balance between calling an ambulance and risking exposure, or Kincaid dying.

The Talbot pack ended up solving the problem for them, because they were closer to the university than the Hale pack, so Cora hot-wired Stiles’ Jeep and drove him there. They had various strains of wolfsbane and ended up saving his life in time for Laura to show up.

Talia had long ago contacted the sheriff, and he and the rest of the pack were driving the two hour long commute towards the university, only to veer off when Stiles’ location finally stopped in Fairview. Scott, Cora and Eric drove to meet them, along with a majority of the Talbot pack, and when Stiles’ tracker started showing him on the move again when everyone was only a few minutes out, Talia started re-directing people, half of the pack going to the cabin Stiles had been held at, and the other half following the tracker.

Stiles had called the cops by then so his dad, Parrish and Derek all got alerts over the radio. They knew they had to move quickly, because local law enforcement was en route, but they ended up managing to finish the fight with relatively little effort given the full might of the Hale pack, Council guards and the Talbot pack.

Only one casualty on the Alpha pack side, his own doing from the sounds of it, and the rest of them had been rounded up and whisked out of sight to be dealt with by the Council. The Hunters had been easier to keep around given they were human and thus could go to human jail. Stiles had already been on his way back to Beacon Hills by then with Laura and Derek tending to him in the back seat while his dad tried to break the sound barrier.

Then it was just a matter of Stiles getting checked out, blood transfusions, some Werewolf healing and pain-sucking, and here they were.

Stiles asked about the marine whose cabin they’d essentially destroyed, but they’d called in one of the Council Mages and his memory had been altered. The Hales were paying to restore his cabin, but the man only knew something had happened and it was being covered.

Stiles informed them that it was very *Men In Black* of them and Derek just rolled his eyes before asking if Stiles ever stopped comparing his life to books and television.

“Where’s the fun in that? My life would be so boring.”

“Oh yeah,” his dad said, shaking his head. “Your life is dreadfully mediocre.”

They only chatted for a little while longer before Laura told him to get some sleep. He hadn’t realized it at first, but the only reason she’d been lingering so long was because she wasn’t actually on shift. She’d just come by to keep an eye on him, and he felt bad because she clearly needed some time to sleep.

He figured it was the protective streak in her. Stiles was pack, and he was her brother’s mate. He actually didn’t even know if the rest of the pack knew that Derek had claimed him yet. He asked him about it the next time he woke up after a short nap and Derek confirmed it was still a secret.

Stiles napped on and off for a few hours, waking up again around five in the afternoon and feeling much more energized. He told Derek and his dad his side of things since he’d gone to sleep that morning before sharing his series of events, and had to give a much more abridged version once the police came to get his statement.

Someone had found his keys and passed them to the lost and found at school, so Scott had gone to pick them up, but his phone and wallet were long gone. Stiles just sighed about that because this would be his third phone this year, but Derek insisted he’d buy him a nice new one, whatever model he wanted, and Stiles punched at him because he wasn’t his sugar daddy.

Talia had been suspiciously absent, and it wasn’t until a little after two that morning that she slipped into the room with Laura. Apparently she’d flown back to New York with the Council immediately after the fighting had ceased. Derek had his father and siblings to help him with Stiles if anything went wrong—though she’d been confident they wouldn’t because Stiles was, “The toughest mate I’ve ever met, don’t tell my husband that.”—so Talia had been forced to deal with the more political side of things.

She’d left the fate of the Alpha pack to the Council, this being one of those situations where she wasn’t willing to sentence anyone to death since that wasn’t her way, but knowing the Council would decide the outcome in the end for a crime such as this.

Going against the royal family was grounds for execution. Going after the mate of an Alpha was grounds for execution. Going after the *royal family’s mate* was probably grounds for double execution, if that was even a thing. Stiles didn’t know, but he could tell it was bad.

He hadn’t heard about Gerard and Kate, or any of the other Hunters, but he assumed they were all locked up snug in their cells, probably cursing his name with their every breath. Wasn’t his fault they’d underestimated him. Like he’d told Merrak, people saw a human and figured he wasn’t a threat. Stiles knew a fair few monsters who would disagree.

He stayed in the hospital overnight again, even though he felt fine. Laura insisted it was mostly for show, given most people didn’t have accelerated healing, and reminded him he’d have to walk out with a limp since Derek had been helping him heal with his whole Alpha-mate bond pain-sucking thing, so by the time he woke up on his third day there, the wound was completely gone.

He was a bonafide medical miracle. Only not, and they couldn’t let people know that, so Melissa came to re-wrap his leg over his smooth skin and then went to get someone to start on his discharge papers.

It was almost dinner time when he finally walked out of the hospital room in fresh clothes his dad had brought over. Most of the pack had been coming and going from the hospital, but Laura had been adamant on leaving Stiles alone so he could heal faster, so he hadn’t seen any of them.

When he started down the hall—fake-limping and putting some of his weight on Derek—with his dad on his left side and Derek on his right, he could see a few of his friends standing in the waiting
room, speaking to each other in low tones.

The second Jackson saw him, he started to shove Cora out of the way so he could close the distance, but he didn’t get the chance. Stiles was surprised at how violently Jackson was pushed aside, but then again, considering who was barrelling down the corridor towards him, he supposed he shouldn’t have been.

A nurse snapped for him not to run, but Merrak ignored her and just bolted down the corridor before slamming into Stiles so hard he almost toppled backwards. Derek and his dad had to steady him before he just landed on his back with Merrak on top of him.

Stiles wrapped his arms around Merrak, the sixteen year old gripping the back of his shirt in his fists, face buried in his shoulder. Stiles could feel him shaking, and he felt guilty for worrying him so much. Not that he’d been planning on getting kidnapped and almost dying, but still.

“I think someone missed you,” Cora said with a smile, coming up beside him with Jackson and Scott. “A few people just left for school or work, they’re gonna be pissed you showed up literally a minute later.”

“Not like I won’t see them later,” Stiles insisted, still hugging Merrak, since he seemed uninterested in letting him go.

“Are you okay?” Scott asked, looking nervous and eying him worriedly.

Stiles rolled his eyes. “No, Scott. I’m terribly injured and dying, that’s why they saw fit to release m—ow! What the fuck!”

Merrak pulled back after having punched him in the kidney, looking furious. “Don’t joke about dying! You almost did!”

“Oh my God, are you crying?” he blurted out. He didn’t mean to, but he was just surprised to see the moisture collecting in Merrak’s eyes.

“Fuck you!” He wiped viciously at his face. “You’re so fucking stupid and annoying and I hate you and you can’t ever do that to me again!”

“Ditto,” Derek said, kissing Stiles’ temple. “Please stop getting kidnapped, you’re not a Disney princess.”

“Oh, so Disney is okay to reference, but anything else is off the table?” Stiles demanded, wrapping an arm around Merrak’s shoulders and continuing on his way out. His dad had to subtly tap at his leg to remind him to hobble along and he hastily went back to pretending he was in pain.

“Mom wants you over for dinner,” Cora informed him. “Whoever’s available in the pack is going to be there, and she invited the Talbot pack, too. As a thank you.”

“Guess they really did win her favour because of me,” Stiles said with a wink, the group shifting so they could all exit the hospital.

“While I’d love to say they did it for selfish reasons, they could see how distressed we were.” She shrugged as they headed for the parking lot. “The Alpha has his own mate, he could imagine what our pack was going through. They didn’t do it to get anything out of mom, they did it because they wanted to help. It just worked out, is all.”

“Hey, they seemed pretty nice when they came by with the gift earlier this year,” Stiles agreed,
stopping near the edge of the lot since it was clear they’d all parked in different places.

For a few seconds, no one moved, and it was clear they were trying to figure out the arrangements, because nobody present seemed interested in letting Stiles out of their sight.

Whatever car he ended up in, he knew Merrak would be attached to him, since he didn’t seem like he was going to be extricating himself from Stiles’ side any time soon. It was kind of nice, actually, and he ruffled his hair playfully, which earned him a hard smack.

Eventually, Derek made the decision for everyone, saying Stiles should go with the sheriff. His dad was also going to the dinner, so Derek said it would be a good opportunity for Stiles to go home, have a shower, spend some time with his dad before heading over. He had to forcibly remove Merrak from him because his brother was adamant he wouldn’t be a shit and could sit quietly on the couch while Stiles and his dad had father-son bonding time. He spat curses at Derek all the way to his cruiser.

Cora and Jackson headed off towards the Porsche, saying they would see him in a few hours at the Hale house. Scott tagged along with Stiles and his dad to get a ride back to his place. Kira was going to pick him up for dinner, so he really just needed the ride home.

They were mostly silent in the car on the way back, the sheriff easing to a stop at the curb to let Scott out. The rest of the drive was conducted in equal silence, and when his dad stopped the car and turned off the engine in front of their home, Stiles saw all the fight leave him and he covered his eyes with one hand, letting out a shaky breath.

Stiles’ heart clenched in his chest at the sound, and he reached over to take his dad’s free hand. The sheriff squeezed it back so tightly his knuckles turned white, but Stiles didn’t mind. He just tightened his own grip and the two of them sat in the car for a few minutes while the events of the past few months washed over them.

It was over. All the terrible bullshit was finally over, and Stiles felt like he could breathe again. Things were still going to be messed up, and hard, and weird, but at least for now, he was safe, and his dad was safe, and his friends were safe.

For now, he was going to take the win, and just sit there squeezing his father’s hand.

