As Luck Would Have It (I'm already smitten)

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/1939755.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Explicit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archive Warning</td>
<td>No Archive Warnings Apply</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, Isaac Lahey/Scott McCall, Vernon Boyd/Erica Reyes, Danny Mahealani/Jackson Whittemore, Jordan Parrish/Sheriff Stilinski, Allison Argent/Lydia Martin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character</td>
<td>Papa Hale, Talia Hale, Liam Dunbar, Stiles Stilinski, Derek Hale, Peter Hale, Chris Argent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stats:</td>
<td>Published: 2014-07-12 Updated: 2017-04-06 Chapters: 29/? Words: 200882</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Luck Would Have It (I'm already smitten)

by Whisper91

Summary

When Stiles meets his Dom for the first time, it’s nothing like the cutesy, lovey-dovey Subflicks he used to drag Scott to when they were thirteen. There’s no burst of sunshine when they collide, no sudden swell of violins when their eyes meet; only a really big dent in the front of his Jeep and a seriously pissed off Alpha glaring at him from the sidewalk.
Chapter 1

Stiles isn’t even driving all that fast.

Maybe it’s the glare of the too-brought sunrise that makes him squint, or perhaps his steadily drooping eyelids can be blamed on the fact that he’s just pulled a fourteen-hour nightshift at the hotel (because writing doesn’t actually pay the bills until you’ve published something) and he’s tired as fuck, but either way he doesn’t see the sleek, black Camaro slowing down in front of him and indicating to pull over outside Starbucks until it’s too late.

He has just enough time to slam on his breaks before they collide, the impact jarring him forwards with a sickening lurch, his forehead smacking against the top of the steering wheel (that’s what you got from slouching all the way home) as the sound of crunching metal and shattering glass explodes around him.

Adrenaline is an awful thing. It sucker-punches you in the gut, steals the breath from your lungs, leaves you teetering on the brink of impending doom as the rational part of your brain switches off. Stiles can’t tell whether he’s choking or if it’s just the seatbelt cutting him in half, but it’s hands-down one of the worst experiences of his life, and it feels like half a decade before he regains control of his respiratory function and remembers how to breathe.

The outside world goes eerily silent, which is even worse than the deafening cacophony of colliding vehicles, because now all he can hear is the rush of blood pounding in his ears and his own fast, erratic breathing as he struggles to push himself upright, his head throbbing as he tips it back against the headrest. But he's alive. Nothing's broken. Even with panic cloying in his chest, he has the presence of mind to acknowledge that it could have been so much worse, and his relief at the fact leaves him shaking.

His vision’s swirly and blotchy for a moment before he blinks it back under control, and then he almost wishes he hadn’t because the other car looks wrecked.

“Shit,” he manages, fumbling with shock-numbed fingers to undo his seatbelt, feeling for the door handle with his other hand. “Fucking fuck, oh my god-”

The door knocks against something solid and rebounds with an “oof”, which is odd because car doors don’t usually verbalise such protests, and that’s when he finally turns his head and spots the dark-clad figure looming in his window, eyes glowing red, blood trickling down his unfairly angular jaw from a rapidly healing cut on his cheekbone.

Fuck. Fucking hell on a stick. He just totalled an Alpha Dom’s car.

Stiles raises both hands in a “look at me, non-threatening human here” gesture, because antagonising a Dom bad enough, but pissing off Alpha is a dozen or so leagues beyond that on the no-no scale.

“I’m sorry,” he blurts, and means it, although he’s acutely aware that this isn’t one of those screw-ups he’s going to be able to apologise his way out of. “Dude, I’m so sorry, I didn’t even see you.”

Angry-eyes doesn’t let up his glare for one second, even as he very slowly and very carefully opens the car door and leans inside. Stiles resists the impulse to scoot across to the passenger seat, because the urge to run and hide and look small and helpless is almost overpowering, damn his biological instincts. But he’s dealt with unsavoury customers working as a hotel receptionist, and he’s had
enough practice with threatening Doms not to lower his eyes submissively when the guy invades his personal space. A sub he may be, yes, but not a pushover. He can handle this.

The Alpha's gaze flickers down to Stiles' wrists, the crease in his brow deepening momentarily, and Stiles suspects the Werewolf had been hoping to identify his Dynamic by the presence of a Sub-band on his wrist. Well, fuck that. Stiles likes long-sleeved shirts. And if this guy's hoping to use his Dominant skills to make Stiles cooperate, he's gonna get slapped with so many Dynamic assault charges, he won't even know up from d-

“Give me your licence,” Pissed-Off says, and although his voice is surprisingly low and calm for a guy who looks about ten seconds from ripping Stiles to shreds with his teeth, the undercurrent of authority is still there, and it’s this that has Stiles fumbling for his wallet, pulling out the licence card with trembling fingers and handing it over wordlessly.

On a better day, he would have questioned the command. Civilians can’t demand to see proof of identification, and if they do the individual involved is under no obligation to obey that order, be they submissive or Dominant. But right now his head’s throbbing and his brain’s foggy and he’s still fighting against the instinctive urge to lower his gaze and bare his throat to appease Mr Angry Eyes. Denying the man his licence certainly isn’t a notion that crosses his mind.

The Alpha glares at his card for a split second, then closes his eyes and takes a deep, steadying breath. And just like that the tension in his posture is gone, his shoulders relaxing, the air of absolute authority he’d previously been carrying dissipating in a split second. And when he opens his eyes again, they’re a soft brown rather than Alpha-red, and the glare is gone entirely. The only indication that he’d ever been angry is the single line that creases his forehead, the faintest hint of a frown.

“I need you to call your Dom,” he says, and while the authority’s still there, it’s soothing now, a balm to Stiles’s jittery nerves. “Okay?”

Stiles blinks at him for a second, dumbfounded. It’s like the guy just flipped a switch; going from murderous Alpha Dom to calm, non-threatening protector in a split second. The only other dominant Were that Stiles has met with that sort of control is Scott, and that’s only because the dork’s a big softy with a heart of gold. There’s a reason he got accepted into the Werewolf Pan-Dynamic Services program fresh out of college. Isaac’s a lucky sub. (And Stiles is still giving himself self-congratulatory pats on the back for hooking them up, even though it’s been years.)

“Hey.” The Dom dips down a little further, putting them at a more even height, holding Stiles’s gaze steadily. “Hey, stay with me. Do you have your cell phone on you?”

Stiles nods slowly, even though there’s nobody to call; he’s been registered under John Stilinski for years now, since it became a legal requirement on his sixteenth birthday, but his Dad’s out in the middle of nowhere for the next three days on a fishing trip, camped out by some lake with a couple of work colleagues where there is absolutely no cell phone signal, Stiles, so please try to keep out of trouble until I get home, alright?

“My-” Stiles pauses and clears his throat, because that weak, wavering thing is not his voice, thank you. “My Dad’s on vacation until Monday. I can’t reach him on my cell.”

The Alpha’s face darkens briefly. “Is there anybody else you can call? Another guardian?”

Shaking his head, even though it only makes the throbbing worse, Stiles shifts in his seat and peers nervously towards where the all the early-morning Starbucks patrons have gathered in a small crowd outside his vehicle. He likes to think himself a fairly confident and independent sub, but right now he’d give anything to have his Dad to hide behind, or to feel Scott’s arm circling his shoulders like a
protective shield from the rest of the world. Because he’s tired, he’s sore, and he’s fairly certain he’s in shock, and the last thing he wants to do is have a breakdown in front of a bunch of strangers.

“I can handle the insurance stuff on my own,” he insists, despite the way he can feel his tenuous control slipping, curling his hands into fists in his lap to keep them from shaking. “Unless you want to involve the cops?” Please no, please no, Dad’s gonna kill me…

“I don’t think that’ll be necessary.” The other man extends his licence back towards him. “And I’m not doubting your ability to exchange insurance details, but I’m also not about to let a shocky sub find his own way home, stubborn-willed or not.” He holds Stiles’ gaze, calm but firm. “Is there a friend you can call? Another Dom who can come and pick you up?”

A friend? Yeah, that he can probably manage. Scott’s not working until Monday, they’d Skyped each other last night to confirm that their plans for a junk food binge and movie marathon were still on. He can count on his best friend answering his phone too, even at this ungodly hour on a Saturday morning, because Scott’s newfound Werewolf senses make it near-impossible to sleep through the sound of a ringing cell phone.

“Scott McCall,” he says, after a pause that’s probably a little too long. But he can’t help that his head’s getting fuzzier by the minute.

The man’s dark eyebrows ascend marginally. “You’re friends with Scott?”

Despite the persistent urge to curl up in a ball and cry, Stiles manages to level the Alpha with a cautiously suspicious look. “Yeah,” he replies slowly. “That a crime?”

“Derek,” the Alpha tells him, like that’s supposed to mean something. At Stiles’ blank expression, he reiterates, “Derek Hale? I work with the Beacon Hills WPDS department. I’m Scott’s supervisor.”

Stiles blinks, opening and closing his mouth stupidly for a few seconds before clamping his lips shut and deciding that saying nothing is probably the best way forward. Otherwise he’ll end up saying something stupid like “oh, so you’re Hunky Derek” and “Scott never shuts up about you” and “I may have already fallen in love with the Perfect Alpha-Dom picture he’s painted of you”. Instead, he nods, because he’s pretty sure Derek just asked a question, and at least that’s some form of an answer.

Derek tilts his head to one side. “Are you listening to me?”

“Uh…” Okay, so maybe nodding without context had been a dumb idea. “I was…no. Sorry. What was the question?”

The Alpha’s lips twitch up at the corner. “I asked you what your name was. I wasn’t sure if you went by your full birth name, and to be honest I don’t know if I’d be able to pronounce it without hearing it first.”

“It’s Stiles,” he says, and his voice has finally lost that tremulous edge to it now that he knows who Derek is, now that he has Scott’s fanboy stories to reassure him that this particular Alpha isn’t about to go crazy and try to claim him. Or eat him.

“Stiles?” Derek echoes, and the smile curls a little wider now, soft and reassuring, and the urge to run and hide has been fully replaced with the urge to curl up against Derek and snuggle. “How about you slide out of the car for me, okay? We’ll call Scott and see what we can do about getting your Jeep towed.”
Stiles nods again, edging carefully across the seat and accepting Derek’s proffered hand as he slides out onto the road. His legs are wobbly and threaten to give out underneath him, and he’s grateful when the Alpha’s hand slides up to hold his elbow supportively, leading him away from the wrecked vehicles and then guiding him down to sit on the edge of the curb.

Something warm settles around his shoulders, and he blinks slowly, feeling weirdly spaced out as he glances down at his arms and sees the dark fabric of Derek’s jacket hanging loosely around him. That guy is seriously muscular, it’s unreal. He kinda wants to keel over sideways and go to sleep on the sidewalk, but there’s a hand on the back of his neck, the touch just firm enough to keep him centred, keep him grounded, as voices wash over him, a bustling hubbub of activity that he’s too tired to pay attention to.

He finds himself inching closer to the Alpha almost subconsciously, especially once the shivers start, the sub-shock rolling in like a tsunami now that the initial burst of adrenaline from the crash has worked its way through his system. He’s suffered enough panic attacks in his life to be intimately familiar with the symptoms of a stress-induced drop. And it fucking sucks, because he just crashed his Jeep and the repairs for both cars are gonna cost him a bomb, and all he really wants is a goddamn hug.

Derek doesn’t push him away, though. Most of it’s probably just Alpha instinct, and their level of contact is purely professional; one hand settled in his hair to keep his face tucked into the Dom’s shoulder, and a muscular arm wrapped around his midriff. Standard submissive comfort technique – Stiles played Test Dummy for Scott for weeks during his WPDS training (hey, any excuse to have prolonged snuggle-time with his BFF), and he recognises the hold immediately.

It feels fucking amazing though. Like Derek’s a barrier between himself and the rest of the world. He’s only ever felt that level of security with his dad when he was a kid, wrapped up in the man’s arms after a nightmare or a panic attack. He doesn’t want it to end. Like, ever. He makes a soft, pleased sound and buries himself as close as their current position will allow. Derek makes a soft, low noise in the back of his throat, and after a moment the Alpha’s arms tighten around him further. Something tight in Stiles’ chest slowly unravels, pulsing with a new and comforting warmth. Home, it says. Safe.

He’s not sure how long he’s sat there, but it hardly seems like any time at all before Scott’s face appears in front of him, concern written into his features as he crouches down in front of Stiles, hands sliding up from wrists to shoulders and squeezing gently, reassuringly.

“Hey, man, you okay?”

Like a bucket of water to the face, the reality of his situation rushes back to greet him, punching through the protective wall of happy, floaty sub-space that he’s built around himself.

He swallows, his throat tight and achy in a way he’s unfairly familiar with, and either it shows on his face or Scott’s Werewolf senses pick up something in his scent, because suddenly Stiles’s face is pressed against the other man’s shirtfront, Scott’s arms wrapped tightly around him, big hands rubbing up and down his spine in a confident, soothing manner.

“You should take him to the centre,” Derek says behind them, and Stiles realises that the Alpha’s hand is still resting on the back of his head, warm fingers rubbing against his scalp. “He’s down pretty far, and his Dom’s out of town.”

“M’fine,” Stiles insists, although it’s more of a muffled mumble because his face his still buried in Scott’s shirtfront. “Wanna go home.”
“I know you do, Stiles.” Derek squeezes the back of his neck gently, and Stiles feels himself go boneless. “But someone needs to stay with you until you’ve come back up again.”

Scott shifts, adjusting his hold. “I’ve got him, Derek. We’ll be alright.” The younger Werewolf’s arms squeeze him a little tighter. “We’re going back to my place, bud. No reason why we can’t start that movie marathon a little early.”

“But-”

“No arguments,” Scott interjects, but it’s still gentle, still neutral; one friend to another. Scott rarely pulls the Dominant card around Stiles, not unless he feels the situation’s escalating towards dangerous.

Stiles gives a grumbled complaint anyway, a token protest, but doesn’t fight the Dom when he’s pulled to his feet and steered on clumsy, uncoordinated legs towards Scott’s car. The ride home is a blur, and although he vaguely recalls being pulled from the backseat and carried upstairs (bless Scott and his supernatural canine strength), true awareness remains frustratingly elusive for a good hour or two afterwards.

He comes back to himself midway through *The Fellowship of the Ring*, his head pillowed in Scott’s lap, sleepy and disoriented but feeling warm and calm on the inside, the way he always does if he’s been guided up from a Drop by someone he trusts. Scott’s fingers are still in his hair, not stroking or rubbing, just resting there. It’s a comforting weight.

“Hey.” Scott’s clearly picked up on the change in his breathing pattern. A warm hand strokes down his side. “Hey, man. You back with me?”

Stiles nods, licking his lips, not quite trusting his voice just yet.

“You wanna sit up?”

He nods again, and Scott’s hands shift to support him, easing him upright slowly until he’s sitting slumped against the couch cushions. He feels *exhausted*. Lifting a too-heavy arm, he drags a hand down his face, taking a steadying breath.

“I crashed my Jeep,” he says at last.

Scott’s fingers smooth over his neck, warm and gentle. “I know.”

“I crashed my Jeep into an Alpha,” he reiterates, in case Scott hasn’t quite grasped the extent to which Stiles has fucked up. “A really, really nice Alpha who also happens to be your boss. He…he was so pissed off, Scott. I thought he was gonna tear the door right off its hinges and *eat* me.”

He drops his hand again in time to see a frown crease Scott’s brow. “What? Did he threaten you?”

Stiles shakes his head quickly, which unfortunately serves to reignite the ache in the centre of his forehead where it had collided with the steering wheel a few hours earlier. It’s a miracle that’s the only injury he walked away with. Come to think of it, he’s lucky he doesn’t have whiplash. Or maybe he does, and the afterglow of his sub-high is simply masking the pain.

“No, he was cool.” He scoots closer to Scott, tucking himself back under the werewolf’s arm when it lifts invitingly. “Really cool, actually. Shut down the whole Alpha-Dom thing once he saw my licence and realised I was a sub.”

He feels Scott relax beside him. “Good. Derek's a great guy, and he's not the type of Alpha who gets
a kick out of Domming people, you know? I'd trust him with my life. But fear and adrenaline can screw with a Dom’s control, and that was a seriously nice car, man.”

Stiles groans and hides his face in Scott’s shoulder. “Duuuude. M’gonna be in so much trouble.”