Honestly, the last thing Stiles wanted to do after showering and getting all comfortable and cozy on the couch with his dad to watch a movie was get dressed and head back out to a dinner. Considering it was for him, he didn’t feel like he could bail though, and his dad was working later to make up for the time off he’d taken while Stiles was in the hospital, so he’d end up leaving anyway to go to the loft.

At least this way he didn’t have to spend any time alone.

He and his dad headed for the dinner, which wasn’t so much a dinner as it was a massive party. There was music playing somewhere at the back of the house, and there were so many people that Stiles kind of felt a little suffocated. Only three-fourths of the Hale pack were present, but it looked like the whole Talbot pack had shown up. He supposed it made sense, this was probably a once in a lifetime opportunity for them and he was sure every single member had dropped everything to come by.

Stiles mostly hung out with his friends, Derek coming and going throughout the evening since he had to make friendly as the future Alpha. Every time Stiles caught his eye, Derek was rolling his
and even mimed blowing his brains out once when his mother wasn’t looking. Stiles couldn’t help but explode into laughter at that, because it was very clear he was rubbing off on him.

He was sure the party could’ve gone on all night, and it was possible it did, but by eleven he was running on fumes and Derek seemed to have had enough with playing nice so he and Stiles bid Talia and Michael farewell, waved at whoever they passed and had the chance to say goodbye to, and then left the Hale house to head to the loft.

“I kind of pity your siblings,” he admitted when they climbed into the Camaro together. “If the party doesn’t stop, they’ll never get any sleep.”

“Laura has a place close to the hospital,” he admitted, starting the car and turning out of the long drive. “She likes staying here because of pack, but she occasionally spends the night there. If this goes on too long, they’ll probably all end up there to get some shut-eye.”

“Well, Merrak has school tomorrow,” Stiles said, since it was the middle of the week. He didn’t know what day, though, he hadn’t really been paying attention. He’d already told his dad he’d probably take the week and head back to school on Monday, he didn’t have any exams or papers right now, so he could afford to unwind a little after almost dying.

“Yeah. He’s pissed because you can’t pick him up until you get the Jeep back.”

“When am I getting that back?” Stiles asked suspiciously. “What did your sister do to it?”

“It’s probably best you don’t know,” Derek said with a wince.

“If she broke Roscoe, I’m disowning her as a friend. And sister-in-law. And packmate. She will forever be that girl who hangs around.”

Derek laughed, but didn’t comment on the empty threat. He instead shifted their conversation towards what kind of phone Stiles wanted. He honestly hadn’t really thought much on it, but ended up asking for any kind of phone where he didn’t risk crotch-dialling anyone and he didn’t have to buy a case with a cover. They were so bulky, he just wanted a phone that worked the way it should.

In the end, Derek said he’d just surprise him and Stiles left it at that.

They reached the loft a few minutes later, having conducted the remainder of their drive in comfortable silence. Stiles reached the door first, unlocking it and then stumbling his way up the stairs.

“We really need lights for your poor human,” he informed Derek. “Mate bites don’t extend to night vision.”

“I’ll get some installed, just haven’t figured out how to finish the bottom half of our home yet.”

Stiles tripped on the last step, Derek grabbing his arm, and he slid the door to the loft open.

He knew it hadn’t been home for very long, but the moment he walked through the door and flipped on the light, everything felt right. His home, his space, and Derek here with him. It was something he didn’t honestly believe he’d ever share with anyone, let alone someone like Derek.

It was funny when he realized he’d hated him and wanted nothing to do with him when they’d first met. Life had a funny way of working itself out.

The door slid shut behind him, and when he turned to ask Derek if he wanted to watch an episode
of Netflix before they headed up to bed, he didn’t get the chance because Derek was suddenly there, wrapping strong arms around him and pulling him into a fierce and protective hug.

Stiles was getting a lot of hugs lately.

He just wrapped his arms around Derek, resting his cheek against his head. Derek tightened his grip on him, muscles tense and almost trembling, like he was struggling to hold himself back. He was breathing shakily against Stiles’ neck, and Stiles let out a slow sigh, one hand rubbing up and down his spine.

“I’m okay, Derek,” he insisted. “I’m right here.”

“I almost lost you.”

“No way,” he said with a small smile. “You wanted this relationship, you’re stuck with me now. Don’t think death is going to get you out of this.”

Derek let out a soft laugh, lifting his head but not releasing him. “No wonder Merrak calls you an idiot.”

“In my defence, Merrak calls everyone an idiot.”

“True.” Derek smiled, and then his eyes dipped down to Stiles’ lips. For a second, he said nothing, and stood perfectly still.

Stiles couldn’t help smirking. “You gonna stand there all night, or kiss me?”

“Still thinking about it,” Derek admitted, but after offering him another small smile, he leaned in and pressed his lips lightly against Stiles’.

Stiles smirked into the kiss, wrapping both arms around Derek’s neck and pulling him in closer. What started out sweet and teasing very quickly dissolved into harsh and desperate. Derek’s hands began to wander urgently across the expanse of Stiles’ chest, and Stiles pushed back into him so eagerly he accidentally bit into his lip hard enough to draw blood.

When they pulled apart for air, Stiles gasping almost embarrassingly, Derek wasted no time in yanking Stiles’ shirt up and tossing it aside, one hand come back to cradle his face to keep kissing him.

Stiles kicked off his own shoes while his hands found Derek’s jeans, pushing the button through the eyehole and yanking the zipper down while he stumbled backwards a step over his own shoes. Derek followed after him, hands dipping down into the back of his jeans and grabbing two handfuls of bare ass.

Inhaling another desperate lungful of air when they broke apart, Stiles struggled to yank off Derek’s shirt, which proved difficult since the other man wouldn’t take his hands out of the back of Stiles’ jeans. Eventually his shirt just got stuck halfway over his head and Derek had no choice but to release him so he could rip the article of clothing off with a snarl, tossing it aside.

It was really much hotter in theory than in practice, but they continued trying to kiss and undress each other while making their way up the spiral staircase to the second level where the bed was. Stiles tripped halfway up and almost bit through Derek’s tongue but thankfully managed to avoid any permanent damage.

He hurried up the last few steps, Derek practically bowling him over in his haste to follow, and
they managed to get the last of their clothes off. Derek stumbled his way out of his boxers, almost falling into Stiles since he was sucking on his tongue and pulling him forward by the back of the neck towards the bed.

Stiles’ legs hit the edge and he broke the kiss only long enough to fall onto it and scoot up towards the headboard. Derek crawled up over him, hovering for a few seconds before swooping down to capture his lips again.

It wasn’t anything like Stiles thought their first time would be. Not that he’d been expecting roses and soft music and candles or anything, but he thought he’d feel more nervous. He figured that it would just be awkward and uncomfortable, but nothing about what they’d just done, their desperate attempts to get each other naked, had felt awkward or uncomfortable. It had felt normal. Natural, even. Like this was just how life with Derek was.

Like they’d done this a thousand times.

Except they hadn’t, so when Derek lowered his weight down and lined their cocks up, rocking his hips in short, jerky motions, Stiles broke the kiss, breathing hard and feeling sweat beginning to break out across his skin. Derek mouthed and bit along his jaw, seeming content to have something to kiss and suck at regardless of what part of Stiles it was.

“Do we even have lube?” he asked breathlessly, tilting his head back and exposing more of his throat to Derek’s tongue and teeth. That earned him a soft growl of approval, Derek biting lightly at his Adam’s apple before licking at the mark.

“You think I bought us an apartment and didn’t think to buy lube?”

“I don’t know how your... wolf brain thinks,” Stiles insisted, reaching out blindly with one hand for Derek’s nightstand since his boyfriend’s hands were busy exploring every inch of his chest.

“Maybe you were just gonna spit in your hand and be done with it.”

“Some other time,” Derek said, biting hard at Stiles’ shoulder where a normal claim bite would go, but not breaking skin.

When he started kissing and sucking his way down Stiles’ torso, it allowed Stiles enough room to shift his upper body so he could finally reach the drawer. He practically yanked it out of the base, cursing when he almost dropped it and muttering about inconveniently timed bursts of strength. Derek just chuckled against his skin, and Stiles could feel him kissing and sucking at the claim mark on his ribs.

It took some doing, but he managed to locate the lube, trying to shove the drawer back in from an awkward angle before giving up and just letting it go. It hit the floor with a loud thud, and Derek laughed again, his dick rubbing against Stiles’ thigh since he’d moved down his body to reach his claim mark.

Stiles held the lube out in triumph and Derek took it from his hand, kissing at the bite one last time before sitting up and using one knee to push Stiles’ legs further apart.

He reached down to wrap one hand around himself, stroking lazily and groaning, head tilted back and eyes sliding shut. He heard Derek shifting before a warm, wet finger slid down the length of his perineum and circled his hole a few times.

“You gonna do that all night, or actually fuck me?” Stiles asked after a few seconds, glancing down the length of his body.
Derek seemed to be transfixed by what he was doing but his eyes snapped up to Stiles’ when he spoke and then back down before he slid his index finger in. Stiles clenched around the digit, Derek’s eyes snapping back up to his face.

Stiles grinned and waggled his eyebrows, rocking his hips down into the finger and swiping his thumb over the head of his erection before continuing his slow, lazy strokes.

“You’ve done this before,” Derek said.

“I might have experimented a bit,” he admitted. “Hard angle for me to reach though, so I definitely prefer this.” He licked his lips suggestively and Derek’s eyes started glowing blue around the edges, pupils blown wide.

It didn’t take long for Derek to add a second finger, pumping them in and out quickly, a dollop of lube sliding down Stiles’ crack. It was a little unpleasant, but he didn’t dwell on it because it would be a distant memory in a few seconds, he was sure.