“I gave Derek your insurance details,” Scott reassures him, resting his chin on top of the sub’s head. “And he’s already told me he doesn’t want to press charges. The only issue you’re gonna have is fixing the Jeep without your dad finding out.”

“My baby,” Stiles laments, lips turning down.

She’s old now, he’s had her since he passed his driving test six years ago, and the cost of the continual repairs and maintenance work has probably already doubled the price of buying a cheap, second-hand car to replace her, but there’s a sentimental attachment there. He lost his virginity in that car. She survived through his senior years at high school, through three years of Literature Studies and Creative Writing courses at college, and through six months of long nightshifts at the Lunar Palace Hotel across town to keep on top of the bills so that his dad could cut back on his shifts at the police station. And now she’s busted. Like, seriously busted.

“But nobody got hurt,” Scott reminds him, with another encouraging squeeze. “And Derek didn’t seem particularly bothered about the damage, so chances are he’s already forgiven you. I mean, your day sucked, totally, there’s no denying that. But it could’ve been worse, right?”

“Mm,” Stiles acknowledges despondently. He doesn’t want to think about how much worse things could have been. About how he’s fucking lucky that he not only hit a Dom who doesn’t have control issues, but that Derek is also an Alpha fucking Werewolf with super-healing. The idea that he probably would’ve put any other driver in the hospital if they’d been human is just too goddamn terrifying to entertain.

He swallows past the lump that’s reforming in his throat and scoots away from Scott again, scrubbing a hand over his eyes. “You got anything to eat? I’m starved.”

“Sure, man.” Scott stands and moves towards the adjoining kitchen, brushing his fingers gently through the Sub's hair as he passes, a casual caress (they’ve become more of a regular occurrence now that Scott’s a werewolf; it’s a pack thing, he gets that, they’ve always been brothers in every way except blood). “Grilled cheese sandwiches work for you?”

“Mmmm, I love you,” Stiles moans appreciatively, flopping back down sideways so that he’s stretched out across the couch.

“Love you too. Dufus.”

Stiles grins tiredly, his eyes half-trained on the screen as Aragorn has a heated argument in Elvish with the blond-haired Dom in Lothlorien, but he’s distracted by a blur of black on the far side of the room, out of place against the cream-coloured armchair its resting on. He blinks. Frowns a bit. Blinks some more.

It’s Derek’s jacket.

Stiles remembers the smell of warm leather and Alpha and Dom and safety, and the back of his neck tingles at the tactile recollection of a steady, confident hand resting there. And suddenly he has an overwhelming urge to wrap himself back up in the jacket and snuggle. Which is ridiculous. And worrying. Because Derek’s a relative stranger, and an Alpha Dom at that, and developing those kind of urges over the guy’s clothing is the kind of lovesick thing that happens to high school teenagers.
around their first Doms.

Besides, Derek’s way out of his league, and he probably already has a cute little sub waiting for him at home. They probably cuddle all the time. And Derek’ll do that thing where he tucks his sub’s head underneath his chin and strokes their hair.

Stiles isn’t jealous. He’s not.

_Ugh._

He’s too much of a coward to take Derek’s jacket to the WPDS centre on Monday and thank him in person, so instead he bakes an extra-large batch of double chocolate and peanut butter cookies and sticks a post-it note to the Tupperware box which concisely sums up all he needs to say:

_Thanks for lending me your jacket, Sir. Sorry again about your car. Make sure Scott doesn’t eat all your cookies. – Stiles xxx_

It isn’t until Scott’s already driving away, jacket and Tupperware container sitting in the passenger seat of his car, that Stiles starts to regret adding the kisses.

His dad’s due to return home from his fishing trip later that day, and if takes Stiles a ridiculously long time to pack up his few belongings from Scott and Isaac’s spare bedroom, the other sub doesn’t mention it. Isaac’s fresh off the nightshift rotation at the Centre, yawning every other sentence, but he still insists on driving Stiles home, and leans over to give him a reassuring hug when he pulls up outside the Stilinski residence.

“It’ll be fine, Stiles,” the curly-haired sub insists, when Stiles clings to him a few seconds longer than usual. He nudges Stiles’s temple with his nose, a gesture of affection from one packmate to another “Your dad’ll just be happy that you’re okay.”

That doesn’t stop Stiles from cleaning the house from top to bottom and making sure there’s a fresh pot of coffee brewing by the time his dad’s car rolls up the driveway. In hindsight, it probably only makes his guilt more of a giveaway, because usually he _hates_ chores, but it alleviates some of the nervous tension that’s been building up inside of him.

Of course, it all goes to hell as soon as his dad sees him, because _hello_, giant swollen bruise in the middle of his forehead. _Idiot._
“What happened?” John demands, his brow creasing as he crosses the room, exuding protective Dom vibes that quickly have Stiles squirming guiltily in his dad’s hold.

“Nothin’.”

“Stiles.” His dad’s gaze flickers down the rest of Stiles’s body, perhaps looking for further injuries. “I don’t need to be a Werewolf to know when you’re lying to me.”

The younger Stilinski bites his lip and lowers his gaze to the floor, curling his bare toes into the fabric of the carpet. “I… I maybe kinda crashed my Jeep on Saturday.”

“Christ.” John’s hands move to cup his face again, forcing his gaze upwards, his eyes narrowed in concern. “Are you hurt?”

Stiles shakes his head as much as he can without dislodging his dad’s gentle grip. “Just a bump on the head.”

John exhales shakily, then pulls Stiles into an abrupt hug, one hand sliding up to cup the back of his neck while the other arms squeezes him tightly. “Thank god.”

Leaning into the embrace gratefully, Stiles blinks back the hot sting of tears, angry at himself because he thought he was over this, except apparently his emotions are still pretty fucked up from the whole ordeal.

“I’m sorry,” he manages a little while later, when they’ve migrated to the couch so that Stiles can curl up against his father properly.

John rubs his back. “Were you drunk?”

“What?” Stiles lifts his head, hurt. “No, Dad, god.”

“Were you speeding?”

“No.”

“Did you run a red light?”

He shakes his head adamantly, a cold, sickly sort of feeling in his stomach at the calm accusations. “No, I didn’t do anything, I promise. I just…I didn’t see him. He was pulling over to park in front of Starbucks, and I didn’t realise he’d slowed down, and it just…it happened so fast.”

His dad drops a kiss against his temple and tugs him in closer. “Then you don’t need to apologise. You’re not in trouble; sometimes these things just happen.”

Stiles sags a little out of relief. He’s never handled disappointment well, especially from his father. Sure, he’s got a smart mouth and enough sarcasm to ward away every sensible Dom in the immediate vicinity, but he never actually intends to cause trouble. Just seeing the look it brings to his father’s face is usually enough to stick a painful lump in his throat and leave his eyes burning, never mind actual discipline and consequences. A couple of taps to his backside and five minutes in the corner had always been enough to bring him to sobbing contrition as a kid, and sadly not much has changed since then. Damned biology.

“Do I need to call the other driver’s Dom?” John asks, patting his back to jar him from his thoughts.

“The other driver was a Dom,” Stiles replies, shifting to settle himself a little more upright. “An
His dad’s brow starts to crease again. “Did he treat you okay?”

Stiles sighs, resisting the urge to roll his eyes only because he’s close enough for his Dad to smack his leg in retaliation for the cheek. “He was fine Dad. He stayed with me ‘til Scott arrived. Derek works at the Centre, he’s Scott’s supervisor.”

“Derek Hale?” John guesses. At Stiles’s nod, he smiles. “We’ve worked together before, he’s a good man. I’ll give him a curtesy call anyway, Dom to Dom, but I’m sure he won’t want to press charges.”

“He doesn’t,” Stiles confirmed, tucking his legs up like he used to when he was thirteen and scrawny. It’s not quite so easy now that he’s in his twenties and has a little more meat on his bones, but it still makes him feel a little more secure. “Scott gave him my insurance details, it’s being sorted.”

John stands, ruffling his hair gently. “Still gonna call him, kid.”

“Not a kid,” Stiles huffs rebelliously, because the thought of his dad talking to Derek makes him feel edgy and uncomfortable in a way he can’t quite explain. It’s not like his dad’s gonna embarrass him. And why does he even care?

He doesn’t. He doesn’t care. It’s fine.

That doesn’t stop him from eavesdropping on their phone conversation though. It earns him a stinging swat to the thigh and an admonishing look when his father emerges from his office unexpectedly and catches him, but Stiles has a hard time regretting it.

He wonders what Derek could have said to make his dad laugh so hard.
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It’s been four days since the crash, and Stiles still feels a phantom tingling at the back of his neck every time he so much as thinks about Derek Hale.

Maybe it wouldn’t be so bad if it was only daydreams or passing fantasies, but the red-eyed bastard is haunting him at night, too. He’s tried every relaxation technique in the book but he still can’t sleep, the Alpha’s face painted against the back of his eyelids in the darkness, the feel of his hands and his lips and the sound of his low, rumbling voice chasing away any hope of a moment’s rest. It’s enough to drive a man to distraction. And don’t even get him started on what it’s doing to his writing muse. Every time he sits down at his laptop to hash out another few thousand words, all Stiles can write about is Derek Fucking Hale and how right it had felt to be curled up against the Dom’s chest, to bask in the strength and security of his hold.

Ugh. Feelings.

“Stiles?” his Dad prompts gently, catching hold of his wrist, and when Stiles glances down he realises he’s been pouring hot coffee all over his Cheerios, straight from the pot.

He blinks a few times, his eyelids heavy, and shakes his head a little to clear it. “Sorry. Guess I’m tired this morning.”

His dad nudges him away from the breakfast counter and over to the dining table. “Sit down before you fall down, kid.”

“M’fine,” Stiles insists, even as he flops into the nearest chair and pillows his head in his folded arms, slumped forwards against the table.

“Did you get any sleep at all last night?”

“Mmf.” Stiles tries to shrug, but all his muscles really do is twitch. Moving is so exhausting. “Couple of hours, maybe.”

His dad’s hand strokes over the back of his head, combing down the short hairs near the nape of his neck, and Stiles sighs, all but melting against the surface of the table. He has zero resistance to his father’s calming tactics when he’s this tired, without an ounce of caffeine in his bloodstream and with the smell of French toast permeating the air, making him feel warm and home and safe.

“Maybe you should to go back to bed for a little while,” John says, and while it sounds like a suggestion, Stiles is about ninety percent sure it’s actually an order.
“Hn-nn.” He pulls a face into the concave of his crossed arms and shakes his head a little. “Need to go out. Meeting up with,” he pauses to heave a huge, jaw-splitting yawn, “with the girls. Lydia’s planning another fundraiser.”

“Then how about after you’ve met up with the girls, you take a nap?” his dad suggests, still stroking soothingly, and Stiles is literally this close to falling asleep right here and now. “I’m only working until two; I could come pick you up on my way home.”

Stiles shakes his head again. “Going over to Isaac’s after lunch. He’s not at work today.”

“I’m sure he’d understand if you felt too tired to-”

“Dad,” Stiles groans, turning his head a little to the side to blink up at the man. “It’s not a big deal, honest. I’ll be fine.”

John sighs, a furrow in his brow, and squeezes the Sub’s neck gently. “I wish you wouldn’t do this to yourself; staying up all hours of the night at that computer of yours.” His tone grows a little firmer. “I know the book’s important to you, kiddo, but you need to start balancing your social calendar a little better if you’re turning into a night-owl; either you sleep at night, or you sleep during the day – you can’t just give up on sleep altogether. You’re gonna end up sick at this rate.”

Stiles hunches over a little more, his eyes burning wetly, biting his lip at the softly-spoken reprimand. Usually he’s a little tougher when it comes to taking lectures – Lord knows his dad’s fond of giving them, so he’s had the opportunity to grow immune over the years – but fatigue and frustration have already substantially weakened his defences, and all he really wants to do curl up in a ball somewhere and have a good cry. Wonderful way to vent your frustrations, crying. But Stiles usually prefers to do it somewhere a little more private.

He swallows, his throat swollen and achy, his chest tight. “I didn’t stay up on purpose,” he insists, hating how tearful and uneven his voice sounds.

“No, no, hey,” his dad murmurs, and Stiles can hear his growing concern. “Hey, c’mon, kiddo. It’s alright, I’m not mad.” He stoops down, pressing a kiss Stiles’s temple, a large hand rubbing soothingly between his shoulder blades. “You’re not in trouble.”

Stiles grinds the heels of his palms against his eyes, willing the tears to stop. He hates crying in front of his dad. It’s bad enough when he’s being disciplined and has a legitimate reason to get upset, but it’s mortifying when his dad’s only tapped into his Stern Dom persona to give him a lecture. He feels about five years old and three feet tall and it sucks.

“I’m okay,” he insists thickly, even as his father tugs him up out of the chair to embrace him properly, one hand rubbing his back as the other clamps securely over the nape of his neck.

John brushes another kiss against his hair, holding him close. “You sure you’re not gonna drop if I go to work?”

Stiles shakes his head, taking a steadying breath and clearing his throat. “No, I’ll be alright. I’m just...” ridiculously sensitive because an Alpha-Dom’s been fucking with my emotions for the past four days. “really tired. I’ll try to get some sleep at Isaac’s, I promise.”

His dad sighs again, pushing Stiles away a few inches so that he can study the Sub’s face, carefully wiping away a tear-trail with his thumb. “The nightmares aren’t back, are they?”

Trying not to shudder at the memories that word awakens, Stiles shakes his head quickly. It’s been almost two years since his last real nightmare (the bad dreams he’s suffered since then are almost
laughable by comparison), and he doubts he’d be able to hide them from his dad even if he wanted to. They always leave him screaming, shaking, drenched in a cold sweat, fighting the urge to vomit as images of the murdered deputies flash before his eyes, the coppery smell of cooling blood clinging to his nostrils. But it’s been more than six years since that horrible night when Matt Daehler put a gun to his temple and told him to kneel, and he’s moved on. He’s recovered.

“Then what is it?” John presses in a gentle tone, like he’s worried anything firmer than that could break Stiles. (To be fair, it actually might.) “Something’s got you pretty riled up, that much is obvious.”

Stiles scrubs at his eyes again to dry them. “It’s nothin’ bad, I promise. I just…there’s a lot of stuff on my mind, and my brain just won’t shut off, y’know?”

John nods in understanding and ruffles his hair, his usual gesture of affection. “A distraction will help. Go meet up with your friends, enjoy yourself,” he suggests warmly. “And try not to think about it too much, okay, champ?”

Unfortunately, it’s proves almost impossible not to think about Derek Hale for the rest of the day, given that the TV and the radio stations all feature snippets of Werewolf Pan-Dynamic Services pep-talks; calm, authoritative Alpha Doms with easy smiles who gently caution young Subs to “Avoid heading out to clubs and bars on your own tonight; it’s always safer to travel in numbers”, and “Cooperation doesn’t mean consent – if you feel pressured into doing something against your will, don’t stay silent. Our helpline is open twenty-four hours a day-”

“Ugh, shut up,” he groans, and chucks an empty packet of Oreos at the TV screen.

Isaac looks at him like he’s grown another head. “Dude, it’s just an infomercial.”

“An infomercial that’s stalking me,” Stiles insists, and fumbles for the TV remote to switch it off.

The other sub eyes him for a moment, then sets down his beer and scoots across the couch cushions to wrap an arm around Stiles’ shoulders.

“Okay, enough,” he murmurs. “You’ve been dodging the bullet all afternoon, and your scent’s totally off today. Are you gonna tell me what’s really bothering you, or am I gonna have to wait until Scott gets home?”

Stiles picks at a loose thread on the cuff of his hoody and shakes his head, clamping his lips shut
rebelliously. On a better day, he probably would tell Isaac about his overwhelmingly sappy teenage crush on Hunky Alpha-Dom Derek Hale, but he’s tired, and Dad wouldn’t let him get his coffee-fix that morning (maintaining the argument that the Sub needed sleep instead), and Lydia insisted on having a caffeine-free fundraiser meeting because Allison’s expecting, and Scott and Isaac don’t even have any coffee in their apartment because they’re freakin’ Werewolves and apparently coffee isn’t a requirement when your metabolism does all the work for you.

Needless to say, he’s not exactly in the best of moods.

“Derek loved your cookies, by the way,” Isaac mentions casually after a minute or two of silence, and Stiles’ thoughts come screeching to a sudden halt.

“What?” he blurts, in a strangled voice that’s at least three pitches too high.

“Your cookies,” the Werewolf reiterates, and while his expression looks innocent enough, there’s a telling glint in his eye. The bastard knows. He knows. “Derek hasn’t stopped talking about them all week, I think you really made an impression. He pinned your post-it note to the board in his office. And he hasn’t mentioned the Camaro once. Congrats, man, you’ve made a new friend.”

Stiles narrows his eyes again, but his heart’s beating double-time now, a hot flush rising in his cheeks. “Isaac Lahey-McCall. Are you fucking with me?”

“I sure hope not; I’m the jealous type.”

Scott drops his work satchel by the door and opens his arms in time to catch Isaac mid-leap, the Sub having vaulted gracefully over the back of the couch to greet his partner. Stiles kneels up on the cushions, resting his crossed arms on the back of the couch as he waits impatiently for the smooching to stop. Which takes far longer than necessary, since Werewolves are tactile as fuck and apparently Isaac’s feeling needy today (not that Stiles can blame him – if he had a Dom as cuddly as Scott, he’d take advantage of that as often as possible too).

He sighs, drumming his fingers against his arm when the smooching transitions into nuzzling, because Werewolves, seriously, but he avoids interrupting them because that would be rude, even for him, and Scott would give him that genuinely-hurt-and-quietly-disappointed look that cuts into him like a knife, and that’s pretty fucking high up on Stiles’ list of Things to Avoid Doing At All Costs.

Scott finally tears his eyes away from his Sub to glance across at Stiles, something warm and fond and amused in his gaze as he arches an eyebrow and tugs on one of Isaac’s curls gently to get his attention.

“Sweetheart, why is there a moody sub on my couch?”

“I’m not moody,” Stiles protests, throwing his hands up in an agitated gesture that completely contradicts the statement, and flopping over with a dramatic huff to crash back down onto the couch cushions. He hears the Werewolf couple snicker from the doorway and glares at the ceiling in disgruntlement. “I feel obliged to tell you that you both suck.”

Scott face appears above him, a grin still curling at his lips as he perches on the arm of the couch and drops a hand into Stiles’ hair, rubbing his scalp gently.

“Hey c’mon, buddy. What’s wrong?”

Stiles wants to knock the hand away, maybe sulk some more, but Scott’s a talented bastard so his fingers actually feel really nice, and the tension in his shoulder muscles is already starting to dissipate.
“You’re tired,” the Dom murmurs after a moment, because he’s also unfairly perceptive about everything and everyone, since that’s kinda his job now. “Did you pull another double shift last night?”

Stiles shakes his head. He’s not working until the weekend (although he’s down for another three nightshifts in a row, since the repairs on his Jeep – while less devastating than he’d first assumed – aren’t going to pay for themselves), but he spent the majority of last night alternating between tossing and turning in bed, and googling frantically for any information he could get his hands on regarding a certain Alpha Dom.

Which was quite a lot, actually.

Some of it he’d already known, like how Derek’s mother had pioneered the Werewolf Pan-Dynamic Services centre in Beacon Hills almost two decades ago after the branch had broken off from the police department to become its own independent organisation. Since Talia Hale’s early retirement a couple of years back, Derek and his elder sister, Laura, had apparently taken her place as co-directors and their recent college recruitment drive had made them one of the largest WPDS centres in the entire State. He knew about the Centre itself, of course - he’d been there often enough during the latter years of his high school life when he’d still been struggling with panic-induced Drops and flashbacks and infrequent but grueling bouts of insomnia. The drop-in Dynamic therapy clinics had been his sole lifeline - or at least that's what it had felt like at the time. They’d assigned him a case worker and put him in touch with support groups and generally been the main reason why he’d managed to make it to his seventeenth birthday without having a mental breakdown.

And both Scott and Isaac talked about work pretty much nonstop, so most of the general information about the role of the service was old news to him. The two Betas had been part of Derek's pack since their transfer from UCLA had been accepted during the final year of the training program, and Stiles hadn't seen Scott so enthusiastic about a job since the dog-walking service they'd provided during the summer of their eighth grade. He and Isaac work full time, and seem to sign themselves up for overtime when shifts need to be covered, and Stiles really wishes he had that kind of drive, because sometimes forcing himself to stay awake through a night shift at Lunar Palace is a slow form of torture.

So yes, finding news articles about the Centre and its staff had been easy enough. They had freakin' fan websites, after all. Sites that featured dozens of links to interviews WPDS funded Sub-rights conferences, and a multitude of both professional and amateur photographs, and even several shakily-filmed video clips of WPDS officers in action. Of Derek in action. Mmmm…

“Stiles?”

“Hm?” He blinks and gives himself a mental shake. “What?”

Scott’s eyeing him closely, a slight crease forming in his brow, concerned Dom and worried best friend all jumbled into one.

“You feeling okay?” The Werewolf’s nose wrinkles slightly. “Your scent’s off.”

Stiles manages to feign an indignant look. “Are you implying that I smell?”

Scott’s hand settles on his forehead, his fingers cool and smooth against Stiles’s skin. “Maybe you’re coming down with something.”

“Oh, he’s sick alright,” Isaac agrees, leaning over the back of the couch to fix Stiles with a leering sort of smirk. “Worst kind of sickness there is. Completely incurable.”
Stiles suddenly wishes he hadn’t tossed his snackbox at the TV earlier, because he kinda wants to throw it at Isaac’s head right now.

“I’m missing something here, aren’t I?” Scott glances between the two of them, suspicion quickly replacing concern. “What’s going on?”

Recognising a hopeless battle before it’s even begun (he’s never been able to keep secrets from Scott, not even as a kid, and that was before the dude’s Werewolf abilities turned him into a lie-detector), he sighs and gently pushes Scott’s hand away, sending Isaac an annoyed look as he sits up. The other Sub appears entirely unapologetic, and Stiles is tempted to tell Scott exactly what happened to his personal stash of Lindor chocolates just on the off-chance that the Dom might decide to reprimand Isaac there and then. But he promised to take the secret to his grave, and Stiles is a man of his word. Damn it.

Scott moves further along on the couch to sit beside him, calm and patient as ever, and Stiles internally flails in panic because how the fuck do you tell your best friend that you’re having vivid daydreams about being banged by his boss?

“Stiles has a massive crush on Derek.”

Isaac, apparently, doesn’t share these same inhibitions.

“Asshole,” Stiles huffs, but it’s more petulant than angry.

The other Sub just laughs and tips himself over the back of the couch to land, awkward-limbed, on the far cushion, and crawls closer until he can curl himself up in Scott’s lap, typically oblivious to the fact that he’s over six feet tall.

Scott, equally undeterred, shifts further onto the vacated cushion to accommodate for his Sub’s size, a puzzled sort of look on his face as he buries his fingers in Isaac’s curls and studies Stiles curiously.

“Derek?” he echoes after a few beats, then blinks and sits up a little straighter. “Derek as in my Alpha Derek? Derek as in Derek Hale, Derek?”

“Knew you’d get there eventually,” Isaac remarks glibly, then gives a whining noise of protest when Scott’s hand slides down and swats his jean-clad backside in a teasing reprimand.

“What was that?”

The Sub rolls his eyes, lips twitching. “Nothing, Sir.”

“Mm.” Scott presses a kiss to his Sub’s hairline to hide his smile. “That’s what I thought.” His gaze flickers back to look at Stiles. “Derek’s a great Dom. I mean, you could do worse, right?”

Worse? Stiles can’t see how he could possibly do better. Derek’s an Alpha Dom who has a good job and a nice, stable background, with a body that looks like it was sculpted by the gods and a face straight out of one of Stiles’s late-night fantasies. He’s perfect. And Stiles is so…not.

“He’s not dating anyone,” Isaac points out helpfully. “And he liked your cookies.”

Stiles rolls his eyes sardonically. “Yeah, ‘cause clearly superior baking skills are all that’s needed to capture the heart of a confident, well-educated Alpha Dom who literally has the pick of any Sub in Beacon Hills. I mean c’mon, have you seen the guy? Nobody would be dumb enough to say no to that.”
“Say no to what?” Scott asks, a wrinkle in his forehead.

Isaac pats his chest. “It’s a Sub thing, dude. And hey,” he nudges Stiles with his foot, “don’t dis your baking powers. I’d ditch Scott in a heartbeat for first dibs on one of your cheesecakes. Ah! No, no, ow! Kidding, kidding!”

Laughing, he squirms away from the barrage of playful swats and seeks refuge on Stile’s side of the couch instead. Unfortunately, since he isn’t a Werewolf and lacks both the supernatural strength and durability of his canine companions, Stiles groans like a dying moose beneath the weight of him and flails half-heartedly with the arm that isn’t pinned against his chest.

“Get off.”

Isaac sighs sadly. “I’m not allowed to; not without permission.”

“Gah! Dude, TMI!”

Stiles shoves at him, but he’s grinning again (albeit against his will) as Scott leans over and drags his Sub back into his lap, laughing. The affectionate roughhousing is a comfortable and familiar scene, one that was fairly commonplace in their shared apartment back at UCLA, and it settles the fluttering sense of unease in Stiles’s chest as he watches the pair jostle with each other playfully. Then Scott pins Isaac back against his chest and nips him lightly on the neck, and the curly-haired Sub just melts against him unresistingly.

“No fair, you cheated,” Isaac complains against Scott’s shoulder, as the other Werewolf effortlessly shifts him so that he’s curled up sideways in his Dom’s lap. “Stiles, he cheated, you saw that, right?”

“There is usually a no-biting rule, dude,” Stiles agrees, because Isaac’s a brat sometimes but this is a Sub-bro code thing, and he knows whose side he needs to be on.

“See? Stiles loves me.” Isaac reaches for him, holding his hand out insistently until Stiles obligingly scoots closer so that the Werewolf can yank him into an impromptu pack-pile of three.

“Seriously, though,” the other Sub says once he’s settled Stiles’ head in his lap, rubbing gently at the pressure points behind his temples (and oh fuck, that’s good, he can tell that Isaac’s WPDS therapy training is paying off). “You should come by the Centre sometime. Bring more cookies; everyone’ll love you. And you’ll be feeding Derek’s pack; he’ll like that. There’s no harm in trying, right?”

Stiles snorts and rolls his eyes. No. No way. Show up at the WPDS Centre unannounced with an armload of cookies? That’s got to be the dumbest thing he’s ever heard of.
This has got to be the dumbest thing Stiles has ever done.

His palms are sweating, slippery against the stack of plastic boxes he’s carefully toting from the trunk of his hire car to the entrance of the WPDS Centre. He can’t believe he’s doing this. It’s going to be awkward and embarrassing and he’s going to humiliate himself in front of a dozen or more strangers, and it’ll all be Isaac’s fault.

The bastard better still be here. He’s part of the fast-response team this week, so there’s a chance he might’ve already been sent out to respond to an emergency somewhere else in Beacon Hills. *It’s not too late to turn around and go home. Sure, that means dealing with Isaac in a sulk, but at least you won’t have to live with—*

“You need a hand with those, sweetheart?”

Stiles peers around the stack of containers and tries not to gape at the gorgeous blond goddess who’s making her way across the parking lot towards him. She’s wearing the department’s standard uniform – a form-fitting beige shirt (made of soft cotton, in case an officer has to restrain or comfort someone suffering from acute sensory deprivation) and black pants, with the familiar triskelion logo printed on the upper left-hand corner near the shoulder. But the top few buttons of her shirt are open, and there’s a platinum collar gleaming around her neck, so Stiles’s defences relax almost immediately.

“That’d be great, thanks.”

She takes half, carrying three of the larger boxes in one arm with enviable ease, but only makes it two paces before she stops again and sniffs. She spins on her heel, a wide grin curling at her lips.

“Oh my *God.* Chocolate and peanut butter cookies, right?” At Stiles’s stunned expression, she laughs and turns around again, making a beeline for the entrance. “Isaac said you’d be coming. And I’ve been craving these for days, you jerk, I couldn’t buy them anywhere.” She waggles the finger of her free hand in a dainty wave. “I’m Erica, by the way.”

“Stiles. Nice to meet you.” He offers her a quiet smile. “I hope you’re hungry; Isaac made it sound like you guys never get to eat anything at work, so I went a little overboard.”

“I’ll say.” Erica studies the boxes that he’s still balancing awkwardly, an eager sort of glint in her eyes. “Exactly how many cookies did you make?”

“About sixty,” Stiles replies, internally preening at the other Sub’s excitement over simple pan-mixed cookies that took him less than an hour to bake. “I made a batch of vanilla crunches, too, and the bottom box you’re holding are Popping Brownies.”

“Popping Brownies?” Erica echoes, arching an eyebrow.

“Um, yeah. They, uh,” he can feel his cheeks heating up, because these are serious working adults, for *fuck’s sake,* why does he do this to himself? “They’re basically just chocolate brownies with a shit-ton of Pop Rocks thrown in. I won’t be offended if you don’t—”

“Holy fuck, that’s *brilliant!*” Erica jogs a few paces ahead, grinning, and disappears through the
entrance to the centre as the automatic doors slide open. But her voice carries back as she enthuses, “Guys! Scott’s friend is here, and he put popping candy in the brownies!”

Apparently the phrase “the quickest way to a Wolf’s heart is through his stomach” is a universal norm, because suddenly Stiles is Mr Popular. He’s ushered past the reception desk and down a long corridor off to the left, still clutching onto his boxes like a lifeline, and into a large, spacious room filled with couches and cushions and throw-rugs, coffee tables dotted in between for convenience. Windows line one wall of the room, sunlight streaming in from the fucking massive garden that it overlooks, the grass disappearing into the treeline of the forest far in the distance.

Stiles is never going to let Scott complain about work again. This place is awesome.

“Hey, Stiles!” Isaac crashes into his side, catching the topmost container when it tumbles from his grip and curling an arm around the human’s waist. “Knew you wouldn’t let me down. Here, let me take those for you.”

He effortlessly plucks the boxes out of the other Sub’s arms (shit, shit, now he has nothing to hold on to) and sets them down on the larger coffee table towards the centre of the room. Stiles stands awkwardly off to one side as the WPDS staff instantly swarm around the baked goods, and without his brain really registering what he’s doing, he’s already edging slowly towards the exit a “hope you enjoy them, see you around!” hanging right on the tip of his tongue.

But of course he’s edging backwards, and backwards has never really worked for him. His foot catches on a stray pillow, and when he stumbles back to correct his balance, suddenly there’s another coffee table, and he’s pretty much resigned himself to the bruises the moment he starts falling.

That is, until a broad arm catches his around the middle and yanks him upright and into a hard, uniform-clad chest. He internally grimaces, because knowing his luck he’s just gone and swan-dived straight into Derek fucking Hale, he just knows it…

“Nice catch, Boyd!” Isaac hollers across the room, closely followed by Erica’s “Sorry, Sweetcheeks, that one’s mine!” and Stiles’s gaze flickers up to take in Mr Tall, Dark and Muscular at a glance and wow, nice one, Erica. This guy looks like he could snap a tree in half, and on top of that he’s gorgeous.

Boyd’s smile is warm and amused as he slides his hands up to Stiles’s shoulders, making sure that he’s steady on his feet. “You alright there, buddy?”

If Stiles flushes any hotter, his head might just spontaneously combust. He gives the Dom a strained, self-deprecating smile in return and nods, stepping back half a pace when Boyd drops his hands.

“Yeah, sorry. And thanks for catching me, Sir.” He rubs the back of his neck. “Graceful isn’t really an adjective I’m intimately familiar with.”

“You’ve probably been spending too much time around McCall,” Erica remarks, attaching herself to Boyd’s side with practiced ease as she hands her Dom a cookie. Then she grins at Isaac’s indignant squawk and ducks the cushion aimed at her head.

“Take that back!”

“Nah, Erica’s got a point, man,” Stiles muses, because winding Isaac up is probably first on his list of favourite things to do right now, given that it’s the other Sub’s fault that he’s here in the first place. “Scott’s got the balance and poise of an inebriated wombat, and you know what they say about
osmosis. We might both be infected.”

There’s a short chorus of suspicious sounding coughs from the other staff members, and Isaac’s eyes narrow challengingly. He inserts a whole vanilla crunch into his mouth and begins stalking towards Stiles with clear intent.

Stiles starts looking for alternative exits, because the last time Isaac got that look, he wound up caked in mud. But suddenly Erica grabs hold of his wrist, thrusts a plate into his hand, and shoves him towards the door with a grin and a wink.