When Derek added a third finger, the stretch burned a little bit, and Stiles started bucking his hips up into his hand, squeezing tightly. Derek ended up reaching out with his free one to clench the base to stop Stiles from finishing too soon.

Grunting, Stiles obediently released his cock, and let out another, louder grunt when Derek added a fourth finger, the stretch just borderline painful.

“I know you have a monster cock, but it can’t be that big,” he insisted, looking down the length of his body.

Derek glanced up at him, eyebrows raised, and he shifted a bit on the bed so that Stiles could get a perfect view of his cock, standing at full attention and the head a deep red with precum oozing from the slit.

Stiles let out another grunt, grinding down on the fingers. “Yeah, yeah, you’re well-endowed, fuck you.”

“Fuck you,” Derek corrected, curling his fingers.

He pressed up against Stiles’ prostate and he grunted, pushing down harder on the fingers when Derek pulled them out.

“Asshole.”

“Yes it is,” Derek offered with an unrepentant smirk at Stiles’ groan of agony.

“Will you just fuck me already before I change my mind?”

“You make it sound so sexy, how can I possibly resist?” Derek demanded, getting up onto his knees between Stiles’ spread legs and grabbing the lube. He squirted some out into his hand and began slicking himself up.

Stiles stared at his cock while his boyfriend stroked himself, propped up on his elbows, and when Derek went to put the lube down, Stiles re-evaluated how big his dick was and motioned for him to add a bit more lube.

Just in case. He didn’t want to have to call the party off because Derek’s dick broke his asshole.
Once Derek was sufficiently lubed up, he dropped the lube and shifted so he was more settled between Stiles’ legs. Then he reached out and hooked both arms under either of Stiles’ knees and dragged him down the bed in one quick pull. The flat of Derek’s dick was in Stiles’ crack and he rocked his hips teasingly, Derek letting out a growl that was more animal than human.

When he had Stiles how he wanted him, one hand left his leg and Derek shifted his hips back so that he could grab his dick and start lining it up. Stiles felt the tip breach him when he reached out and smacked at Derek’s arm still around his leg, other hand up and clenching the bedspread beneath his fingers.

“Wait, wait!”

“What?” Derek asked, chest rising and falling rapidly, eyes electric blue and fangs descending. It looked like it was taking everything he had not to thrust into Stiles in one go.

“You’re sure you’re not gonna end up, like, ripping a baby out of my stomach with your teeth, right?”

The most adorably confused look Stiles had ever seen crossed Derek’s features, pleasure disappearing for a split second before returning quickly, Derek’s hips pressing forward just a tiny bit more to push more of his dick into Stiles.

“What?”

“You know, I’m not gonna get Werewolf pregnant, right?” Stiles asked, chest rising and falling quickly and hips rocking back in small, aborted motions, struggling to stop himself from trying to suck Derek in further.

Derek huffed out a breath, almost a laugh. “Stiles, we talked about this. You can’t get pregnant. You’re a guy. You lack a few parts.”

“Just making sure,” he insisted, wiggling his hips and getting used to the girth. Derek was barely even in and already he felt huge. This was going to be a fucking for the ages.

“Besides,” Derek said, almost conversationally while he pushed in a bit more, very slowly. “If I was going to get a baby out of you, it wouldn’t be with my teeth.”

“No claws, either,” Stiles clarified.

“Stiles, my sister is a nurse, pretty sure if I had to get a baby out of you, I’d just call her.”

“But you said no babies were coming out of me, so it’s a moot point, right?”

“Please stop talking,” Derek insisted with a small groan. Stiles wasn’t sure if it was pleasure or exasperation, but he chose to believe it was the former.

He lifted his hips a bit more to give Derek better access, and he very slowly and torturously pressed into him, seeming to take his time with it, like he was savouring every second. His eyes were locked on his dick disappearing inside Stiles, and Stiles himself just let his head fall back against the mattress, one hand still digging nails into Derek’s bicep and the other hand clenched in the sheets beneath him.

When Derek finally pushed in all the way to the hilt, Stiles expected a moan to escape him. He expected the most embarrassing moan in the world to slide up his throat and escape his mouth, something so sinfully dirty that it would have Derek come at the mere sound of it.
That wasn’t what escaped him.

Instead, the second Derek was in to the hilt, Stiles let out a shaky exhale, almost in relief, like he’d been waiting his entire life for this moment and a moan just wasn’t enough.

For a few seconds, Derek did nothing more than roll his hips, nudging at Stiles’ prostate with each rotation, building up the pressure. When Stiles started getting impatient, clenching around him and trying to rock his hips, Derek finally showed him mercy and pulled out before slamming back in.

“Oh Jesus!” Stiles shouted, the sheer force of it having him slide up the bed. “Oh fuck!”

Derek’s other hand returned to Stiles’ knee, wrapping around it and pulling his hips up higher so that Stiles’ ass lifted off the bed. The angle made it so that every thrust in had Derek pounding right into his prostate and Stiles scrambled for something to hold onto, nails of his left hand breaking skin on Derek’s arm.

When he found nothing but the sheets, he brought his other hand up to grab at Derek’s opposite arm, raking angry red lines down his tanned skin and throwing his head back, eyes clenched shut.

Stiles was rocking his hips up into nothing, wanting to grab himself but worried that if he let go of Derek he’d fall apart, so he just lay there and let Derek continue pounding into him, his cock throbbing and dribbling pre-cum down the length.

“Oh Jesus. Jesus Christ, oh fuck me, yes. Jesus, yes.”

“Much as I’m sure he’s enjoying the view,” Derek said, voice a low growl while he continued snapping his hips forward, “I’d prefer if you said my name instead of his.”

“Oh God, Derek!” Stiles struggled to sit up, even while knowing the angle made that impossible considering the only thing supporting him right now was his shoulderblades, Derek’s arms holding up the entirety of the bottom half of his body. “Fuck Derek, oh God!”

Another low growl escaped him, hips beginning to move faster, rhythm lost in his attempt to reach his climax. One of Stiles’ hands managed to leave Derek’s skin, reaching back blindly and gripping the headboard so tightly his hand hurt.

Stiles knew he was speaking, he knew words were escaping him, but he couldn’t even focus on what they were, just a steady string of nonsensical words mashed together with Derek’s name thrown in every now and then.

With a loud snarl that was definitely more animal than human, Derek slammed into Stiles almost painfully hard, his shoulders sliding up another inch on the bed, and came. Derek’s fingers were almost bruising against his skin, and Stiles rocked his hips desperately, trying to find his own release, while Derek’s pulsing dick pressed against his prostate.

Before Stiles could reach down himself, Derek’s large hand was suddenly gripping him, curled tight around the base. He only pumped him four times before Stiles jerked and cried out, a mix of ‘God’ and ‘Derek’ escaping him as ribbons of cum spattered across his abdomen.

Derek was going soft inside him by the time Stiles felt like he could breathe again, his boyfriend still holding most of his weight up and Stiles positive that his hand was now permanently attached to the headboard behind him, as well as one of Derek’s biceps.

“Fuck,” he managed to get out, his back hurting from the awkward position, but Stiles felt too lethargic and sated to really pay too much attention to the dull ache. “Fuck. Jesus, that was good.”
“Yeah, he knows, you kept telling him so.” Derek huffed out a laugh. He shifted back slightly and Stiles tried to lift his hips a little to help Derek, but he was so boneless he didn’t think he did much good.

Derek pulled out of him, Stiles wincing at the feel of cum oozing out of his ass, but he managed to keep his thoughts to himself to not ruin the moment.

His lower half was gently placed back on the bed and Derek crawled up over him, kissing at his cheek, then his temple before lowering himself on top of him, crushing him under his weight and burying his face in Stiles’ neck. His arms came up on either side of him, bracketing him in beneath his considerable bulk, and Stiles wrapped his arms around Derek, pulling him in tightly.

“You’re all sweaty,” he complained, despite tightening his grip.

“You’re so romantic,” Derek said dryly, voice muffled by Stiles’ skin.

“I know,” Stiles informed him with a small smile.

They lay there for a moment longer, Derek’s insane Werewolf body heat stopping Stiles from getting cold as his sweat began to dry. The cum drying caked between them—and in his ass—wasn’t entirely pleasant, but Stiles felt too good to move right then.

He was comfortable, and happy, and he felt safe, and loved. So he just lay there staring at the ceiling, one hand running lightly up and down Derek’s back while they enjoyed each other’s silent company.

“I love you.”

Stiles glanced down at the top of Derek’s head, resting comfortably against his shoulder, face turned away from him.

It was obvious it had been said with a clear, “You don’t have to say it back” tacked onto the end, but Stiles just smiled, pinched at Derek’s side lightly, making him jerk, and kissed whatever part of his head he could reach.

“Love you too, Sourwolf.”

TBC...

Chapter End Notes

SMUT: If you don't want the smut, you can skip from the moment Stiles and Derek get back to the loft after the Hale house party. You can go straight to the next chapter.

WARNINGS: Kate gets a little handsy again while getting rid of Stiles' phone, wallet and keys. Deucalion breaks Stiles' ribs again with his Werewolf strength. He also threatens to both blind him, as well as cut out his tongue (but he doesn't). There is a lot of violence, Stiles gets badly injured in this chapter, including loss of consciousness from blood loss.

Obligatory Copyright Crap:
- Teen Wolf (c) Jeff Davis
- Twilight (c) Stephenie Meyer
- Harry Potter (c) J.K. Rowling
- Zombieland (c) Rhett Reese
- Pokemon (c) Satoshi Tajiri & Ken Sugimori
- Avengers (c) Marvel
- Star Trek (c) Gene Roddenberry
- Aliens (c) James Cameron & Ridley Scott
- James Bond (c) Ian Fleming
- Star Wars (c) George Lucas
- The Hunger Games (c) Suzanne Collins
- Men In Black (c) Lowell Cunningham
[Derek]
hands up

[Derek]
pack meeting tonight is about us

[Stiles]
Really?
[Stiles]
You don’t say.
[Stiles]
Where’s my eye-rolling emoji?

[Derek]
asshole

[Stiles]
YOUR asshole ;)

[Derek]
also just a regular asshole

Stiles smirked, about to send back a snarky response, but the bell had just rung and he glanced over at the school entrance, shoving his phone back into his pocket and starting the car.

It was the second day of winter break, and things were good. So fucking good. Stiles was pretty much living at the loft full time, he and Derek cuddled all the time, and occasionally had sex, but mostly they cuddled because Derek was like a giant teddy bear, though he’d never tell him that.

They’d had their first real fight about the stupidest domestic shit ever—namely Stiles finishing the coffee and not buying more, which led to Parrish dealing with a grumpy Derek during a graveyard shift before he got caffeinated—and actually felt like a real, normal couple.

No Supernatural creatures had come to the loft looking to attack Stiles, though the pack did have to deal with an infestation of Pixies back in November.

They had a few pack dinners here and there, and Stiles even went out for lunch with the Talbot pack guy from his university, Brett. He was a nice guy, and they got on fairly well, which Stiles liked because it was good having more people to hang out with on campus, even if he only had one semester left and all his friends were Werewolves.

His exams had gone well, most of his marks having come back already. He was just waiting on two more to find out if he could move forward with his classes for the next semester. It was surreal to think he was almost done, and he was so looking forward to his winter break.

Though considering the mandatory pack meeting Talia had called, he had the feeling his winter break wasn’t going to be quite as relaxing as originally anticipated. She’d sent out a mass text to the whole pack the week before, informing everyone to make whatever plans they had to in order
to have the night off for a mandatory pack meeting. Stiles had been pleased when his dad called him to ask what a pack meeting was, because it meant he was officially part of the pack.

Melissa too, and that gave Stiles the warm fuzzies, because he loved his dad and his found family in the McCall pack, and his new found family in the Hale pack. He just loved everything right now, it was all perfect and awesome.

And he knew tonight was going to be interesting, because even after all this time, they still hadn’t told the pack Stiles had been claimed. He kept seeing the Hale siblings shooting glances at his neck whenever he wore a T-shirt or anything remotely low-neck, and every time they looked disappointed.

He was anticipating a beating when they found out. Mostly from Merrak.

He figured he should tell him first, because maybe it would make him less angry.

Stiles decided that was definitely the best course of action, since he knew Merrak could keep a secret given how stubborn he was, and he smiled a little when he saw him heading in his direction. He still insisted on Stiles picking him up, but given Stiles was now two days into his vacation, it meant he could actually show up on time, even if today was the last day of Merrak’s own semester.

It took him a few seconds to notice that there was a guy walking alongside Merrak, keeping up with him and speaking excitedly. Stiles had to suppress a grin because he was positive it was that Tyler guy Merrak had been spending so much time with lately. And whenever he wasn’t spending time with Tyler, he was spending time with who Stiles suspected was Merrak’s girlfriend, even if he wouldn’t admit it. A girl named Ashley the year above him, apparently they’d met in detention, which Cora had found hilarious.

When Merrak reached the Jeep, he hesitated for the briefest of moments before opening the passenger-side door, Tyler standing a step or two back and craning his neck to see through the window.

“Hey,” Merrak grunted, “Tyler needs a ride home, is that okay? His dad got called away and he’ll have to walk.”

“Yeah, no problem.” Stiles tried really hard not to grin, because he would be the first to meet the infamous Tyler, but Merrak just shot him an annoyed look, muttered something—probably rude—under his breath, and turned to tell Tyler to get in the car.

Tyler beamed like this was a special treat and opened the back door of the Jeep, clambering inside and glancing over at Stiles on his way in before shutting the door. Merrak climbed into the front, slamming the door harder than necessary before buckling himself in.

“Hi, I’m Tyler,” the other teen said, tossing his bag onto the neighbouring seat and hunting around for the seatbelt.

“Stiles. Nice to finally meet you.”

Merrak shot him a warning look and Stiles just grinned before pulling out of his spot and following the line of cars out towards the road.

“So are you one of Merrak’s brothers, then?” Tyler asked, finally getting his seatbelt on and settling comfortably in the middle seat.

“No, my brothers are losers,” Merrak informed him. Stiles noted he was less aggressive in his tone.
when he spoke to his friend, and it made him want to coo and pinch Merrak’s cheek. “Stiles is my oldest brother’s boyfriend.”

“Cool,” Tyler said with a shrug, clearly unconcerned with the fact that Merrak’s older brother was, at the very least, bisexual. Stiles liked him already.

He also saw the perfect opening, because having someone else in the car, not to mention Stiles actually driving, meant he was less likely to get murdered.

So before anyone said anything else, Stiles said a silent prayer to not get murdered by the ball of anger beside him, and said, “Husband.”

Silence.

Merrak didn’t react at first, like the word was taking a second to register. When it finally did, he whipped his head around to stare at Stiles, mouth hanging open.

“What?” he asked incredulously.

Stiles shrugged one shoulder, stopping and motioning for an SUV to go ahead of him. “Husband. Technically.”

“What?!” Merrak demanded, more emphatically, turning to face him, eyes raking over his neck.

“So Tyler, whereabouts did you say you lived?”

Tyler seemed to recognize something was going on, but he obediently gave directions to his place, Stiles excitedly telling him that he used to have a babysitter who lived in the same neighbourhood and he and Tyler talked about all the awesome Halloween decorations from the four houses at the end of the block who tried to outdo each other every year.

Stiles ended up asking him about Pokemon-Go to keep him talking, since Merrak looked like he was in shock. His eyes were locked on Stiles’ neck, and Stiles could practically see the gears turning in his head as he attempted to figure out what the fuck was going on.

The drive to Tyler’s wasn’t very long, and the teen bid Merrak a Merry Christmas on his way out. Merrak managed to return the sentiment, though a bit muted, but Tyler didn’t seem to notice. Or maybe he didn’t mind. He just beamed at him, said he hoped he saw him over the break, and then shut the Jeep door.

Stiles waited for him to disappear into his house before backing out of the drive and turning the Jeep around to head back home.

And of course, that was when Merrak got violent, punching him hard in the ribs.

“Ow!” Stiles insisted, and attempted to protect himself while Merrak continued punching at him.

“What the fuck, Stiles! He claimed you? When? Where?!”

“A gentleman never bites and tells,” Stiles insisted haughtily, then laughed when that just earned him another punch.

“Tell me! We all thought you were never going to let it happen! We figured you were happy dating him and nothing more, how long have you been claimed?”

“Since September.”
Stiles was actually worried for his safety, but it was better to get the most violent one out of the way first, considering he was sure Cora would be just as angry.

“We figured it would be safer for me to be claimed without anyone knowing. It’s how I got away from the Alpha pack, I Mate Talked them into letting me go.”

“But the bite—”

Stiles tapped at the ribs on his left side, and almost ran the Jeep into oncoming traffic when the teen grabbed at his hoodie and shirt and wrenched them up.

“Hey, hey, driving! Driving!” Stiles insisted, Merrak’s hands pushing the material higher to get a better look.

“Holy fucking shit. You really did it. You really Werewolf married Derek.” He leaned back in his seat, and for the first time since he’d met him, Stiles saw a truly genuine smile cross his face, like this was the best thing that had ever happened to him.

When he noticed Stiles looking, he wiped it off immediately, then cleared his throat and sat back properly.

“So,” he said casually, “who else knows if it was a secret?”

“Your parents, my dad and Jackson.”

“You told Jackson?” Merrak demanded, sounding insulted.

“Okay first off, Jackson’s my friend, and if you’re mad, think about how pissed Scott’s gonna be considering I’ve known him basically my whole life.” He gave Merrak a pointed look. “Second, Jackson was kind of out of necessity. Something—happened. Mate-bond-connection-related, and he was there, so I had to tell him.”

Merrak was quiet for a moment, rolling everything over in his head before frowning. “The mandatory pack meeting. It’s—”

“Yeah.” Stiles sighed. “I’m assuming my winter break is going to involve the Council.”

Merrak perked up at that, turning in his seat. “Are they coming here, or are you going there?”

“Not sure. Guess it depends on your mom.”

“It’s up to you and Derek,” Merrak insisted. “I’ve heard them talk about it before, and it’s usually something you guys decide. Can you do me a favour?”

“Maybe?” Stiles said hesitantly, glancing over at him.

“Can you choose New York?” He winced, like he realized asking that was a little rude, but he rushed on before Stiles could say anything. “It’s just, if you choose New York, the family will go with you. It’s a family thing, so we’d all go, and your dad, too. I just—it’d be really nice to spend the holidays with my friends. Not that Tyler isn’t great, and I know we won’t be in New York for long, but I want to spend time with them. Sorry, I know it’s rude. And selfish.”

“Hey buddy, I get it,” Stiles insisted, offering him a smile. The only reason he didn’t reach out to ruffle his hair was because he didn’t want his hand bitten off. “I’ve never been to New York. I
wouldn’t mind heading out there if Derek is cool with that. Might be a bit tight financially, but—"

“Shut up, like you’d be paying for anything.” Merrak rolled his eyes and fell back heavily against his seat once more. “You’re the most annoying brother-in-law ever. All this power at your disposal and you never even use it.”