“End of the corridor on your left – run!” she yells helpfully, and promptly takes down Isaac in an enthusiastic tackle-hug that successfully halts his advance.

The whole situation’s bizarre enough that Stiles doesn’t even think of questioning it, darting out into the hallway and jogging to the far end of the corridor, skidding to a halt outside the solitary wooden door there. There’s a golden plaque attached to it at eye-level, the name Derek Hale written in dark, bold letters.

The bottom drops out of his stomach.

He pivots slowly to peer back down the corridor, where the door to the staffroom is still visible. Isaac, Boyd and Erica are all leaning around the doorframe, grinning, and when Stiles gives them the finger (Boyd’s a Dom, sure, but he’s a sneaky bastard, so Stiles isn’t going to apologise), they all give him a thumbs-up in response.

Those little shits. This is totally a conspiracy.

Never one to back down from a challenge, he grits his teeth and turns around to face the door again, taking a steadying breath and clutching the plate of baked goods hard enough to make his fingers hurt. Then he lifts his free hand and, before he can lose his nerve, raps softly on the door three times.

There’s a pause then, quiet but authoritative, “Come in.”

He quite possibly forgets to breathe when he pushes the door open and finally catches sight of the Alpha. Derek’s wearing the same soft, light beige uniform as the rest of his department, but he looks so fucking good in it. The colour compliments his natural tan, suits the dark of his hair and eyebrows, and Stiles could write a fucking sonnet about the way it accentuates his muscular build, the sleeves short enough to reveal the bulging biceps underneath. And his hip-to-waist ratio in those pants with that belt, Jesus Christ…his knees are going to buckle.

But it’s the man’s smile that really floods Stiles’s chest with warmth, as the Alpha’s eyes flicker up to meet his gaze, his expression softening into something that’s both fond and pleasantly surprised as he stands up from behind his desk.

“Stiles.” He moves closer to greet him, settling a hand on his arm, a welcoming but suitably restrained level of physical contact between Dom and Sub, given that they’re still practically strangers (even though Stiles wants to climb him like a tree). “It’s great to see you. What brings you this far out?”

This is all happening quite suddenly, so Stiles finds himself completely out of decent excuses. He could try lying, of course, but Derek would never fall for it, and then he’d have to live with the guilt and regret of having lied to an Alpha Dom, and he doesn’t deal with guilt well. At all.

Ugh. Truth it is, then.
“Isaac said you liked my cookies,” he blurts - and wow, smooth delivery there, Stilinski. “So I figured you wouldn’t mind if I brought you some more. Sir.”

Derek’s gaze stays locked with his for a moment, before flickering down to take in the plate of goodies that Stiles is holding aloft. A quiet grin curls at the Alpha’s lips as he extends his hand, their fingertips brushing momentarily as he takes the plate from him (keep it together Stiles, it was an accident, don’t go freaking out over- oh dear god, his mouth is sinful), and Stiles has to try really, really hard not to stare when Derek bites into one of the baked goods.

The Alpha makes a quiet noise of surprise, lips pressing together tightly as his nostrils flare, and he squints at the brownie suspiciously. Stiles winces. Of course he had to pick the brownie first.

“Shit, I’m sorry. They’re Popping Brownies. Like, you know…” He trails off briefly as Derek opens and closes his mouth a few times, a perpetual expression of bemusement creasing his brow as the faint cracks and pops echo in the room. “Um, like the popping candy? Scott says it’s like fireworks for your tastebuds when you’re a Werewolf. With sound-effects. But then Scott’s been wrong before-”

“That’s incredible.” Derek takes another bite, and grins around it this time, shaking his head as his jaw works, savouring the mouthful. “It’s not a secret recipe, is it? My kid brother would love these.” He pops the rest of the treat into his mouth in one go and reaches for the coffee mug on his desk to wash it down.

“You have a brother?” Stiles asks, because the online articles hadn’t told him everything, and he’s insatiably curious about the Alpha (’because he is your mate, Stiles’ the irrational part of his brain insists firmly).

“Mm, three,” Derek replies, moving to push the door closed and then gesturing Stiles towards the comfortable-looking sitting area on the far side of the spacious office. “And two sisters. You?”

Stiles shakes his head. “Nope, just me. Dad insists I’m the equivalent of at least six kids, but I’m pretty sure he’s biased.” He takes a seat awkwardly on the edge of the couch, fiddling with the sleeve of his shirt. “Um, do you have a pen or something?”

Derek arches an eyebrow at him, curious. “A pen?”

“Unless you want me to write you the recipe in blood?” Stiles continues, and the sensible part of his brain starts crying, “But, uh, that seems a little morbid.”

The Alpha blinks at him for a moment, then huffs a quiet laugh and shakes his head, the corners of his eyes crinkling with the volume of his smile as he heads back over to the desk briefly. There’s a moment of silence between them while the Dom searches for a sheet of scrap paper, and unfortunately for Stiles, that’s a moment too long. Because when he’s nervous and unsure and feeling awkward, his mouth just does the thing.

“So, how’s the car, Sir?”

Shit. Way to bring up your reckless driving when you’re supposed to be seducing him.

“It’s fine, thank you,” Derek glances back at him over his shoulder, looking amused. “I’m picking it up tomorrow morning.”

“Great. Awesome. Congratulations.” Oh dear god, shut up. “Um, sorry again, by the way. For, you know…crashing into you.”
Derek shrugs, crossing back over to him and holding out a pen and an open notebook. “That’s alright. I forgive you.”

Stiles freezes, fingers gripping the items loosely, and tries to remember how to breathe again. He’d already known that Derek had let bygones be bygones – Scott had told him as much. But it’s different, hearing the words from the man’s lips. A personal statement of forgiveness, Dom to Sub…

He’s never wanted to kneel for a Dom so much in his entire life. And that includes his massive crush on Hugh Jackman during middle school. He can almost feel the muscles in his legs twitching a tiny, aborted movements, his body urging him to follow his natural instincts.

His eyes are still locked with Derek’s, and there’s something burning there, in the Alpha’s gaze. This is always the part in those cutesy Subflicks where the Dom leans in and kisses the Sub and the scene reaches its climax in a crescendo of uplifting orchestral music. Except Stiles’s life isn’t one of those happily-ever-after, cliché-riddled love stories where the protagonist fulfills the fantasies of every lonely Sub in the audience and-

Oh. Derek’s kissing him.

It’s not heat and strength and fiery passion, like he always imagined it would be. Instead it’s gentle, steady, two warm palms cupping his jaw as Derek presses their lips together softly, like a prayer, like a promise. His thumbs stroke tenderly against Stiles’s skin, back and forth across his cheeks, as he leans away an inch or two to study the Sub’s face closely.

“Is this okay?”

Fuck yeah, Stiles’s brain supplies, but his body’s lagging a little further behind, heart beating a rapid tattoo in his chest and skin tingling hot and cold all at one. But he manages a shaky nod and a tremulous smile, and apparently that’s enough for Derek because the Alpha’s shifting to sit next to him on the couch, gently angling the younger man’s jaw around to face him, dipping back down again to claim his mouth in a firmer, deeper kiss that leaves Stiles squirming and clutching at one thick, muscular forearm, yearning for more, closer, harder.

Derek doesn’t escalate things further, however. His grip on Stiles is firm, but only enough to keep him still, preventing him from either clambering up to straddle Derek in sudden a burst of confidence, or slipping off the couch and landing in a boneless heap on the floor. Both are entirely possible right now.

“Sir,” Stiles manages, shaky and breathless, when the Alpha breaks the kiss to nuzzle gently at his throat. “Sir, please…”

The Dom pulls back sharply to study him again, but after a beat the concern vanishes, another smile curling at his lips when he realises that it was a plea for more rather than a request for him to stop. He leans in again and nips lightly at the underside of Stiles’s jaw, chuckling when the Sub sucks in a sharp breath and clings to him, trailing a line of kisses back up over his chin before recapturing Stile’s lips in a searing kiss. This one is pure domination, fierce and intense with enough tongue to leave the younger man’s head spinning.

“Easy,” Derek soothes in a low, rumbling voice when he breaks the kiss and Stiles whines in response. A hand slides over Stiles’s shoulder to cup the back of his neck, Derek’s nose bumping against his cheek in a tender nuzzle. “Easy, baby. I’ve got you.”

The endearment yanks the floor out from underneath him, and the sound that comes out of his mouth is choked and needy, closer to a whimper than anything else. And suddenly he’s being shifted, lifted,
settled comfortably on solid thighs as those strong, warm arms fold around him, crowding him in close to Derek’s solid, comforting presence.

He snuggles closer unashamedly, because apparently now he can, and there’ll be time later to work out how the fuck he managed to turn a series of disasters into the perfect Alpha-seducing recipe, but right now he’s content just to be cuddled. The Alpha tucks his head under his chin, murmuring gentle words of praise, telling him how good he is, how well he’s behaving, how pleased Derek is to be the one to give him what he needs. And it’s music to his ears, the words settling over him like a blanket, his body thrumming contentedly, warm and secure and protected.

This is where he belongs. Right here, with Derek. He’s never leaving the man’s lap again.

Of course, he’s not deep enough into subspace to stay adrift for long – his current headspace is merely the result of suddenly finding himself up close and personal with a very attractive and dominant Alpha, triggering an initial burst of endorphins that pushed the boat out to sea for a little bit. So it’s only a matter of minutes before he feels reality settling over him again, and he shifts a little in Derek’s hold, tugging on the sleeve of the man’s uniform shirt where he’s been fisting it as a means to keep himself anchored in close.

“Sir?”

Derek stirs, uncurling a little from around Stiles and straightening up, rubbing one large, warm hand up and down Stile’s outermost thigh where it rests on the edge of his lap. “Hey there.” His smile is warm, tender. “You with me?”

“Yeah.” He feels his cheeks heating up again. “Sorry. I didn’t expect to drop so fast, I-”

“You were perfect,” Derek insists firmly, in a tone that brooks no argument, and he tilts Stiles’s chin up again to kiss him chastely. “I’m sorry if I moved too fast. But I haven’t been able to stop thinking about you since the crash, and the way you smelled just now, God, when I realised it was mutual-”

He cuts himself off by kissing Stiles again, cupping his cheek this time so that he can maintain eye contact when they break apart. “This is what you want, isn’t it?”

Stiles nods so hard his head might just fall off, but the resulting neck-ache is worth it for the wide, eye-crinkling smile that lights up the Alpha’s features. Something hot and happy bursts inside his chest again, and he leans up in a moment of boldness to bump his nose against the underside of Derek’s jaw. It’s usually a Werewolf thing – he’s seen Isaac do it to Scott a thousand times – but somehow the gesture just feels right when he does it. And Stiles has never really been the nuzzling type before, so clearly this is a hormonal thing.

Derek growls, low and possessive, his arms closing tightly around Stiles again. “I knew you were the one,” he murmurs, stroking a hand over the Sub’s hip. “Right from the moment you crawled into my arms after the crash. Letting Scott take you away from me that day went against every Dominant instinct inside of me.”

So maybe the jacket hadn't just been a means of keeping Stiles warm. Maybe it had been a possessive Alpha-Dom claiming thing, too. Stiles can't say he minds that notion.

“Well,” Stiles manages, and he's impressed when his voice doesn’t wobble, because his heart’s beating so fast that it feels like a thrumming vibration against his chest wall. “Nobody’s coming to take me away this time.”

Derek smiles softly, his gaze flickering across Stiles’s features, studying him intently. Then he tilts his head down to press their foreheads together.
“I want you to be mine, Stiles. Please.”

It might not be the traditional way to ask a Sub out, since Stiles isn’t kneeling and they don’t have a collar nearby, but it’s perfect. Besides, fuck tradition. Stiles puts Pop Rocks in brownies, he doesn’t need a traditional relationship.

He smiles, closing his eyes as something warm and secure and certain wraps around his heart.

“I’m yours, Sir,” he promises, soft and sincere. “All yours. For as long as you’ll keep me.”

Chapter End Notes

I am so TOTALLY overwhelmed by the awesome response from chapter 1. Hence the super-fast update! A huge thank-you to everyone who reviewed/favourited/left kudos. You guys rock!

Also, while this story will primarily focus on Stiles and Derek's D/s relationship, if anyone would be interested in reading further into how Scott and Isaac came together, or to see a D/s interaction scene between them, let me know! I love Scisaac, so it's no skin off my back. ;)

xxx
Someone’s shaking him awake.

He frowns sleepily and makes a whining noise of protest, trying to bury his face further into the cushion it’s pillowed on, but the intruder is persistent, the hand on his shoulder gripping a little harder to give him another shake.

“Dude, c’mon, don’t make me resort to violence.”

Stiles opens his eyes to a squint and turns his head to the side, peering up at Isaac blearily. His frown deepens momentarily at the unfamiliar surroundings. Where the hell is he? Did he fall asleep at wor-

Oh. Oh.

Isaac clearly recognises the moment when reality sinks in, the Werewolf’s lips kicking up in a wide, amused smile as Stiles’s heart does a funny *blip* thing and a tingling thrill rushes through him.

*Derek*. He’s dating Derek Hale. He’s going out to dinner tomorrow night with the hottest Alpha-Dom in Beacon Hills. His Dom. He has a Dom now. Holy shit.

He exhales a happy sigh, unbothered by the frankly *stupid* grin he can feel curling at his mouth, and lifts a hand up to rub the tips of his fingers against the still-tingling mark on his neck. “I know it’s not a collar,” Derek had said, nuzzling at the fresh bruise as Stiles lay slumped in a boneless, spaced-out heap against his chest, “but it’ll mark you as mine until tomorrow evening. Think you can be good for me until then?”

Stiles had fervently assured him that he would; he’d be “so, so good, I promise, Sir. I’ll be, like, the best behaved Sub ever, just you wait and see, people won’t know what-” And Derek, chuckling fondly, had tipped his chin up gently to silence the younger man’s babbling with a tender kiss.

“So,” Isaac says with a falsely innocent smile. “I take it that everything went smoothly?”

Suddenly remembering the three grinning Werewolves who’d quite clearly staged a scene in the staffroom in a ploy to send him running for Derek’s office, Stiles’s smile slips, a frown crinkling his brow as he pushes himself upright.

“Yeah, no thanks to you.”

Isaac holds up a hand defensively. “Hey, no, I’m pretty sure it’s *all* thanks to me. You were about ten seconds from making an excuse and *leaving*, and Derek hadn’t even seen you yet. Besides, it worked out okay in the end, right?”

When Stiles doesn’t crack a smile, the Werewolf sighs and deflates a little, his casual attitude vanishing instantly, which makes Stiles wonder whether it was all just an act for his benefit in the first place. Leaning forwards in his crouch, Isaac pulls the other Sub into a companionable hug.

“Look, I’m sorry, okay? I know you hate surprises. But Boyd said Derek’s been pining over you for *days*, man, and you’ve hardly slept a wink since the crash. I had to do *something*. Desperate times call for desperate measures.”
Stiles loses the frown after a moment, bringing his arms up to return the hug. “Is this payback for me hooking you up with Scott all those years ago?”

“Nah, that turned out pretty well for both of us in the long-run.” Isaac pulls back a little to look at him, studying the other Sub’s expression carefully. “You’re…you’re not mad at me, right?”

“No,” Stiles assures quietly, and sighs. Then he gives Isaac a half-hearted shove so that he rocks back on his knees. “But I still can’t believe you set me up like that. I could’ve humiliated myself.”

“But you didn’t,” the Werewolf points out with a small, tentative smile. He holds out a slip of paper. “And now you have a hot Dom on speed-dial.”

Stiles takes the post-it note and can’t keep the pleased grin from his face when he sees the cell phone number written there, along with a scribbled note underneath that reads ‘Text me when you get home safely.– Derek’, and Stiles decides then and there that he’s going to have to frame it. He tucks the note carefully into his pocket, covering a yawn with the back of his other hand.

God, he’s tired.

He remembers talking with Derek at length about everything and anything for most of the afternoon – curled up in his Dom’s lap like that, he’d felt so safe, so at ease, that his mouth had just gone into overdrive. But the Alpha hadn’t seemed put off by the realisation that he’d just promised himself to a chatterbox. On the contrary, he’d listened closely and hm’d in all the right places, nodding whenever Stiles paused for breath, asking question when Stiles forgot to elaborate on certain key points. And either he’s an amazing actor or he’d genuinely been interested in what Stiles was saying, because he hadn’t broken eye contact once.

Scott is his best friend, they’ve known each other since Kindergarten, and even he still has trouble keeping up with Stiles’s rambling train of thought sometimes. But Derek had matched his pace seamlessly.

Unfortunately, sleep deprivation had caught up with him eventually, and at the first jaw-splitting yawn, Derek had gently but firmly told him that he needed to get some shut-eye. Stiles hadn’t been overly keen on the idea, given that he’d only just bagged himself a smoking-hot Alpha and there were far more interesting things that they could have been doing with their time, but orders were orders and he hadn’t been about to disobey his new Dom at the first hurdle just because it didn’t suit him. Besides, with his head pillowed on Derek’s thigh and the Alpha’s fingers stroking through his hair tenderly, he hadn’t really stood a chance against the enticing lull of slumber.

“How long was I asleep?”

Isaac shrugs, shifting up on his knees so that he can lean over and retrieve the other Sub’s discarded shoes (that’s weird – Stiles can’t even remember taking them off). “A while, by the looks of it. Derek had to respond to an emergency call a couple of hours ago. He told me to keep an eye on you until my shift was up; he wasn’t sure what time the team would be back, and he didn’t want you waking up alone and freaking out.”

Stiles scrubs a hand down his face, trying to wake himself up a little more as he shoves his feet into his shoes clumsily. “How come you didn’t go with the team? I thought you were on-call this week.”

“So did I.” The Werewolf nudges the other man’s hands away and starts tying his shoelaces for him (admittedly he’s far quicker and more efficient at it than Stiles is capable of right now). “But I don’t…” he clears his throat and shifts again, dropping his hands to rest against his thighs, “I don’t think Derek’s all that happy with me for setting you guys up like that.”
Stiles raises his hands. “Well, he didn’t hear it from me. You know I wouldn’t rat you out like that.”

“You didn’t need to,” Isaac says with a sigh, and Stiles can see the uneasiness written into the creases at the corners of his eyes; he might as well be holding up a sign that says ‘It’s me, I’m guilty, and now I feel like shit’. Stiles kinda wants to hug him again, because he’s been there often enough himself, and it sucks. “The guy knows everything, seriously. Secrets never stay secret for long around here.”

Stiles touches the Werewolf’s shoulder gently, his own brow creasing. “You’re not in trouble, right?”

Isaac shrugs again, somewhat despondently, hands fidgeting in his lap. “Derek didn’t say, exactly. He just…it’s a Werewolf thing. He didn’t even look at me any different, but I could feel he wasn’t happy with me.”

“Well, did you apologise?”

The Sub shakes his head morosely. “There wasn’t time.”

“Maybe you should wait here until he gets back,” Stiles suggests, feeling a sympathetic twinge in his chest at the guilt Isaac’s obviously dealing with. “I’m sure he won’t be angry with you, man. I could text him, if you like? Tell him I wasn’t offended by it or anything?”

“It’s not just that,” Isaac sighs as he climbs to his feet, threading his fingers through his curls in a nervous, agitated gesture. “It’s the principle of the thing. I persuaded an un-bonded Sub to visit the Centre with the sole intention of setting him up as a romantic interest for my Alpha; mutual attraction or not, that was way outta line. It was presumptuous and manipulative and—”

“Hey,” Stiles interrupts firmly, pushing himself up from the couch quickly and grabbing Isaac by the arms before he can start berating himself any further. “Stop it. It maybe wasn’t the smartest thing to do, I’ll give you that, but you’re being way too hard on yourself.”

“No m’not,” the Werewolf mumbles, and shoots a look towards the door, brow still creased as he sighs again. “Thing is, I’m glad I did it. Because you two are perfect for each other, you know? But I just wish I’d done it differently; preferably in a way that didn’t include going behind my Alpha’s back, even if it was for his own benefit. I feel like a total dick.”

Trying to coax a smile out of his friend, Stiles arches an eyebrow. “What, so you feel bad about tricking Derek, but setting me up is totally fine?” He presses a hand to his chest. “I thought you loved me, bro.”

“You know I didn’t mean it like that.” Isaac rolls his eyes, but his shoulders are still slumped, his face forlorn. “But Derek’s my Alpha. Even Scott’s not allowed to pull stunts like that around here. And what I did today was…it was really disrespectful, Stiles.”

“He’ll understand,” Stiles reasons, concern seeping into his tone, because the speed at which Isaac is sinking into a black pit of self-deprecation is a little alarming. “If he didn’t tell you off earlier, I’m sure he’s not angry.”

“But he was angry,” the curly-haired Sub insists, gaze sliding down to stare at the carpet. “I know he was. Why wouldn’t he be?”

Why? Because Derek doesn’t seem like the kind of Dom who’d blow small issues out of proportion. Stiles hasn’t exactly known him personally for very long, but Scott’s been regaling him with work-related stories since he first got the job and joined Derek’s pack, and Scott doesn’t tend to praise
people like that unless they’ve genuinely earned his trust and respect. And his best friend wouldn’t trust or respect an Alpha Dom who unfairly disciplined his Betas and employees. Sure, Stiles understands the significance of undermining the Alpha’s authority, especially for a Werewolf, but Derek must have known that it wasn’t done with malicious intent. He’s not stupid.

“Hey,” he says again, and rubs his hands up and down Isaac’s arms, a soothing gesture from one Sub to another. “Do you need me to call Scott?”

“No.” Isaac shakes his head quickly. “He’ll be disappointed if I don’t apologise to Derek first.”

“He won’t be disappointed,” Stiles tries to reassure, but it’s obvious nothing he says is going to sink home any time soon. Not now that Isaac’s clearly reached the point where guilt and regret and shame have all curdled together to form an uncomfortable, churning ball in the pit of his stomach.

It’s a well-known fact that Subs are far better at punishing themselves than any Dom could. Stiles wishes he could testify to the contrary, but he knows from personal experience that a guilty secret kept hidden for more than a day or so turns into a torturous burden that messes with his emotional control and stability, Submissive instincts being thrown out of whack as a knock-on effect of unbalanced body chemistry. He hates being disciplined (what Sub wouldn’t?), but at least the slate’s wiped clean after that and his mind can be at peace, rather than jumping aboard an emotional train-wreck of internal self-flagellation, wallowing in his own regret until his body’s finally pushed to its limit and forces him into a Drop.

So compared to the alternative, administering a little hands-on discipline is universally considered the safer and more preferable option for all Submissives.

Actually, denying a needy Sub the discipline and absolution they require is widely seen as an act of abuse. Stiles knows Isaac’s father had possessed a tendency to manipulate the Sub’s emotions in that way – verbally berating him for non-existent or exaggerated disobedience so that Isaac reached a point where he desperately needed comfort and forgiveness, and then locking him up in the freezer in their cellar for hours at a time and deliberately neglecting the boy’s emotional needs. Eventually he’d been arrested, charged with the unlawful abuse of a Submissive minor and sentenced to a heck of a long time in jail, but a lot of that emotional abuse had left scars. Isaac had been thriving and healthy when Stiles had met him during their first week at college, but he’d remained incredibly shy around Doms for months until Stiles had sneakily arranged for both Isaac and Scott to meet him in an empty classroom at the same time, and the pair had immediately hit it off.

Just like Stiles had known they would. Scott’s the protective, doting, nurturing type, and back then Isaac had needed a cuddly Dom far more than an overly authoritative one.

That being said, Scott isn’t a total pushover when it comes to discipline. Hell, he’s even spanked Stiles before. Mostly at college, for a number of dumb, poorly-planned stunts that had put him in harm’s way. Like when he and Isaac had snuck off to a party in second year with a few unsavoury characters and drunk way too much spiked punch and had almost gotten themselves arrested. It was one of the few times when Stiles had seen Scott genuinely lose his temper (albeit briefly), although the Dom’s anger had mostly stemmed from fear and concern.

And they’d never really been proper spankings; maybe a dozen or so swats at most, over his clothes. If it had been any other of his friends – Lydia or Danny or Allison – he probably would’ve put his foot down and told them to back the hell off. Doms couldn’t just punish random Subs these days, that sort of bullshit was outlawed half a century ago. Things have changed now. Only an individual’s legal Dom or members of their immediate family (or their Alpha if the individual is a Werewolf) can lawfully discipline a Sub. Employment contracts also include an opt-in/opt-out form where Submissives can choose whether or not their employer or direct supervisor can discipline them on-
site for work infractions, rather than calling their Dom’s emergency contact number.

It’s a very personal choice, and on the whole it’s probably a fifty-fifty split between those who choose to grant permission and those who would prefer to be disciplined in the privacy of their own home. Stiles has always chosen the latter, but that’s mostly because the Dom supervisor who works weekends and nightshifts at the hotel is a total ass.

But Scott’s his best friend, and he’s always been more of a brother than anything else, so that’s what the spankings tend to feel like; a Dom brother disciplining his Submissive sibling. Which is hardly unusual. Actually, in a weird way, it had made Stiles feel safer at college, knowing that he had someone keeping an eye on him; someone he could fall back on if he screwed up without needing to call home and confess to his Dad. Scott had always offered to phone John first, of course, but since the Werewolf had never spanked him half as thoroughly as his Dad (who took things like drinking and reckless endangerment very seriously), letting his friend deal with it then and there had always seemed like the better option.

Still, that hadn’t stopped from loudly and tearfully protesting it every time he found himself across Scott’s knees, regardless of the way Scott would unashamedly spoil him afterwards with hugs and junk food and movie marathons. But Stiles has always been frustratingly emotional when it comes to a well-deserved spanking, and he doubts that’s ever going to change. His brain just seems to throw stoicism to the wind whenever he’s about to be disciplined, despite how controlled and independent he usually is. Damned Submissive biology.

“Stiles.”

He startles, yanked from his thoughts, and drops his hands from Isaac’s arms to spin towards the speaker. Derek’s standing in the doorway to the office, a slight frown crinkling his brow, more confused and surprised than anything else. Clearly he hadn’t expected Stiles to still be here. But the Alpha’s gaze quickly flickers over to the curly-haired Beta who’s standing stock-still in the middle of the room like a deer caught in the headlights; eyes wide, body tense, radiating guilt and fear and sadness in waves (Stiles isn’t a Werewolf but he only has to look at Isaac to guess what he must smell like to an Alpha).

Isaac wets his lips, throat moving as he swallows, shoulders hunching like he wants to make himself as small as possible. “Hi, Derek.”

Derek’s frown deepens, but concern’s written in there now, and he stands impossibly still for a few seconds as he studies the other Werewolf. Then he seems to come to some sort of conclusion, because he’s abruptly in motion again, crossing the room in a few brisk strides to pull Isaac against his chest in a bear-hug, tucking the Beta’s head under his chin. Isaac visibly shudders against him and brings his arms up to clutch at the back of Derek’s shirt.

“Hey. Easy, buddy. What’s gotten you so worked up?” the Alpha murmurs, carding his fingers through Isaac’s curls. “Hm? What’s going on in that head of yours?”

“M’sorry,” the younger Werewolf blurs, face buried in Derek’s shoulder. “I’m really sorry, I shouldn’t have set you up like that, I wasn’t thinkin’ straight. I won’t do it again, I promise.”

Derek glances towards Stiles, who’s too busy feeling overwhelmingly relieved at the Alpha’s return (because Isaac internally punishing himself is something that genuinely tears him apart, since he’s powerless to stop it) to do anything other than stare back at him helplessly. The Dom sighs softly and rubs between Isaac’s trembling shoulders in slow, soothing circles, nuzzling his temple.

“So, I’m mad at you because you tricked Stiles and I into meeting each other today?” Derek guesses
quietly, and Stiles can tell by the tone of his voice that this clearly isn’t the case.

Isaac nods jerkily. “I know it was wrong. I was disobedient and manipulative and I deliberately went behind your back. And I’m so, so sorry, Sir.”

“Mm,” Derek considers, stroking his hair. “That’s quite a list you’ve got there, Isaac. But,” he pulls the Sub away from his chest a few inches to tip his chin up, meeting the boy’s gaze, ‘I’m not angry with you. It was a minor infraction, pup, and I’d planned on letting you off with only a warning and a quiet word with Scott.”

“But-” Isaac protests, voice hoarse.

“However,” the Alpha continues, in a tone that’s both gentle and unwaveringly authoritative, “you know perfectly well that you’re not allowed to punish yourself like this. So I’ll be taking care of that in a moment.”

Stiles sags a little out of renewed relief, because he knew Derek wasn’t one of those unfeeling Alphas who’d leave a needy Beta-Sub undisciplined.

“Not because I’m mad at you or disappointed,” Derek adds, stroking the boy’s cheek, “but because you’re mad and disappointed with yourself. Do you understand?”

Isaac nods slowly, his eyes wide and round and wet, and Derek presses a quick kiss to the centre of his brow. Then his gaze finally shifts back to Stiles for a moment, his smile warming into something gentle and affectionate.

“I need you to step outside for a couple of minutes while I talk to Isaac, okay?” he requests. “Don’t go far.”

The human Sub dips his head in a quick nod and shuffles towards the exit, grateful for the invitation to grant Isaac a little more privacy and dignity. They’ve seen each other spanked before, but it’s not exactly a pleasant experience. Even if he is curious about how Derek deals with that sort of thing, given that he’ll undoubtedly find himself upturned across the Alpha’s knees at some point in the near future. He tries not to screw up, he genuinely does, but trouble has a way of finding him. And yeah, okay, sometimes he makes stupidly impulsive decisions, too. Apparently his mom was the same when she and Dad first met, so maybe he can blame it on genetics.

He walks further down the corridor, until he feels he’s at a safe distance not to be able to overhear anything. But it puts him close enough to the staffroom that the low hum of conversation is more discernable, which makes it far more noticeable when the talking stops abruptly, silence hanging in its wake.

“What’s that?” a voice asks curiously after a beat, and Stiles freezes, thinking he’s been caught.

There’s another pause, then a second speaker chimes in, his tone both amused and sympathetic, “Ooh, someone’s gettin’ it from the Boss. Nick, can you tell who it is?”

“Sounds like Isaac,” a deeper voice (Nick, maybe?) replies, and there’s a chorus of mumbled agreements. “Poor kid. I’d wondered if somethin’ was up, he’s been moping all afternoon. And then Derek goes and takes him off the team at the last minute. Didn’t say why.”

“Oh c’mon,” a third person scoffs. “You could smell the guilt on him from a mile away. Deaton was about ten seconds away from phoning McCall to come and pick him up before the emergency call came through. To be honest, I’m surprised the Boss didn’t intervene sooner.”
“I think Derek was a little distracted,” maybe-Nick drawls, amused.

A hand touches his wrist suddenly and Stiles swallows back a yelp (only because he’s hyper aware that there are probably a bunch of overprotective WPDS Doms in the room next door who’ll come charging out full-throttle if he makes a ruckus), but when his gaze snaps to the left, it’s only Boyd. The broad-shouldered Dom gives him a friendly smile, gesturing with a nod of his head towards a room a little further down the corridor.

Stiles doesn’t know Boyd all that well (hell, he doesn’t even know his first name), but he knows Scott’s close friends with him, and there are tons of pictures on Facebook of Boyd and Scott with their respective Subs at various WPDS parties and events, grinning at the camera, arms wrapped around each other companionably. So he at least knows Boyd can be trusted. Besides, his warm, easy manner is pretty damn soothing. And he had saved Stiles from landing on his ass earlier that day.

Following the Dom as quietly as he can away from the staffroom, he slips into the empty office as indicated and perches on the edge of the desk, watching Boyd carefully as the Werewolf pushes the door closed behind them.

“Isaac’s okay, right?” he asks as soon as they’re alone, because Boyd has super-hearing and Stiles doesn’t.

The Werewolf nods with another easy smile. “Derek won’t go too hard on him,” he reassured. “It’s not like he screwed up big-time.” He sighs then, and the fondness and affection in it eases something in Stiles’s chest. “The kid just has a tendency to overthink things.”

“Yes,” Stiles agrees, rubbing the back of his neck. He doesn’t know if Isaac’s told Boyd about his past, about why he’s so often inclined to heap the blame on himself for small infractions, and decides it’s better not to comment on it, just in case. It’s not his story to tell. “What about Erica? Is she okay?”

“My girl?” Boyd snorts, eyebrows arching. “Believe me, man, she has no regrets about hooking you up with the Boss. And neither do I. We’d heard about you from Isaac and Scott, sure, but we couldn’t be sure until we met you in person. And Isaac’s right, you and Derek are a perfect match.”