“I use it sometimes,” Stiles insisted. “Jackson doesn’t steal my fries anymore, and that is immensely satisfying.”

Merrak rolled his eyes and called him an idiot again.

They spent the rest of the ride bantering about Stiles’ inability to use his newfound powers for evil. It occurred to him that Merrak was human and he could Mate Talk him, but he supposed it was because he was a human in a Werewolf pack and his mother was a Werewolf. After all, Stiles himself had been part of a Werewolf pack back before the Hales had come back, so he knew that anything was possible.

Also he could heal himself and order Werewolves around and his boyfriend-pseudo-husband could turn into a wolf so really, it didn’t stretch the boundaries of the imagination.

When they finally reached the house, Stiles emphatically motioned for Merrak to keep his trap shut. Knowing something his siblings didn’t made him more likely to stay quiet though, so he didn’t worry about it too much.

They headed inside and Stiles emphatically motioned for Merrak to join him. Cora wandered down a few minutes later, having been on the phone with someone from the Talbot pack. Merrak insisted it was her boyfriend, and the two of them got into a fight overtop Stiles about her not-boyfriend and Merrak’s not-girlfriend.

It was super.

As the afternoon passed, more and more people began to show up. A lot of the adults headed straight for the kitchen after popping their heads in to say hi to the younger crowd at the TV, but a few of them wandered in for a short chat.

Lydia showed up with Parrish, the two of them holding hands, and Stiles saw Scott grumble under his breath while passing a few bills over to a smirking Jackson. He didn’t know what the bet was about, but Scott had very clearly lost it.

When it started getting louder, more and more of the pack present, Talia called for everyone to head for the large sitting room on the other side of the house, which was different from the living room the younger crowd had been hanging out in the majority of the afternoon.

Stiles was still lingering by the entrance, waiting on his dad and Melissa, since they were the last to arrive. They showed up as the guards started making their way through the house to the sitting room. Derek came up the porch behind them, so Stiles figured he’d been waiting on them, probably because the sheriff had picked up Melissa.

“All right, kiddo?” he asked, passing him and clapping his shoulder lightly.

“All right.”

Merrak smiled and kissed his cheek, patting the opposite one lightly before following after his father. They seemed to figure the guards would lead them where they needed to be so they followed along without prompting, Stiles alone with Derek in the entrance, his boyfriend shutting
“Well,” Derek said, shoving his hands in his pockets. “This is it.”

“No takebacksies,” Stiles insisted.

Derek leaned forward, hands still in the pockets of his uniform pants, and pressed his lips lightly to Stiles’.

“Wouldn’t want a refund anyway.”

“Sap,” Stiles muttered, ignoring the way his heart jerked in his chest whenever Derek said something stupidly romantic.

“Come on, mom will murder us if we make them wait any longer.” He took one hand from his pockets and wrapped it around Stiles’ shoulders, pulling him into his side and kissing his temple. Stiles wrapped his own arm around Derek’s back and they walked through the house together towards the sitting room.

Everyone was still speaking, the cacophony of sound hitting him the second he stepped foot into the room. Talia noticed them immediately and motioned them towards the front. Stiles didn’t like being the centre of attention—shocking, he knew, but true—though he felt like he would need to get used to it considering who his Werewolf husband was.

He hadn’t really given much thought to being just husbands with Derek, but figured that was a conversation for when he was actually out of school and had a career. They had tons of time to figure that side of things out.

It took a while for Talia to call everyone to order, but eventually the noise died down and Stiles swept his gaze across the room. A lot of the guards were hanging out by the doors or standing out of the way closer to the wall, but the pack itself was all collected in the middle of the room, most of them touching each other in some way and sucking his dad and Melissa right into the fold. He couldn’t help but smile, because for a long time it had just been him and his dad, Melissa and Scott. They had so many more people to rely on now, so many people who wanted to get to know them, and be there for them. He hoped they took advantage of the new friendships being in the Hale pack would bring.

Then again, his dad already golfed with Chris and Michael on Sundays, so he was a step ahead.

“I’m afraid I’ve been a terrible Alpha.”

Of all the ways Talia could’ve started her speech, that wasn’t how Stiles had imagined it.

“I have been deceiving you for a number of months. At first, it was out of necessity, but once the dangers of the Alpha pack passed, it should’ve been addressed. I chose to keep this information private out of respect for my son.”

Derek pulled Stiles closer into his side, and Stiles suspected the reason she’d kept it quiet was because Stiles was dealing with school, and he knew they were supposed to see the Council once the claim occurred. Talia had probably delayed it so he could at least get through his semester.

He appreciated that, school was hard.

“Given this is something for him to share, I’ll let him be the one to tell you.” Talia turned and motioned for Derek to speak.
Stiles noticed Laura snap straight, eyes widening, like she already knew what was coming. A few of the pack looked excited, like they’d already guessed, but Cora just leaned forward in her seat and squinted suspiciously, like she thought everyone was hyping things up only for it to be something mundane like Stiles was going back to his buzzcut or something.

“In September,” Derek said, sounding a little uncomfortable, “my parents and I had a meeting with Stiles and his father. During this meeting, we discussed my desire to stake my claim on Stiles.”

Laura let out a loud squeak that four people shushed her for and she slapped both hands over her mouth.

“It was accepted, and I officially claimed Stiles as my mate on September 28th.”

Half the room erupted into shouts of excitement, but the other half sounded incredulous. They all tried to speak over each other and Cora actually stood on her chair and almost ripped her shirt yanking at her collar and pointing emphatically at her neck.

Since she was his friend, and he didn’t need to hear her to know what she was asking, Stiles figured he’d put her out of her misery and just reached down to pull his shirt and hoodie up.

He thought the pack was going to lose its fucking mind. It was kind of hilarious to see a whole group of adults freaking out like they were. His poor dad and Melissa looked extremely confused about the excitement. To be fair, his original pack wasn’t reacting quite as exuberantly, though Stiles noticed Jackson lean over with a smug look, likely informing the others he’d already known, because Jackson was an asshole that way.

Talia seemed content to let the pack freak out about it, smiling a little at how excited they all were, and Stiles’ gaze inevitably ended up on Kincaid. The guard was staring right back at him, face slack with shock. He was probably thinking about all the horrible things he’d been saying about Stiles for the past few months because he wouldn’t allow Derek to claim him when Stiles already was claimed.

He offered him a small shrug, a kind of, “No hard feelings” gesture when Kincaid lowered his head in apology. Stiles understood where he was coming from, he was just being protective of his future King. Besides, the guy had been a lot nicer to him ever since Stiles had saved his life, so it was hard to hold a grudge.

When the pack finally managed to settle down, Talia went through what Stiles assumed was the usual spiel about this sort of thing. She explained what the hierarchy was, what the claim meant, what was coming next. When they moved through the list and she mentioned the Council, Derek made a noise of distaste beside him and Stiles figured he wasn’t looking forward to that.

“Speaking of the Council,” Talia said, and focussed her attention on one of the guards Stiles didn’t know. “Please inform the Council that the claim has been made. We will be in touch shortly with arrangements for it to be verified.”

The man bowed his head once and slipped out of the room. Stiles had thought he’d wait for them to finish, but he supposed this was already three months overdue so he probably wanted to get the call in immediately.

“So, Stiles,” Talia said, turning to him. He looked over at her, and couldn’t help but smile at how pleased she looked. “As I mentioned at the dinner, for the claim to be verified, either the Council will come here, or we will travel to New York. If we travel there, the Hale family along with yourself and your father will need to be in attendance. If they come here, the setting is smaller so it
would be myself and your father only. It’s up to you and Derek which you’d prefer.”

“Give us a show!” Cora shouted from her seat, followed by a scuffle when Eric tried to smother her.

“I’m fine with going to New York,” Stiles admitted, turning to Derek. “But you get a say, too. Apparently.”

“Thanks.” Derek seemed to be refraining from rolling his eyes, then looked past Stiles to his mother. “It’ll be nice to be back in New York. And it’ll be good for Stiles to get an idea of what the Council is like since this won’t be the only time we end up there.”

Talia nodded with a smile. “I’ll make arrangements. Laura, John.” She turned to the pack. “I know it’s short notice, but if you tell me what days you’re available, we’ll make it work.”

“Can we still get tickets this late in the month?” Stiles asked Derek quietly.

He just laughed, lips pressed to his temple as he replied. “It’s cute you think that’s going to be a problem.”

Rich people were so damn cocky.

Stiles was fairly certain a year ago that he would’ve been able to confidently say he would die without ever having flown First Class in his entire life.

He could not say that today, because when they got to the airport, not only were there people tripping over themselves to get their bags, but they were led through security much faster than Stiles was sure they should’ve been and then brought to the First Class lounge. There were mini sandwiches.

Mini sandwiches!

He felt so posh, which was why it was kind of hilarious watching Merrak slowly and methodically cram veritable handfuls of them into his mouth when his mother wasn’t looking. Laura asked him if he was twelve and Merrak just opened his mouth to show her partially masticated food.

Stiles loved that kid, he sure hoped he was the one who ended up with the next Hale heir.

The flight itself felt much shorter than it was because of how amazing the seats were. His dad looked particularly happy and Stiles honestly loved how important he felt just sitting in one of the big, plush seats. Derek told him to get used to it, but Stiles didn’t think he could ever get used to this. After all, sure the Hales had a huge house, and Derek had bought them both a loft, but it wasn’t like they flaunted their wealth on a daily basis. They had nice cars, but no more than anyone else in town who was well off, like Lydia’s family, and Jackson’s. The Hales had money, but it was subtle.