“Why?” the Sub asks, genuinely baffled.

“Personality traits,” Boyd replies evenly. “You balance each other out. And besides, he hasn’t shut up about you since the crash, so that was a bit of a giveaway. He hasn’t shown that level of interest in a Sub for a long time.” He winks and taps the side of his nose. “But you didn’t hear that from me, okay?”

Stiles nods and mimes zipping his lips shut, and the Dom’s smile broadens into a grin. Then he turns his head to the side, tilting it a little, listening.

“They’re all done in there, if you want to go back,” the Werewolf tells him. “And Isaac’s fine, man. But you’re welcome to sit with us in the staffroom if you’d rather wait for them to come out?”

The Sub shakes his head, pushing himself off the edge of the desk. “No, that’s okay. Thanks anyway, Sir.”

The Dom chuckles and holds out a hand. “Call me Boyd. Judging by that mark on your neck, we’re gonna be seeing a lot more of you around here.”

Stiles flushes, slapping a hand against the bruise on his throat even as he shakes Boyd’s hand. The
man’s got a firm, warm grip, but it lacks the strength of a dominant trying to exert his authority, and Stiles finds himself liking the man even more.

“It was nice to meet you, Boyd,” he says, and wiggles his fingers in a quick wave before slipping out through the door and jogging back up the hallway towards Derek’s office.

“Come in, Stiles,” the Alpha calls through the wooden door before Stiles has even had a chance to knock.

He finds his Dom sitting on the couch that Stiles had been sleeping on, Isaac curled up against his chest, flushed and teary-eyed and sniffling, but boneless and relaxed in a way that he hadn’t been before, the tension and anxiety gone from his posture. Derek’s got an arm wrapped around the Sub, his expression calm and contented as he rests his cheek against Isaac’s curls, and Stiles just about falls in love with him all over again. Especially when the Alpha sends him a warm smile and lifts his other arm invitingly.

“Are you alright?” he asks quietly, as Stiles tucks himself up against Derek’s side comfortably.

Stiles nods, smiling when Derek turns his head to brush a kiss against his hairline, and reaches out to flick the back of Isaac’s hand gently.

“Still alive, then?”

Isaac gives him a watery smile in return, nodding a little and turning his head towards his own shoulder to scrub away some of the tear-trails on the short sleeve of his uniform shirt. Derek watches him with a fond expression, before redirecting his gaze towards Stiles, arching an eyebrow questioningly.

“Were you expecting to find him with a limb missing?” he asks mildly, and Stiles can see the humour dancing in his eyes.

“Well, not a whole limb, no,” he muses. “Couple of fingers, maybe?”

Isaac sniggers wetly, smiling more fully now. “Nah, he only does that if you mess with his protein shakes.” Then he yelps out a laugh and clutches at the Alpha’s shirtfront when Derek makes as though to turn him back over his knee again. “No! Derek, no-no-no-no!”

Chuckling, Derek resituates the Sub in his lap carefully, nuzzling Isaac’s temple when his Beta winces and squirms a bit. Stiles feels warmth swell in his chest at the easy interaction between them; aside from Scott and Melissa (and maybe his dad, too), he’s never seen Isaac so tactile around another Dom. It’s downright adorable.

Isaac shifts after a few minutes, scrubbing at his face one last time before glancing up timidly at his Alpha. “I should probably go, Boss. Scott’ll be expecting me home soon.”

“I’ll drive you,” Derek tells him, patting the Sub’s knee and extracting his arm from around the Beta so that he can get up if he wants to.

The younger man shakes his head. “I’ll be fine.”

“No.” The Alpha’s tone is still calm and even, the word deceptively soft, but it also brooks no argument. “I’m driving you home tonight, pup. Understood?”

Isaac glances up at him, then drops his gaze just as quickly and dips his head. “Yes, Sir.”
Derek gives him a brief squeeze before nudging him gently off his lap, his hand lingering on the small of Isaac’s back until his Beta moves out of reach. Stiles stands along with him, yanking the taller Sub into a quick hug.

“I ought to be heading home, too,” he acknowledges, ruffling the Werewolf’s curly hair. “We’re still on for lunch tomorrow, right?”

“Right,” Isaac confirms, and when he pulls back he’s at ease again, his smile casual and friendly. Then he glances across at Derek quickly, seeking permission. “I just need to grab my stuff from the locker-room, Sir.”

Smiling softly, Derek gestures towards the door with a nod of his head, and Isaac bounds off in search of the locker-room, his previous rear-end discomfort apparently forgotten. Although his enviable supernatural Werewolf healing powers probably have a lot to do with that.

Too busy watching him leave, Stiles startles at the gentle touch of hands on his hips, but relaxes immediately when a warm body presses up behind him, Derek’s breath a warm puff against his throat as the Alpha dips down to kiss the mark on the side of his neck.

“Will you be alright getting home on your own?”

“I’m sure I’ll manage somehow,” Stiles replies with just a hint of sarcasm, grinning, and settles his hands over the ones that are resting on his waist.

Derek breathes a laugh against his neck, blunt human teeth teasing the sensitive skin there. “I’m going to have my hands full with you, aren’t I?”

“Yes please.”

“Stiles.” The Alpha drops his head to lean his brow against the Sub’s shoulder, then gives him a gentle squeeze around the middle and pulls away. “Just do your best not to crash into any Doms on your way home, okay?”

“Oh, low blow, Sir.”

Derek’s smiling at him, that same wide, eye-crinkling smile from earlier, and Stiles could seriously stare at it all day. It’s amazing.

“I’d like you to call me tonight,” the Alpha requests, brushing his hands up from Stiles’s wrists to settle on his shoulders briefly, before cupping his face. “Any time before eleven, but preferably once you’re in bed. Is that alright?”

Stiles nods, turning his head by a fraction of an inch so that he can press a kiss to the inside of Derek’s palm. “I’d like that, Sir.”

Derek studies him for a long moment, his eyes lingering on the Sub’s features, warmth and affection in his gaze. Then he leans forward quickly to brush their lips together, one hand cupping his jaw, the other cupping the side of Stiles’s neck. A happy thrill rushes through him at the contact, leaving him flushed and smiling, his skin practically buzzing where Derek had touched it.

“Until tonight, then,” the Alpha murmurs, stroking his cheek.

“Yeah,” Stiles manages, once he’s remembered how to use his voice. “Until tonight.”
“Stiles?” his dad calls the moment the Sub steps into the house and closes the door behind him. “Can you come into the living room, please?”

Dropping his keys into the dish on the shelf near the door, Stiles kicks off his shoes and sets down the carrier bag of empty Tupperware boxes, a tiny burst of guilt and uneasiness trickling down into his stomach despite the fact he can’t think of what he might have done wrong. Sometimes he just switches to contrite and apologetic by default, because that tends to work better for him than sarcastic-and-defensive.

His dad’s sitting in the armchair (the armchair, oh shit), nursing a mug of coffee, still dressed in his Sheriff uniform, minus his jacket. The Dom hasn’t even taken the time to change before having a conversation with Stiles. Double shit. He must be in big trouble.

“Whatver it is, I’m really sorry and I won’t do it again,” he attempts to placate. It never usually works, but that rarely stops him from trying.

John’s lips twitch up at the corner, even as he very carefully sets his mug to one side and leans forwards in the armchair, crooking a finger at Stiles and pointing to the spot in front of him, a familiar “here, now” gesture.

The nervous fluttering in his stomach ratchets up another few notches as he shuffles across the living room towards his dad, toes curling and uncurling into the soft carpet beneath his feet as he fidgets nervously, squirming under his father’s calm, unblinking gaze.

“What?” he finally blurts, only just resisting the impulse to stamp his foot in frustration.

John’s mouth suddenly curls up in a wide, amused smile. “Congratulations, son.”

Well, he certainly hadn’t been expecting that.

“Um,” he manages, intelligently.

“I got a phone call from Derek Hale about twenty minutes ago,” the Sheriff elaborates, “asking for my permission to take you out to dinner tomorrow night with the intention of giving you his collar.”

Stiles blinks, stunned. His dad had spoken to Derek. Derek had asked permission to collar him. His dad knew about the two of them.

It was all a little too much for his brain to process in one go.

“You’re such a jerk,” he complains when he finally finds his voice, his tone and expression equally disgruntled. “Jesus, Dad, I thought you were gonna spank me.”

“No, I didn’t,” John warns, but it’s an idle threat, his tone still warm and
amused. He pushes himself up out of the armchair and pulls Stiles into a hug, one large hand rubbing the back of his neck gently. “I’m happy for you, son. Derek’s a great guy, and good Dom. He’ll treat you right.”

Stiles loses the frown, the uneasiness in his stomach settling at his father’s quiet words of approval. He snuggles unashamedly closer for a moment, feeling warmed all the way down to his toes, before his dad releases him and sends him towards the door with a motivational ‘pat’ to his backside, telling him to go wash up for dinner.

“Oh, and Stiles?” his dad calls after him.

The Sub poked his head around the doorframe. “Mm?”

“You’ll tell me if he doesn’t treat you right, won’t you?”

Stiles rolls his eyes, but he’s smiling. “Yes, Sir.”

“Good.” John reclaims his seat and reaches for his coffee again. “Because I’ve already told him I’ll fill his sorry ass full of silver bullets if he breaks your heart.”

“Dad!”

---

Chapter End Notes

I'm so excited and pleased that this story is being received so well! And apparently positive feedback feeds my motivational gear-stick, because my brain won’t switch off! But sadly I'm working almost every day this week, so it'll probably be a least 5 days or so before my next update. I'll try and have another one next weekend though! <3 x
Stiles figures he should probably feel at least a little bit disappointed that his phone conversation with Derek has stayed entirely PG-rated so far. Especially considering he’s spent the past four days lost in vividly arousing daydreams featuring the Alpha-Dom.

But strangely enough, he isn’t.

Although it’s hard to feel disappointed about anything in life, really, when he’s grinning up at his bedroom ceiling like a lovesick teenager, his cell phone pressed against his ear, listening to Derek’s quiet, rich voice rumbling through the speaker.

They’ve only been talking for a couple of hours now (and thank God his phone bill is on a fixed monthly rate, otherwise he’d be screwed), but Stiles feels as though he’s known Derek all his life. Their backgrounds are so different that they may as well have come from opposite corners of the universe, but they have so much in common, too. Music, movies, books; they seem to share similar tastes in most of their hobbies (other than athletics; Derek is quite clearly very passionate about basketball, having played for the Werewolf regional division while he was in college, whereas Stiles lost interest in sport when one of the senior players on his High School lacrosse team turned out to be a raging, mass-murdering psychopath).

They spend at least half an hour enthusing about Neil Gaimen’s latest novel, discussing how author seems to have penned it as a not-so-subtle stab at the immorality of the recent actions of Dominants’ Rights Activists. Derek insists that he’s not as passionate about politics as his older brother, Johnathan (who, as it turns out, is the nominated WPDS representative for the entire county, just in case the Hale family wasn’t already busy enough), but he rants for a good ten minutes about the DRA’s latest anti-equality campaign, the one that aims put restrictions on the number of un-bonded Subs who can gain managerial positions in the workplace.

“It’ll never make it to a court of law,” Derek concludes, and his sigh crackles loudly over the phone line. “But they’ve gained a lot of followers over the past six months, and some of the more recent protests at the National WPDS conferences turned violent. Johnny’s worried they’ll start to target Centres directly if tensions keep rising.”

“There’s no danger of that happening in Beacon Hills, right?” Stiles asks, a note of concern slipping into his voice.

“Not as far as we know,” the Dom assures him calmly. “There are a couple of groups who get pretty vocal about the Equality Act every now and then, but we’ve got them on our radar. Nobody’s going to sneak up on us unawares.”

“Good. I happen to be pretty attached to a few of the guys who work there.”

“Oh?” Derek’s voice has taken on an amused, teasing note again, one that makes Stiles’s heart flutter. “Anyone I know?”
Stiles grins up at his ceiling again, threading his fingers through his fringe. “Well, there’s this Beta-couple that I have the misfortune of calling my Pack. The Dom’s a complete klutz, he never really recovered after his senior year growth spirt, and his Sub’s got an affinity for scarves and baked goods, so he’s easy enough to please. Oh, and there’s this Alpha who works there too. I guess I’m semi-interested in him.”

“Semi-interested, huh?” The Dom sounds like he’s trying not to laugh. “And what’s he like, this Alpha?”


“Sounds like a douche.”

Now it’s Stiles’s turn to laugh, his grin stretching wide enough that his cheeks start to ache.

“Oh, I don’t know, he has a few redeeming qualities. He’s got a good taste in potential Submissive partners, for one.”

“That’s true,” Derek acknowledges casually. “Isaac is pretty cute.”

“Oooh!” Stiles crows, as the Dom chuckles on the other end of the line. “I’m telling Scott!”

There’s a light tap on his door suddenly, and he pushes himself upright, glancing at the clock. It isn’t all that late, so it’s not as though his conversation will be keeping his Dad awake, which means it’ll probably just be a reminder about mowing the lawn in the backyard like he’d promised to do this week (a chore he has continued to put off because he’s a chronic procrastinator).

“Sorry, hold on a sec,” he says to Derek, then presses the cell phone against his chest to muffle the conversation a little as he calls, “Come in!”

His Dad opens the door, dressed in his usual sleep-shorts and an ancient BHPD ‘Number One Sheriff!’ t-shirt that he’d gotten from the deputies when he’d first been nominated for the post back in ’95. He leans against the doorframe and flashes Stiles a quiet smile.

“Hey, champ. Just to let you know, I’ll be heading out early tomorrow morning; I’m working a shift down at the station.”

Stiles feels his brow crease a little. “I thought you were supposed to be off until Saturday?”

“There’s a flu bug going around,” his dad elaborates. “They’re down a couple of officers, and it isn’t like I had anything planned for tomorrow. The gardening can wait.”

“Awesome.”

John points a finger at him, the corner of his mouth twitching upwards. “That doesn’t mean you’re off the hook, kid. I still want that lawn finished by the weekend.”

He flushes pink, all too aware that Derek can probably hear every word his father’s saying. “Yup. Got it.”

“Thank you.” John is about to turn away, but his gaze flickers down to Stiles’ cell phone at the last minute, his expression of ‘and what do we have here?’ making the Sub’s insides squirm.

“Goodnight, Dad,” Stiles says, meaningfully.
“Who are you talking to?”

“Lydia,” he answers, grasping onto the first name that pops into his head. *Don’t look down. Don’t look away. Maintain eye contact, you can do this.* “We’re going shopping tomorrow. You know. For clothes.”

“Well then,” John replies, a little *too* casually. “I hope you both have fun. Shopping. For clothes.” He sends Stiles a knowing smile and begins to pull the door closed behind him, calling out a cheerful “Goodnight, Derek!” just before it shuts.

Stiles drops his head into his hand, wincing, and slowly lifts the cell phone back to his ear in time to catch the tail-end of Derek’s laughter.

“You heard that, huh?”

“*Mm. So what time are we going shopping, Stiles?*”

He groans and flops backwards onto his pillow, blushing. “With all due respect, Sir, I’d really like you to shut up now.”

“You’re a terrible liar.”

“Yes, I’m aware of that, thank you.” Stiles drapes an arm over his eyes, cheeks still hot and flushed. “But better that than a Sub who’s going to con you out of house and home, right?”

“*True,*” Derek agrees, sobering a little. “*I’m not sure if I could date a compulsive liar.*”

“I wouldn’t lie to you,” Stiles hurries to say, because the part of his brain that’s being influenced by his biology is insisting that he ‘*must not lose potential mate, win him back, win him back!*’, before common sense catches up and acknowledges that he might be setting himself up for the impossible. “I mean, I’d try really hard *not* to. Sometimes it just…happens. But as you just witnessed, I seriously suck at it, so you won’t have to worry about me hiding anything from you.”

“I know, Stiles.” Derek’s voice is soft and soothing again. “*And I’m not expecting you to be perfect all the time; everyone makes mistakes. As long as you’re aware that certain mistakes will reap consequences.*”

“Yes, Sir.” Stiles shifts onto his side to get comfortable, chewing on his bottom lip for a moment before hedging, “Am I in trouble?”

“No,” the Alpha reassures him gently. “*You told a fib to your Dad, not to me, and he sounded more amused by it than anything else. No harm done, right?*”

“Right.” The Sub sighs in relief, the slight twinge of guilt in his chest dissipating instantly. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.” Derek sounds like he’s smiling again, but it’s not teasingly amused, more like fond and warm, and Stiles wriggles a bit under his duvet, pleased.

“It’s getting late, Stiles,” the Dom says after a pause. “*It’s probably time we say goodnight.*”

He makes a noise of protest and rolls onto his back again, blinking the heavy feeling from his eyelids stubbornly. “Nah, m’good. I don’t sleep much.”

“*Is that because you can’t sleep or because you’re usually up all night at your desk, writing?*”
“That’s classified information,” the Sub replies glibly, because damn, he’s gone and fallen in love with a mind-reader.

Derek’s low, rumbling chuckle sends another pleasant tingle down his spine. “How about you put the story to one side tonight, hm? Otherwise you might end up falling asleep straight after dinner tomorrow evening, and I was kinda hoping you’d be interested in spending the night with me.”

Stiles freezes, a hot flush prickling at his cheeks again. “With you? Like, with you with you? At your apartment?”

“Only if you want to,” Derek soothes, apparently interpreting Stiles’s temporary state of lust-induced shock as a lack of interest on his part. “There’s no rush. I’d be happy to drive you home afterwards if y-”

“No!” Stiles blurts, very much wanting to put an end to any plan that doesn’t involve him sharing a bed with his new Dom. “Nope, staying over at your place sounds good. Really, really good. I am all over that plan. I’m practically there already.” Oh god, shut up, shut up.

Derek just laughs again, warmly. “In that case, pack an overnight bag. And you said you’re due to work an evening shift at Lunar Palace on Friday, right?”

“Yeah,” Stiles confirms with a sigh. “I work triple nights at the weekend so that I can take weekdays off. Gives me more time to write.”

“Well, how about you pack your work clothes?” the Dom suggests. “I’m not at the Centre on Friday. We could sleep in late, spend the afternoon together at my place, and then I could drive you to work after dinner?”

“Fuck yeah,” he agrees readily, because his brain-to-mouth filter stopped working years ago and Derek’s plan sounds unequivocally awesome.

“I’m glad you approve,” Derek answers, amused. “Now lights out and go to sleep. You’ve got a busy couple of days ahead of you.”

“Alright,” Stiles relents with a put-upon sigh, although he obediently rolls over to tap the base of his bedside lamp, plunging the room into darkness. “But I’m really not all that tired, Sir.”

“I’ll see you tomorrow, Stiles,” the Dom continues, soft and fond but with a note of authority that brooks no argument. “Our dinner reservation’s at seven-thirty; how about I pick you up just before seven?”

Smiling, Stiles slides an arm under the pillow he’s resting on, hugging it like he’s wont to do when he’s buzzing with happy hormones.

“Sounds perfect.”

“Stay out of trouble, okay?” Derek tells him, and it feels so normal, so natural for a Dom to be bidding him goodnight like this that Stiles might as well have been dating him for years.

He hums appreciatively, smiling. “I’ll be good, Sir.”

“I know you will.” There’s a brief pause then, softer still, “Sleep well, Stiles.”

“Night, Derek.”
He keeps the phone pressed against his ear long after the call has disconnected, and he’s ninety percent sure he’s still grinning like an idiot even as he drops off to sleep.

He sleeps for a solid eleven hours, more than he’s had consecutively for a long time, and only wakes up because his phone’s ringing. Thinking it might be Derek, he almost brains himself against the headboard when he jerks towards his bedside table, clutching at his throbbing brow as he fumbles for the device, squinting at the caller ID.

“Dude,” he complains, pressing the phone to his ear as he flops back against the pillows, “I was sleeping.”

“And good morning to you too, Sunshine,” Danny replies, amused. “C’mon, I’m taking you shopping. I’m outside your house.”

Stiles groans and covers his eyes with the back of his arm. “Who told you?”

“Isaac.” Danny sounds typically smug about managing to embarrass him. “He’s here too.”

“Well, you can both fuck off.” He pulls the duvet up over his head, although it’s somewhat of a pointless move, given that the phone is still pressed to his ear. “Leave me alone.”

“We have coffee!” Isaac hollers in the background, and outside his house a car horn blares twice, loudly. “C’mon, Stiles, we’re here to make you look hot. You need clothes.”

“I already have clothes,” he grumbles, because he’s rarely compliant before his first caffeine fix and he’d been having a really, really nice dream, dammit.

“You need sexy clothes,” Danny insists. “And I need a break from my dissertation. It’s clearly meant to be.”

Stiles sighs, dragging a hand down his face and grumpily kicking off his bedcovers. “You’re both horrible friends, I hope you know that.”

“Love you too, gorgeous.”

He’s grateful though, later on, when they’ve got him standing in front of the mirror in one of the group changing rooms at La Subchique. The black pants aren’t anything too fancy, but they’re a perfect fit, hugging his hips snugly, and the dark purple shirt isn’t even close to his usual fashion sense, but he looks pretty damn hot in it, even if he does say so himself.
“See?” Danny says, stepping up behind him and settling his hands on Stiles’s hips, grinning at him in the mirror. “Told you the colour would suit you. And the weather’s still pretty mild, so you shouldn’t even need a jacket.”

Stiles tilts his head, admiring the long, pale expanse of his throat where it contrasts vividly with the dark material of his shirt. “Are you sure I shouldn’t button it up a little higher?”

“Absolutely not,” Isaac insists from where he’s sitting on one of the padded benches. “How else are you gonna show off Derek’s collar?”

Danny rolls up the long sleeves a little so that Stiles’s forearms are exposed. “Wear it like this,” the Dom directs, tugging and tweaking until it sits just-so. “You’ll knock him dead.”

He feels a blush creeping into his cheeks and ducks his head, glancing down at his arms and fiddling with the woven strip of soft, dark leather that loosely circles his left wrist. It’s not the only Sub-band he owns (there’s a box full of them in his dresser, varying in colour and design as he went through new fashion phases during the last few years of high school), but this one’s his favourite; a present from his dad when he turned twenty-one and reaffirmed with the Registration Office that he was a Submissive. Twenty-one was a pretty important age for most people for that same reason, especially if they finally had the opportunity to register as a different Dynamic than the one they’d previously been known as. Not that Stiles had ever even considered the possibility that he could be anything except Submissive.

However, a number of his peers had changed their Dynamic status during re-registration; Lydia and Allison (previously marked as Dominants) both chose to register as Switches, the Dynamic having only become a legally acceptable status back in 2008, and had promptly gotten married a few months later. Jackson, who’d adamantly maintained the façade that he was the most dominant Dom ever during High School (overcompensating for the fact that he was most definitely Submissive but desperately wanted to live up to the expectations of his pushy parents), had gone off with Danny to California Polytechnic university as a bad-tempered, unhappy Dom, and returned to Beacon Hills four years later with Danny’s collar around his throat, a changed man. He was still stubborn-willed and butted heads with Dominants on occasion, but Stiles was closer to him now than he’d ever been during High School. Back then they’d tolerated each other (and even then, only under duress), but Jackson had later admitted that most of his frustration had stemmed from jealousy over how comfortable and open Stiles had been about being a Submissive.

But Stiles has never been given reason to doubt his own Dynamic, not for as long as he can remember. Even as a Neutral growing up, he’d always been a cuddly, tactile kid, confident in himself and his own abilities, but easily upset by mistakes he made or the knowledge that others were disappointed in him. And then he’d hit puberty, and suddenly the strong, athletic Dominants he saw on TV gave him fluttery feelings in his stomach, and all he’d wanted to do was cuddle up with them and make them proud. The urges and impulses had only increased in frequency and intensity once he’d started High School, but he’d still been a Neutral back then, legally unable do anything of a sexual or romantic nature with a Registered Dom or Sub until he turned sixteen. Which, yeah, had been torture.

But it does make sense, he has to admit. Some of his classmates weren’t as certain about their Dynamic as Stiles had been, and often found their test results surprising, ending up registered as a Dom even though they still displayed Submissive qualities. That’s why the Affirmation Act had been put in place back in the 70’s, when biological and psychological studies had proven that blood tests and Pan-Dynamic profiles conducted during adolescence were likely to produce inaccurate results, especially if the individual was a late-bloomer. Consequently, it had become a legal requirement for everyone to re-register at the age of twenty-one, regardless of whether or not that individual wanted
to change their dynamic.

According to statistics, only about five percent of the population actually do alter their legal status, but still, that’s a lot of people who might otherwise have become emotionally unstable as a result of false registration. God knows how Jackson might’ve turned out if he’d been forced to live as a Dom for the rest of his life. He certainly wouldn’t be managing the newly founded Little League lacrosse programme in Beacon Hills, that’s for sure. Or happily married to Danny.

“You get used to not wearing it after a couple of weeks,” Isaac tells him, startling him from his thoughts, and Stiles realises he’s still fiddling with his Sub-band nervously.

“Really?” He can’t imagine having two bare wrists again, not after so many years. It’s just weird.

Danny smiles at him in the mirror again, giving him a comforting squeeze around his midriff. “I’m sure you’ll too preoccupied with the new collar around your neck to even spare a thought for your missing band.” He pats Stiles’s hip and steps back. “Is that the one you’re giving Derek?”

Stiles nods, unbuttoning his shirt and handing it to Danny when the Dom holds his hand out. “Yeah. It’s my favourite, so.” He shrugs. “You think it’ll do?”

“Yeah man, it’s nice,” Isaac encourages, passing him his sweater. “I haven’t seen you wear that one before, is it new?”

“Nah, but I usually keep it for special occasions,” he replies, yanking the top over his head. “Parties and birthdays and holidays, mostly. Dad got it to me for my 21st.”

“I’m sure your new Dom’s gonna love it,” Danny reassures, discreetly turning to the side so that Stiles can change into his jeans again without an audience. “So. Scott and Isaac both seem pretty convinced that this Alpha of yours is ‘the one’.”

“He is,” Isaac insists, folding the dark pants carefully and handing them to the Danny.

Stiles just smiles and shrugs, feigning indifference even though his heart’s fluttering manically in his chest again. Judging by Isaac’s knowing grin, the other Sub’s clearly knows how he really feels.

“He does seem pretty perfect,” he concurs, cheeks turning pink again as he sits down on the edge of the padded bench to put his shoes back on.

“Every Dominant has their faults,” Danny points out, ever the rational Dom. “Especially the perfect ones.”

“Dude, you sound like my Dad.”

“Maybe so. But you still need to be careful,” Danny insists, growing uncharacteristically serious for a moment.

He’s probably the most laid-back Dom that Stiles knows (the type of anti-stereotype that the DRA just hate), but occasionally he’ll pull out the Dom-card and surprise everyone. This time is no exception; both Stiles and Isaac automatically sit up a little straighter, giving Danny their undivided attention as the Dom moves closer to crouch down in front of him.

“Derek sounds like a great guy, and I’m happy for you,” the other man continues evenly. “But you’re gonna be caught up in the honeymoon phase for at least a couple of weeks. Just don’t go doing anything rash, okay? Like running off to register him as your legal Dom after the first night.”
Stiles sighs inwardly (because he’s already heard this lecture from Lydia, Allison and his Dad), but obediently nods his head to appease the Dom. “I won’t, man, I promise. Derek’s already suggested we wait at least a month.”

Danny nods approvingly and eases himself back upright again. “Good.” He holds out a hand towards Stiles and yanks him up into a quick, tight hug when the Sub takes it. “C’mon. Let’s get these paid for and go grab a pizza or something.”

By six o’clock he’s showered twice (cleaning himself very, very thoroughly in certain places because he has high hopes for what’s going to happen later this evening), brushed his teeth at least five times, changed into his new outfit, and stood staring at the only two pairs of dress shoes he owns for at least half an hour, trying to decide between them.

“He’s not going to be looking at your feet,” Danny tells him with infinite patience when Stiles calls him mid-crisis. “Wear whichever pair you feel most comfortable in.”

Problem solved.

Which unfortunately leaves him with just under an hour to spare before Derek arrives. He attempts to tidy his already-neat room just to give his hands something to do, but that frustrates him more than anything because all he ends up doing is rearranging his bookshelves alphabetically by first name rather than last name, which he knows he’ll come to regret later on.

Finally, at quarter to seven, he goes downstairs to wait in the living room, taking his overnight bag with him. He drops the satchel near the door and holds his arms out.

“So?”

His father glances up from the book he’s reading and smiles, quiet and affectionate. “Well now. Dressed to impress, aren’t we?”

Stiles feels his cheeks turn pink again as he tugs self-consciously on the rolled-up sleeves of his shirt. “It’s not too much, is it?”

John shakes his head, folding the corner of the page he’s on to mark his place (Stiles hides a wince – he must’ve bought his dad a hundred bookmarks over the years, but it’s never cured him of the habit) and crossing the room to stand in front of the fidgeting Sub.

“You look good, son,” he assures, settling his hands on Stiles’s shoulders and pulling him into a gentle hug, careful not to crease the shirt by squeezing too tight.
Stiles rubs his forehead against his dad’s shoulder, grounding himself in the familiar sensation of being held and protected, feeling his racing heart slow a little.

“Thanks, Dad.”

His father’s hand settles on the back of his neck, stroking the skin there soothingly. “You know I’m only a phone call away if you need me to come and pick you up.”

“Dad,” Stiles sighs, a note of exasperation creeping into his voice now. “I’m twenty-two.”

“That doesn’t make a lick of difference,” John insists firmly, squeezing his nape. “You need me, you call me. Got it?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Good.”

The doorbell rings suddenly and Stiles flails, his heartbeat skyrocketing again as he quickly steps back to neaten his shirt, fingers running over the Sub-band on his left wrist to check that he’s remembered to put it back on again after his shower.

John watches him, an eyebrow arched. “Aren’t you going to get the door?”

Stiles nods, holding his hands up to his the older man in a *stay here* gesture, because the last thing he needs is his dad threatening Derek with silver bullets again. He hurries out into the hallway, taking a deep, steadying breath as he reaches the door and opens it quickly, like yanking on a band-aid.

Derek looks…*wow.* Stiles had thought that Danny was the only person alive who could look *that* good in a suit. The material’s dark grey and looks soft and unwrinkled, and Stiles want to bury himself in it. Or take it off. Possibly both. Although with that *and* the white shirt he’s got on underneath, it’s going to take a fair amount of effort on his part to peel back the layers.

The Alpha stares at Stiles for a moment, eyes widening fractionally as his gaze flickers down the length of him. Then Derek smiles at him warmly, his eyes crinkling at the corners as he leans in to brush a kiss against the younger man’s cheek.

“You look amazing,” he murmurs, soft and sincere, his hands running up Stiles’s arms briefly before he glances over the Sub’s shoulder and straightens a little.

“Evening, Sheriff.”

“Derek,” the older Dom greets, coming up behind Stiles to settle a hand on the small of his back (oh no, oh *god,* this is what Stiles wanted to avoid), and extending his right hand for the Alpha to shake. After a moment of silent staring, the corner of his mouth twitches up. “Don’t let him eat shellfish, son, he’ll redden up like a lobster.”

“Dad!” Stiles squawks, mortified.

“Thanks for the tip, Sir.” Derek’s smile crinkles at his eyes again as he drops the other Dom’s hand. “Don’t worry, I’ll take good care of him.”

“I know you will.” John squeezes Stiles against him in a sideways hug, brushing a kiss against his temple before nudging out onto the porch, handing his overnight bag to Derek. “Have fun, boys.”
And with a final, motivational pat to Stiles’s backside, he closes the front door behind the pair. Stiles is torn between being quietly furious at his father for doing the whole ‘dad’ routine (again), and being insanely grateful that the older man has somehow managed to ease Stiles’s unsettled nerves by redirecting his focus away from the date itself.

Now all he has to do is avoid making a fool out of himself during dinner, and everything will be fine.

The Italian restaurant is over on the opposite side of town, and it’s somewhere Stiles hasn’t been to before, mostly because it’s a little too fancy a place for casual meet-ups and last-minute dinner plans with his friends. The décor’s amazing, though, and the cosy little side-booth they’re shown to puts Stiles at ease straight away.

The booths are partitioned from the main restaurant floor by silk curtains, ostensibly to afford certain diners a little more privacy than they would otherwise be afforded. The semi-circular nook is fairly spacious, actually, and Stiles suspects it’s built to accommodate parties of up to four or five people, so the little two-person table in the centre of the booth leaves them with plenty of elbow room on all sides.