Except right now, clearly, and Stiles was not complaining.

Stiles, Cora and Eric played cards for a majority of the trip, alternating between regular cards and Uno. Merrak was busy with his PSP and Derek was sitting with his Kindle reading. Whenever Stiles leaned over to ask what boring trash he was so engrossed in, he just insisted Stiles wouldn’t like it.

Stiles believed him, because Derek had no taste in books. He hadn’t read *Harry Potter or The*
Hunger Games, so clearly he had no taste.

Of course, that turned into a game of Stiles being trash because Derek had chosen him and apparently Derek had no taste, Stiles’ own words, but he won that argument by Mate Talking Cora and Eric into letting him win.

It was immensely satisfying, if only because he wouldn’t ever use it for anything other than to win petty arguments.

When they reached New York, he wished his head was on a swivel because he wanted to look everywhere and at everything. Derek promised him he’d take him around over the course of their visit, but Laura had to head back relatively quickly so the goal was to get to the house, unpack and unwind, get a good night’s rest, and then meet with the Council in the morning. Once that was out of the way, they could all enjoy the rest of their trip as they pleased.

Laura would only be staying for three days before returning to Beacon Hills since she didn’t want to screw anyone over during the Christmas holidays. His dad was sticking around only two days longer, Eric and Cora agreeing to play tour-guide so that Derek and Stiles could do their own thing together. Merrak was planning on spending every available second with his friends, and Talia and Michael were going to be dealing with some royal business since they were in town for a few days.

It didn’t sound like a fun way to spend the holidays, but Talia said she didn’t mind because it wasn’t as invasive as it used to be. When they lived in New York, she never had any time to herself, but now that she was home in Beacon Hills, it was much easier for her to have a minute to breathe before dealing with something that required her attention.

The house was every bit as extravagant as Stiles expected it to be, an almost mirror-image of the one in Beacon Hills, except maybe a little smaller given it was in New York and probably cost a pretty penny. He half-expected servants when they opened the doors, but Cora said the staff only came around every now and then to clean and stuff, otherwise it was just them. Talia was a firm believer of her children growing up like all the other Werewolf children, because she’d seen how having maids and cooks had affected both herself and her brother Peter, and she didn’t want her children to turn into, “Entitled, spoiled little shits,” as Merrak so succinctly put it.

Stiles went out with Laura and Michael to get groceries, mostly because he was jittery and didn’t want to stay cooped up in the house. It also allowed him time to speak about what to expect tomorrow, since Michael had gone through it himself.

He admitted it was intimidating, but that the claims were absolute and this was more of a formality, at this point. One of those traditions that had been started eons ago and nobody had bothered to say was no longer needed.

“Just be yourself, Stiles. That’s all you need to do.”

He didn’t necessarily feel better after the conversation, but he at least felt calmer. No one was going to tell him he couldn’t have Derek, because it was too late, and they could pry him from his cold, dead fingers.

Except hopefully not, because Stiles hadn’t survived the year from hell only to be killed by a bunch of geezers who thought they could tell his boyfriend-pseudo-husband who he was and wasn’t allowed to be with.

The group was divided between the living room and the kitchen when they got back, and Stiles helped Laura and Talia with dinner while his dad and Michael chatted about golf at the counter.
behind them.

Stiles hadn’t seen Derek in a while, but when he hunted him down, he saw him sitting on the couch in the living room with Cora, Merrak and Eric. The latter three were watching a TV show, but Derek was reading on his Kindle, probably the same book he’d been reading on the plane.

Dinner was really nice. It was a relaxing and familiar affair and made Stiles kind of jealous he hadn’t grown up with a larger family, even if he got to make up for it now. He could tell his dad liked it, too.

And his dad was fond of Merrak, which didn’t bode well for anyone, since he now had both Stilinskis on his side.

Once they were finished with dinner, Merrak left to go and meet up with some friends and Derek went back to the living room to read, but the rest of them stayed at the table and chatted. Mostly about the next day, but also about some other things, like how Michael and Talia had met, and what his reaction had been to the whole Werewolf thing.

Stiles also shared the story of how he got involved in everything, since his dad only knew the story second hand and the Hales had never actually heard it.

They also touched briefly on Peter and his daughter, and for the first time Stiles saw how much Talia’s position hurt her. Apparently she and her brother had been close when they were younger, but as they grew older and it was determined she would be the next Alpha, it caused a rift in their relationship that she’d never been able to fix. It was why she’d always been very careful with her own children when it came out that Derek was the next Hale Alpha, because she saw how much they cared for each other and she didn’t want them to lose that.

Stiles really liked that she was working hard to ensure history didn’t repeat itself, in more ways than one.

Eventually, Stiles couldn’t sit still anymore and he went for a walk around the outside of the large house. His dad ended up joining him, the two of them walking slow circles in silence, enjoying each other’s company.

“You’re gonna be fine tomorrow,” he said to him. “You know that, right?”

“I’m not exactly royal material,” he muttered.

“Talia said it’s just a formality. They don’t have a say in what happens, they’re just making sure you actually accepted the claim.”

“Do you think Derek would dump me if they ordered him to?”

“No,” his dad said immediately. “Do you?”

“No,” he admitted. He knew how much Derek cared about him, so he was sure the Council would get a huge middle finger on Derek’s way out the door. “I guess I just didn’t really consider how much I had to lose until the Council meeting was knocking down the door.”

“You’re not going to lose anything, kiddo.” His dad wrapped an arm around his shoulders. “You’re gonna go, say your piece, and then Derek will take you to the best pizza joint in town at a time I am specifically not also there at.”

“Dad,” Stiles groaned. “Your diet.”
“I’m on vacation, let me live a little.”

“I’d rather you live a long time.”

“Smartass.”

By the time they made another loop around the house, Derek came out looking for them so they could head to bed. Stiles followed him up the stairs, bidding good night to his dad when he branched off and headed further down the hall to one of the guest rooms.

Stiles moved to follow Derek into his room, but Cora opened her door as they passed and squinted out at them, wagging a finger.

“No hanky panky, these walls are not that thick.”

Stiles made a face. “My dad is right there, and your parents are down the hall.”

“That means nothing, I can see you both doing the hanky panky anyway.”

“Good night, Cora,” Derek said emphatically, pulling Stiles past her room and into his own. He shut the door behind them, and the thoughtful expression on his face made Stiles wonder if he was considering whether or not they could get away with a little hanky panky.

Stiles grinned.

Maybe just a little.

Every time Stiles heard about the Council, he always imagined a group of ancient, doddery old men with flowing white beards, crazy hair and one breath away from disappearing into dust.

Apparently that was the outcome of too many movies, because the Council was not, in fact, a group of doddery old men. It was a mix of men and women between thirty and sixty, all of them different ethnicities and Supernatural types, and the head of the Council looking strikingly similar to his fourth grade math teacher whom he’d severely disliked.

He anticipated this entire thing wouldn’t be as fun as he was originally thinking. Not that he’d thought it was going to be fun, per se, but he’d definitely been less worried before seeing the Council enter the building and greet Talia formally. Some of them bowed low while shaking her hand, whereas others just inclined their heads respectfully. Talia didn’t seem to mind either or, and greeted each one by name, asking about various personal details, such as spouses or anniversaries, people’s grandkids. It was kind of endearing, actually, and made him respect Talia more than he already did because she clearly cared about people or she wouldn’t have bothered learning so much about the Council members.

There were fifteen of them in total, and once they’d all congregated in the entrance, speaking to Talia and getting organized for the day with guards and assistants, they finally seemed to notice Stiles over by the far wall with Derek and said they should begin.

Everyone filed through a set of large double doors, Stiles and Derek near the back. His nerves were making his stomach ache, even though everyone kept telling him there was nothing to be nervous about. Derek himself looked fine, if a little unsure, likely because he didn’t know exactly what to expect.

Stiles’ anxiety was not helped by the layout. It looked like some kind of courtroom, with stands on
either side where the Hales and his father went to sit, and a few other random people he didn’t
know taking a few seats on the other side. In front of them was a large dais with two chairs,
presumably for them, and at the front of the room stretching from one end to the other was a set of
elevated podiums where the Council members were all taking their seats, speaking quietly amongst
themselves while they got settled. Assistants were making their way along behind them, setting
down coffees and waters, as well as folders and papers that the members shuffled but didn’t really
look at.

The woman who sat dead centre, the one who looked like his evil math teacher, was staring at
them hard enough to light them on fire.

“I swear,” Stiles hissed while he and Derek moved forward towards the dais, “this feels like we’re
on trial with the Volturi.”

“I don’t know what that means,” Derek informed him quietly, despite the fact that both of their
voices carried. That was kind of the point in a room like this, he supposed.

“Vampire Council, *Twilight* stuff, not important.”

“For a series you claim to hate, you seem to remember a lot about it,” Derek said with an amused
smile, climbing the two steps up and motioning for Stiles to choose whichever seat he wanted.

He opted for the one on the right, closest to the stand where his father and the Hales were sitting.
Derek fell into the one on the left.

“It sticks with you,” Stiles argued, pulling at his collar. It was choking him a little bit, he should’ve
worn a different shirt. “Seriously, you have to stop them if they bring out the guillotine.”

“Stiles.” Derek looked amused now, leaning over his armrest a little to get closer to him. “Relax.
This is just a formality. Your head is safe.”

“Yeah, until they yell ‘off with his head’! Less safe then!”

Derek reached out with one hand and pressed it to his cheek, giving his head one firm shake.
“You’re being ridiculous. Everything’s gonna be fine.”

Stiles let out a loud huff, but felt a little better when Derek leaned over to kiss him lightly. If he
was being this openly affectionate in front of a group of strangers, he obviously wasn’t worried
about what they thought of him.

Though he *had* dressed for the occasion. Derek was wearing a suit. A bonafide suit. He looked
really good, too. Stiles would’ve been paying more attention if he weren’t sweating buckets
through his own shirt.

He didn’t own a suit, and Talia had insisted his slacks and button-up would be fine, and that he
really could’ve shown up in a graphic tee and jeans if he wanted to. But Derek was dressed up to
make a good impression, so Stiles was going to do the same.

The murmuring began to die down both in the stands and at the front and the head Council member
stood, looking up and down the line.

“Are we ready to proceed?” There were murmurs of ascent and she nodded while taking a seat.
“Let us begin. We are calling to order the verification of claim on this nineteenth day of December
in the year two-thousand and nineteen at oh-nine-hundred hours.”
Oh God, Stiles was not going to be able to hold it together if the entire thing was like this. Who spoke like that?! 

“In attendance for the Alpha heir Derek Hale’s mate claim, Councilwoman Morrell.”

They went down the line from right to left, identifying themselves probably moreso for Stiles than anything else, though he did notice there was someone typing furiously in the corner by the stands. It really was like court, because they were literally keeping record of this.

When all the names had been said, Morrell shuffled her papers importantly and spoke while pulling one out from the pile in front of her.

“We are here to verify the official claim between his Highness Derek Hale, and his mate...” Morrell trailed off, staring down at the page in front of her. The other members cast glances at her before seeming to shuffle through their own papers.

No one spoke.

Someone in the stands coughed.

Morrell looked up at him expectantly and Stiles folded his hands together. When she raised her eyebrows, he smiled.

“Take your time, I can wait.”

Stiles saw his dad cover his face with one hand out of his peripheral. He wondered if the typist was jotting that down. ‘Hale Heir’s mate’s father facepalmed at this time.’

Derek just let out a small laugh. “You can call him Stiles,” he said, smile clear in his voice.

“Names have power, your Highness,” Morrell informed him, eyes cutting between them sharply. “In a setting such as this, full names are required.”

She stared expectantly at Stiles then and he could practically hear his dad begging him to behave. Sighing, he obediently said, “Mieczyslaw.”

Morrell nodded once in thanks, and Stiles saw two Council members near the end share a look before one of them shrugged expansively.

What, they’d never heard of Poland in New York? Was it a made up fantasyland?

“We are here,” Morrell said again, “to verify the official claim between his Highness Derek Hale, and his mate Mieczyslaw Stilinski.”

She butchered it, but man did she try.

“Close enough,” Stiles offered with a smile.

He saw the corner of her lips quirk, and thought maybe this wouldn’t be as awful as he was expecting. Maybe she found him amusing, which was good. He’d rather be the King’s fool than find his head on the chopping block.

“Please state the inception of the mate bond,” Morrell said, looking back down at her papers.

Stiles assumed she meant the bite, but Derek spoke then and talked about the first time he’d noticed Stiles and how his actions led to him being his chosen mate back when he was thirteen. It
seemed unkind to force Derek to repeat something that had been so hard for him for years, but he didn’t seem to mind. He was speaking very factually, like his mother had given him pointers and he’d rehearsed beforehand.

He wished Michael had done the same, but to be fair, Michael had insisted it was always different and that it was hard to predict what they would ask.

“And you, Mr. Stilinski?” Morrell turned to him.

“I’m sorry, I don’t get the question,” he admitted.

“When did you first recognize the mate bond on your side?”

“Oh, uh, well...” Stiles thought about it. “I was in the food court, and Derek was staring at me really hard.”

He saw his dad cover his face with one hand again, but Derek let out a snort of laughter beside him.

Morrell just stared at him like he was an idiot.

“ Anything else?” she asked.

“Yeah, he broke into my room to watch me sleep.”

The snort of laughter this time came from the stands and he turned to see Cora covering her mouth with both hands. Laura looked like she was trying to hold it together, but was going to lose it very quickly.

“Is this amusing to you, Mr. Stilinski?” Morrell asked, though she didn’t sound angry, more curious.

“I’m just not sure what you want me to say. Derek knew I was his mate for years. I found out Werewolves existed when I was sixteen. There was a bit of a gap in understanding and information there.”

“Let me rephrase the question, then. When did you agree to accept Mr. Hale’s request for you to be his mate?”

“Probably sometime between my total mental breakdown and the baseball.”

One of the Councilmen looked delighted, like this was the most interesting meeting he’d ever attended, and while Morrell didn’t seem pissed, it was clear she knew this was going to be an extremely long day.

“Perhaps we can move on with the knowledge that you did, in fact, accept Mr. Hale as your mate.”

“Oh, yeah.” Stiles slapped his hands lightly on his thighs and nodded with a brilliant smile. “Sounds good.”

“Excellent.” Morrell glanced back down and Stiles wondered if she had questions written out. “Can you tell us what prompted you to accept Mr. Hale’s claim?”

“I mean... we were dating? And I love him?” That was embarrassing to say in a room full of people judging him, but he saw Derek smiling out of the corner of his eye, so it made up for it.
“And his position did not influence your decision at all?”

“It did, but uh, in a negative way, to be honest.” Morrell looked surprised and he shrugged helplessly. “I’m not exactly oozing with charisma. It’s intimidating, you know, dating someone who’s supposed to be King one day. Refer back to total mental breakdown I was talking about earlier.”

“I see.” Morrell looked back down. She was silent for a moment, shuffling her papers, like she was trying to collect her thoughts because Stiles was throwing her off-course. Eventually, she seemed to give up and just asked about the claim.

Derek gave her the date, and explained where it was and why it was there. Stiles had to take his shirt off, which was extremely awkward, and two of the Council members near the ends came down to look at the bitemark. Someone else came and took a picture and Stiles really had to wonder what they did with all this information once it was over.

This seemed excessive and he was tempted to ask them if they wanted a damn DNA sample too, except he worried they’d take him up on it and ask for a kidney for good measure.

The next few questions were pretty okay, mostly just about how he reacted to the bite, what changed, what didn’t, how it’d worked for him, when and how he’d used any of his newfound abilities.

He had to go into a lot of detail about the Alpha pack, since the only reason he’d escaped was that he Mate Talked them, which he learned wasn’t a thing people called it when Morrell interrupted him with, “I’m sorry, you what?” but he just repeated the term and bulled on.

When he was done with that story, Morrell paused for another moment before looking up at Stiles and folding her hands together.

“How have you consummated the bond?”

For a second, he thought he’d hallucinated the question, but when Derek’s eyebrows flew up in shock beside him, he realized that, no, no he hadn’t.

“I’m sorry, what?” he asked, just to be absolutely sure.

“Sex, Mr. Stilinski,” Morrell said bluntly. “Have you had sex?”

Was that normal protocol? Why were they asking that? Talia didn’t seem to be reacting to any of the questions, but he didn’t know if it was because she’d heard them herself or because she had a great poker face.

“Um, have you considered that isn’t any of your business?” Stiles asked, because his dad was right there, thanks lady!

Morrell turned to Derek then. “Mr. Hale, would you like to answer?”

“Do you want me to go into graphic detail about the first time I got him off and he came in his boxers, the first time I fucked him, or the blowjob I gave him last night to calm him down enough for him to sleep?”

Talia’s poker face finally cracked and she reached up with one hand to cover her face very similarly to how Stiles’ father had been for a majority of the interview so far.
Morrell was silent for much too long, like she was trying to think of the most appropriate answer to his question. Finally, she cleared her throat, straightened her papers, and just said, “Let’s just mark that box as ticked, shall we?”

“Let’s,” Derek agreed with a small smirk.

Things only got more entertaining from there, because Morrell seemed to be playing a game with them, like she was trying to trip them up. Stiles didn’t know what she was trying to trip them up on, but she kept asking normal questions, and then would delve into something highly inappropriate a few inquiries later.

Things got particularly heated when she brought up pregnancy, because Stiles had turned to Derek and insisted he had been adamant that it wasn’t a thing and Derek had to reassure him again that it was not a thing. Morrell clarified after they were done having a lover’s spat that she was asking about how they would proceed if they wanted children, which wasn’t at all how she’d phrased her original question and Stiles decided she was a sadist.

He also felt like Talia was deeply regretting her entire life right now, because every time an inappropriate question came up, Stiles and Derek both sass ed the Council about it.

When he glanced over at her after at least half an hour since the facepalm, she was pinching the bridge of her nose between her thumb and forefinger like she thought she would’ve been better off waiting outside or not coming at all, though that wasn’t actually an option for her as the Queen.

Merrak, on the other hand, was leaning forward in his seat with both hands on the railing in front of him, looking positively delighted at the proceedings, like the two of them giving the Council a hard time was the most entertaining thing he’d seen all year.

He hadn’t been paying attention if that was what he thought, Stiles felt many other things were much more entertaining.

A drunk Jackson, for one. Now that had been entertaining.

It felt like the meeting went on for an eternity, and the room wasn’t getting any less stuffy as time passed, but eventually, after one final question about their living arrangements, of all things, Morrell looked up and down the row before she stood and nodded once.

“The Council has determined the claim is valid. Verification has concluded on his Highness Derek Hale’s claim to his mate Mieczyslaw Stilinski—”

“Oh, better!” Stiles informed her.

She gave him a small, unimpressed look before continuing, “—on this nineteenth day of December in the year two-thousand and nineteen, ending at thirteen-twelve.” She looked at Derek and inclined her head slightly. “Your Highness.”

Stiles tried really hard not to snort, but when she turned to look at him, he almost groaned.

“Your Highness,” she repeated.

“Oh yeah, I don’t like that,” Stiles said quietly, despite knowing a majority of the room could hear him.

Derek just laughed and stood, leaning over slightly on his way up to kiss his temple before straightening and taking Stiles’ hand. He stood as well, nodded seriously to the Council members,
then turned to walk back down the dais with Derek towards the doors at the back.

The people in the stands weren’t leaving, murmuring to each other and one of them commenting about how it was the most *entertaining* interview he’d ever witnessed.

Stiles was glad to be of service.

Only the Hales and his dad moved down the steps and they met at the doors, stepping through them and back out into the main hall. Once the doors were shut behind them, Stiles winced before turning to Talia, who was shaking her head at both of them.

“I need a drink,” she informed them, raking one hand through her hair.

“Seconded,” the sheriff said. “Lead the way.”

Talia turned on her heel and motioned for him to follow. Michael let out a small laugh, shaking his head and following after the other two adults, leaving their children behind.

The second Stiles looked over at the other Hale siblings, Merrak moved right up into his space.

“That,” he said with a shit-eating grin on his face, “was fucking *awesome*! I am *so* glad I came!”

“Can your first act as King be to dissolve the Council so no one else ever has to go through that?” Stiles asked.

Derek laughed, wrapping his arm around Stiles’ shoulder and pulling him in to kiss his temple.

“Don’t give me dangerous ideas. Come on, we better catch up before mom abandons us.”

“Best day ever,” Merrak insisted while they headed for the doors. “Seriously, I wish I had a recording.”

After the Council meeting, the rest of the trip was a lot more relaxing, and fun. They were flying back on Christmas Eve so that Laura wouldn’t be alone at home for Christmas, but that still gave them all time to do various things.

Merrak was virtually non-existent, out with his friends, and Cora and Eric alternated playing tour guide with the sheriff and seeing their own friends. Laura was the only one who seemed not to have anyone to visit, but she admitted to Stiles that all her friends were crazy busy at work and she didn’t want to make them feel obligated to see her if they were exhausted so she hadn’t actually told them she was in town.

Derek didn’t talk about friends at all, content to bring Stiles around and introducing him to the best pizza on the planet—sorry Italy—but after the first full day, Stiles began to prod at him about it. Eventually he admitted he didn’t want to bug Stiles with being stuck listening to Derek and his friends catch up, which was nice, but also ridiculous and he firmly demanded that Derek see his friends, even if it meant Stiles spent the day with his dad and Eric or Cora.

In the end, Derek finally conceded defeat, but he told Stiles he wanted him to come along, so he got to meet a few of Derek’s university buddies along with some of his police academy friends who were officers now themselves. Stiles was surprised to discover that they all knew about him, and he had to keep a really good poker face because, according to them, he and Derek had been sort of almost together since high school. Derek looked embarrassed at his friends outing him like that, but Stiles just took it in stride since he knew the years in New York away from him had been hard.
Meeting Derek’s Werewolf friends had been interesting, because they knew the only reason Derek would be in New York with his mate was if he was claimed, and Stiles almost got stripped naked at the excitement of one of the girls trying to see his claim mark since it wasn’t in the usual spot.

Thankfully, Derek showed him pity and saved him from losing all his clothes.

All in all, it was really fun. Stiles got to see the city, he met some of Derek’s friends, and he got to hang out with the Hales and his dad. It was nice.

The nights where he and Derek weren’t out with his friends were usually pretty chill, considering everyone was tired from a long day. Talia looked particularly haggard and Stiles felt bad he’d wanted to come to New York because she was obviously trying to shove as much in as possible with the Council while she was in town. He couldn’t imagine how it must’ve been for her when she’d been living there, and was actually really glad she’d moved.

Sometimes he and Derek did their own things when they got back to the house, which was nice because a little separation was good for the soul. He always expected Derek to go out or do something he wanted to do, but a majority of the time while Stiles and Cora were being idiots watching TV, Derek was in the study reading. Stiles figured the book was good, because he’d seen Derek on his Kindle a lot during the vacation. He asked him about it one night before they headed to bed and he’d just shrugged and said it was entertaining, if nothing else.

When their trip came to an end, Laura and the sheriff already having returned home, Stiles was almost sad to go but happy to be getting back to familiar territory and away from the Council and their weird, creepy, invasive questions. The return flight was just as amazing and surreal as their trip out to New York and he was sure he’d learn to enjoy travelling before long if he was always in First Class.

Still, he didn’t like the Council, so he would avoid New York as much as possible.

When they were back in Beacon Hills, Stiles awkwardly pulled Derek aside when everyone was getting settled in once more at the Hale house.

“So,” Stiles said uncomfortably, “Christmas.”

“Yeah.” Derek smiled. “You’re spending it with your dad, Scott and his mom.”

Stiles gave him a startled look and Derek just shrugged.

“Your dad told me. It’s tradition. He said everything this year was a lot for everyone and he thought it might be best for a familiar, quiet Christmas.”

“Are you okay with that?” Stiles asked uncertainly.

“I understand. Hoping it’ll be different next year, but I want you to be happy, and I know spending time with your dad makes you happy.”

“Okay.” He let out a slow breath, then smiled. “I was thinking we could spend the night at the loft, though. Today, I mean. Wake up bright and early tomorrow and I can head home and you can come back here. Dad’s working tonight anyway, so he won’t miss me.”

“Sure, just let me talk to mom and I’ll meet you there.”

Stiles nodded and made his rounds, saying goodbye to everyone, Talia first so that Derek could speak to her. He got a huge hug from Cora, and a slightly tamer one from both Merrak and Eric, all
of them wishing him a Merry Christmas. When he’d finished with everyone, he went out to the Jeep, which he’d driven over with his dad so that they wouldn’t take multiple vehicles to the airport, and headed to the loft.

It was a little cold when he slid open the door at the top of the stairs, but nowhere near as bad as New York. It had snowed out there, but thankfully nothing crazy or his poor Californian ass would’ve frozen.

Given the hour, he figured they wouldn’t do much before heading to bed, so he just took a quick shower and was drying off by the time Derek came in. They traded spots so Derek could grab his own shower, since planes were gross even in First Class, and Stiles headed up to bed.

He was texting with Scott and Jackson when Derek finally crawled across the mattress and grabbed him around the middle, rolling them over so he was lying on top of him and pressing a kiss to his lips.

“What was that for?” Stiles asked.

“I need a reason to kiss you?”

“I would like a detailed explanation of why you kissed me, along with a schedule of the next time you plan on doing it, and descriptions of—”

Stiles laughed when Derek shoved a pillow in his face, rolling off him. He pulled the pillow off and stuck it under his head instead, rolling over to put his phone on his nightstand before turning to face Derek again.

Derek was just staring back at him, a ridiculous smile overtaking his features and Stiles rolled his eyes.

“Get that goofy look off your face.”

“If you don’t like my face, stop looking at it.”

“You’re annoying,” he informed him with a sigh. “Light?”

Derek shifted off the bed and went to turn the light off, Stiles kicking at the covers to get under them. When they were bathed in darkness, he felt the mattress dip and Derek pulled him into his chest, hugging him tightly around the middle.

Stiles got comfortable against him, closing his eyes and more than ready for sleep. It would be weird, but awesome, to wake up beside Derek on Christmas day. He honestly hadn’t ever thought about something like this happening to him, and now... Well, life had a funny way of working out.

“Thank you,” Derek murmured when they were both silent for a long while.

“For what?” Stiles asked.

“Giving me a chance. Not immediately writing me off after you realized I was following you around.”

“Stalking. You can say it,” he insisted with a grin.

“Stalking,” he admitted. “Just—thank you.”

“I didn’t do anything,” Stiles argued. “Besides, you’re the one who had to wait.”
“I’d wait forever for you.”

“Sap,” he teased, slapping at Derek’s closest thigh. “You’re stuck with me now. Werewolf married me and everything.”

“I don’t mind. I like having you around.”

“Yeah, you’re pretty great yourself,” Stiles agreed.

“Besides,” Derek said, turning his head into Stiles’ hair and inhaling, “your scent is like a drug to me.”

It took a second for the words to click, but when they did, Stiles turned in Derek’s arms and began to violently shove at him, trying to kick him off the opposite side of the bed while his boyfriend laughed and easily rebuffed his efforts.

“No! Fuck you! Fuck you, Derek Hale! Get out of my bed! You’re relegated to the couch!”

It explained why Derek wouldn’t tell him what he was reading over their short vacation, because apparently he was catching up on Twilight.

“I’m sorry,” Derek insisted, laughing so hard Stiles didn’t believe him at all. “I’m sorry, I love you.”

“No! Get out of my bed! You are not welcome here!”

Derek managed to grab at his wrists, rolling over so he was on top of him and effectively halting any further attempts to injure him or kick him off the bed.

“Don’t worry, I promise not to call you Bella.”

“I am a solid Jacob!”

“Sure you are.”

Derek kissed him.

Stiles didn’t have the strength to fight him on it.

Besides, as much as he hated to admit it, looking back on the past year, he supposed he really was a Bella Swan.

Even if he would never, ever, ever say so out loud.

END.

Chapter End Notes

Obligatory Copyright Crap:
- Teen Wolf (c) Jeff Davis
- Twilight (c) Stephenie Meyer
- Pokemon (c) Satoshi Tajiri & Ken Sugimori
- Terminator (c) James Cameron
End Notes

Thanks for sticking around. Hope you enjoyed the ride.

Come chill with me on Tumblr.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!