The table is set for two, with two chairs, but there’s also a kneeler pad tucked neatly underneath the chair on the right-hand side. It’s less common these days for Submissives to kneel in public during meals (whereas fifty ago, kneeling had been compulsory for all bonded Subs), and only one or two of the patrons that they’d passed on the way to the booth had been making use of the kneeler pads. It’s considered to be very much down to personal choice. (And personally, Stiles prefers to avoid achy knees, thank you.)

Derek pulls out the left-hand chair for Stiles before he can start fretting about where the Alpha wants him to sit, the older man brushes a hand over the short hairs on the back of his neck as he moves around the small table to take his own seat. The touch goes a long way to settling Stiles’s rumpled nerves, and he sends the Dom a small, grateful smile, before quickly hiding behind the menu so that he can collect his wits about him.

Pull yourself together, Stilinski, for fuck’s sake. You’ve been waiting for this moment since you were thirteen years old, don’t you dare screw things up now.

“Stiles?” Derek calls a little while later, once he’s finally managed to get his heart to stop fluttering high up in his chest, and he lowers the menu a little to see a waiter standing at Derek’s shoulder, looking at him expectantly.

“Can I get you a drink, sir?”

“Just a lemonade for me, thanks,” he requests, because adding alcohol into the mix would be a bad
idea, and he has a feeling Derek would be far less willing to tumble into bed with him later on if he was under the influence of anything.

Judging by the Alpha’s pleased smile when the server jots down his order, he’s probably guessed right.

The waiter closes the curtain carefully behind him, and Stiles sags in his seat again, reaching for his water cup to take a sip. Derek’s hand closes over his own before it can curl around the glass though, and he glances up to meet the Dom’s gaze, his heart fluttering rapidly again.

“If the restaurant is too much for you, we can go somewhere more casual instead,” Derek murmurs, his thumb brushing over the back of Stiles’s knuckles.

Stiles shakes his head quickly. “It’s not the restaurant, Sir, honest. This place is great. I guess I’m just worried about screwing things up.”

“Short of pulling out a knife and stabbing me in the chest, there’s not an awful lot you can do to ‘screw things up’,” the Dom tells him, smiling gently. “This isn’t a test, Stiles.”

The younger man feels himself relax a little further, managing a more genuine smile when the waiter comes back with their drinks and asks if they’re ready to order. Stiles is so ready. He singled out his order the moment he picked up the menu, choosing the option on the list that a) looks freakin’ delicious, and b) won’t create a huge mess when he tries to eat it (like spaghetti inevitably does). The last thing he wants to do is end up with bolognaise all over his shirt.

The waiter bows out and leaves them alone again, and Stiles returns his attention to Derek, whose watching him in turn. The Alpha tips his head to the side a little, considering, then pushes his chair back a couple of feet from the table and holds out a hand towards Stiles.

“Come here.”

Confused but eager for any excuse to close the distance between them, Stiles stands and moves around the table, taking the Alpha’s hand and letting himself be pulled in closer, dropping into Derek’s lap with a surprised ‘umph’ when the Dom tugs him down.

“Mm. That’s better,” the Alpha concludes, one arm circling around his Sub’s waist while the opposite hand rubs up and down the younger man’s outer thigh as Stiles settles himself sideways in the Werewolf’s lap.

It’s a familiar position, identical to the one he’d found himself in the previous day when they’d first kissed, but it feels more intimate now, somehow, like the Alpha’s trying to soothe him and guard him all at once. Stiles finds himself smiling as he leans up to bump his nose against the underside of Derek’s jaw.

“Thank you.”

Derek hums, brushing a kiss against his brow, and Stiles’s eyelids flutter closed as he allows his head to be tucked beneath the Alpha’s chin.

“Your heart was beating so fast, I thought you were about to bolt,” the Dom remarks a while later, once Stiles is calm and comfortable and floating, his ear pressed against the white of Derek’s shirt, hearing the Werewolf’s slow, steady heartbeat. “Are things always this exciting with you around?”

Stiles feels his lips twitch into another smile, one that he’s too lazy to fully form. “What can I say? I like to make life more dramatic. It’s a talent.”
Derek chuckles, his fingers brushing through the Sub’s hair slowly before dropping down to lightly pinch his chin, tipping Stiles’s head back so that the Alpha can brush a slow, gentle kiss against his lips. Stiles returns the kiss enthusiastically, lips parting when Derek’s tongue presses against them to demand entrance, feeling the Alpha’s fingers skim down the front of his neck to settle near the base of his throat.

Stiles is a little lust-drunk by the time their mouths finally disengage, his skin buzzing, his head spinning, the air around him feeling thick and hot as Derek trails a line of biting kisses down his neck.

“I was going to do this the romantic way,” the Alpha murmurs, his voice low and gravelly with arousal, “but the more I look at your neck, the more I want to see my collar on it.” He nuzzles at the skin just below his Adam’s apple and hums. “God, you smell so good.”

Stiles shivers, clinging onto the lapels of the Alpha’s suit for dear life. “I want that too, Sir,” he manages, because he came here with a clear goal in mind and even his groggy, hormone-riddled Submissive side can pulls itself together long enough to be claimed by his Dom, his mate. “I want your collar. Please?”

Derek growls again, low in his chest, and this time it’s one hundred percent Werewolf. But the hand he uses to tilt Stiles’s head up is fully human, and the gentle kisses he brushes over the Sub’s brow and cheeks and nose belie his more primal instincts.

The Dom pulls back a little to smile at him softly. “Kneel for me.”

And it’s the most natural thing in the world, sliding to his knees in front of Derek Hale, every cell in his body thrumming with the absolute certainty that this is exactly where he belongs, his head tilting forwards automatically as Derek settles a hand in his hair, fingers rubbing his scalp gently.

“Mm. You're amazing.”

The Dom produces a jewellery box from God only knows where, opening it in his lap so that it’s at a height where Stiles can see it properly. And holy shit, the collar’s gorgeous. It’s jet-black, made of dozens of leather cords intricately woven together to form a spiralling pleat, but the inside of the collar looks to be padded with velvet, and Stiles doesn’t doubt that it’s been expertly altered to fit snugly around his neck. Derek strikes him as that sort of Dom.

There aren’t any tags or nameplates on it though, nothing to legally mark him as Derek’s Sub, nothing to suggest that they’re bonded. Plates and tags come later, once they’ve registered together, and Stiles is already under obligation to wait at least a month before he can make things official.

But it’ll be enough for now just to be marked as taken; to go about his daily business safe in the knowledge that he’s answerable to someone else now, someone that he intends to spend the rest of his life with. Nameplates don’t matter when the heart already knows to whom it belongs.

“Will you accept my collar?” Derek asks softly, holding out the open box towards him. “And with it my protection, authority and guidance?”

Stiles takes the collar carefully, holding it balanced on the flat of his palms as Derek sets the empty box to one side, then bows his head again as he offers it up to the Alpha, murmuring the words he’s had memorised since he was a kid daydreaming about meeting a young, dashing Dominant prince who would swoop in to save him from the playground bullies.

“I accept it, Sir. Freely, gladly, and wholeheartedly.”
The soft press of cool leather against his neck feels like a kiss, and he closes his eyes, barely daring to breathe as Derek carefully fastens the collar around his throat. The Dom’s fingers smooth it down reverently, before catching Stiles’s chin in a gentle grip and tilting his head up again, Derek leaning down to meet him halfway in a deep, searing kiss.

“I’ll take care of you, Stiles,” the Dom murmurs against his lips as they part. “I promise.”

The Sub’s hands come up to loosely clutch at Derek’s right wrist where the man’s hand cups his face, and he turns his head a little to the side to trail a series of soft, reverent kisses along the Alpha’s palm, before opening his eyes to gaze up at the Dom. Derek’s expression is warm and affectionate, but there’s a lustful fire smouldering in his eyes too.

“Will you take my Sub-band, Sir?” he asks, his voice wrecked, and feels an inner thrill when the Dom’s smile stretches wider.

“With pride,” the Alpha insists, and it’s said with such genuine sincerity that Stiles can’t resist leaning up on his knees a little further to kiss him again.

He couldn’t care less about the rest of the date; about whether or not he’ll end up spilling pasta sauce all down his new outfit, or if he’ll be granted the opportunity to peel Derek out of that sexy suit. Right now, right at this precise moment in time, he’s the happiest he’s ever been in his life.

And that’s pretty fucking awesome.

Chapter End Notes

So finally the couple have made things official! Now all that's left is a chapter of raunchy, shameless sex. If that ain't your cup of tea, you might want to consider skipping the next installment. <3 xxx
The apartment is nice. Like, really nice.

But even so, Stiles secretly wishes his Dom had postponed the full tour until the morning, because he’s literally this close to climbing Derek like a tree, or dropping to his knees to show the Alpha that his mouth’s good for something else besides talking, or flat-out begging the Werewolf to hurry up and fuck him already, God, please.

Derek, however, seems to have decided that slow and steady is the way forward. It’s infuriating.

Thing is, he’s been semi-hard since they ordered dessert back at the restaurant, when he’d been forced to watch Derek’s lips and tongue do sinful things to the spoon of his sundae. And what’s worse, the bastard obviously knows it, if the telling glint in the Dom’s eye and the way he steers Stiles around the apartment with two large hands resting his hips is anything to go by.

“That’s a really nice place you’ve got here,” is what he intends to say. But what actually comes out of his mouth is:

“Ohmygodpleasefuckme.”

Derek spins him around by his hips abruptly, one arm circling around his waist to keep him from losing his balance as a warm hand cups his jaw, angling his head upwards as the Alpha’s lips crash against his own in a kiss that’s far hotter, harder and more desperate than any of the previous ones have been. Stiles clutches at his Dom’s shoulders, returning the kiss with equal enthusiasm and whining into it when Derek’s hand slides down from the small of his back to cup the curve of his ass, kneading and squeezing with obvious intent.

“Derek,” he gasps, when he finally pulls back from the kiss to suck in a lungful of air. “Derek, please.”

The Alpha growls softly; a low, rumbling sound from deep within his chest that stirs something deliciously instinctual inside Stiles, his legs trembling with the urge to drop to his knees and serve his Dom. But Derek’s hands keep him upright, warm lips trailing a tingling path down the column of his throat, over his collar, and lower still to brush against the skin just below his collarbone where the dark purple shirt hangs purposefully open (Stiles is immediately and eternally grateful that Isaac
made him wear it with so many buttons undone, despite his initial reservations).

His back impacts with something hard and smooth, and Stiles realises Derek’s steered him into the nearest wall so that he can crowd him in close without the danger of Stiles toppling backwards. Shit, that’s hot. He moans appreciatively, hands resting loosely on the Alpha’s hips, as Derek’s fingers deftly unbutton his shirt and push the material aside to palm over his chest and abdomen with slow, confident touches that leave him breathless, panting, and so hard in his pants that it physically hurts.

A thumb catches against a pebbled nipple and he arches into it with a soft cry, ridiculously overly sensitised to every touch, ever kiss. His skin feels like it’s on fire.

“You’re incredible. God, just look at you,” Derek murmurs, as though Stiles standing there flushed and horny and unable to catch his breath is somehow the best thing he’s ever seen. The Dom’s hands slide down to settle on Stiles’s hips again as he leans in to brush his nose lightly along the Sub’s jawline, inhaling deeply. “Fuck, Stiles. You smell amazing.”

“Fuck Stiles,” the younger man echoes, his voice a little strangled as Derek’s knee slips between his legs, a solid, muscular thigh pressing firmly against his crotch. “Yup. Totally down with that plan, Sir.”

Derek’s forehead drops against his shoulder, the Alpha’s shoulders shaking in silent laughter, and Stiles can feel the man’s grin against his throat as Derek presses another kiss there.

“Hold onto me,” the Dom tells him, and Stiles barely has time to contemplate the meaning behind the request before Derek’s hands are sliding down and behind Stiles to cup the curve of his ass, hoisting him up sharply and oh, oh shit, Derek’s carrying him.

This is a problem. This is a problem because if there’s one thing that trims the fuse to his impending orgasm by a good eighty percent, it’s a muscular Dom lifting him or moving him or holding him in place like he weighs nothing, like their strength is sufficient for the both of them. The secret, password-encoded stash of porn on his laptop at home mostly consists of giant, handsome beefcakes physically dominating skinny Subs, and the clips that usually have him spilling the fastest are the ones that involve the Sub being hoisted up effortlessly and pinned against the nearest available surface. Because hot damn, that’s something he’s been fantasising about since he was a teenager.

Stiles is literally about ten seconds from blowing his load, and that’s just not acceptable; his pants are still on.

He whines, gritting his teeth against the renewed surge of arousal, arms wrapping around Derek’s neck to keep himself upright as the Dom strides out of the kitchen and into the hallway of the spacious apartment. By the looks of things, the Werewolf seems to be heading for the one room that Stiles hasn’t seen yet – the master bedroom. Good. About time, too.

Satisfied, he dips down to rub his forehead against Derek’s shoulder, grounding himself in the moment, basking in the sensation of being held by his Dom, the Submissive part of his brain preening at the knowledge that he belongs to an Alpha who’s strong enough to give him what he needs, to protect him and care for him properly.

Marry him, the voice insists, because apparently the collar isn’t enough already.

Thankfully he’s lowered down onto a soft, comfortable kind-sized bed a few seconds later, and the voice is too busy screaming ‘oh god, yes, fuck me!’ to demand immediate matrimony. Derek braces one knee on the edge of the mattress, using it as leverage as he slides his hands under Stiles’s arms and moves him further up the bed until his head and shoulders sink into a deep pillow. Then the
Dom is crowding over him again, brushing kisses slowly up his bare chest until he reaches the base of his throat and sets about sucking what Stiles knows is going to be a particularly vivid bruise into the skin there.

Stiles whines and paws at Derek’s suit jacket, because it’s so not fair that the Alpha is still fully dressed.

“Off.”

Derek pulls back to look at him, arching an eyebrow, a smile tugging at his lips. “What was that?”

Stiles whines again, because he doesn’t want to use words, he wants to be f**ked. “You’re not naked, Sir;” he complains. “Why are you not naked?”

Derek leans over him again to brush their lips together, his eyes still shining with mirth. “Ask me nicely, and maybe that’ll change.”

“Please can you get naked?” Okay, so he isn’t super eloquent when he’s horny. Nice to know nothing’s changed since he last got f**ked in college.

The Alpha huffs a quiet laugh against his lips and kisses him again. “Good boy.”

And ohhhh, that’s nice. Stiles shudders at the words, grabbing fistfuls of the duvet underneath him to keep from reaching for Derek as the Dom straightens up on his knees, straddling Stiles’s legs, and makes quick work of unbuttoning his jacket and tossing it to one side, like a thousand-dollar Armani suit doesn’t mean anything to him.

That shouldn’t be hot. It totally is.

“Holy shit,” he breathes, once Derek has tossed his shirt aside to join the jacket on the floor, because his Dom is seriously ripped. Like, Stiles could write a sonnet dedicated to the sculpted chasm between the man’s bulging pectorals, and lose himself in a twenty-stanza poem about how the man’s biceps do that thing every time he moves. Jesus. One day he is going to eat off those abs. He’s thinking whipped cream, lots of chocolate sauce. Anything that involves extensive tongue-to-skin contact.

Derek grins, his eyes crinkling at the corners again as he shifts on his knees, running his hands along the Sub’s upper thighs to settle lightly on his hips. “Like what you see?”

“Mmmff,” Stiles manages, hips bucking up into the contact.

The Alpha’s grin turns promisingly predatory as he leans down again, hands sliding further up the mattress to curl around Stiles’s wrists, dragging his arms up slowly until they’re pinned against the pillow either side of his head, Derek hovering directly above him. Stiles isn’t sure that the needy, desperate noise that escapes his throat is entirely human, but Derek’s fingers are gripping his wrists, pinning him, and he’s never been so turned on in his entire life.

“You like that?” his Dom asks, his voice low and lust-hoarse, pressing his wrists into the mattress a little harder as Stiles arches his hips with a gasp, skin prickling with heat.

“Hnng! Yes…oh f**k Derek, please…”

“F**k Derek, huh?” the Alpha teases, hips rolling down to give them both a little friction, and shit, Derek feels huge even through his pants. “I thought it was ‘f**k Stiles’ a second ago?”
Stiles whines, arching his pelvis up to meet the Dom’s. “Sometime this century would be nice.”

He regrets saying it immediately – apparently he’s a mouthy little shit when he’s sexually frustrated, and sassing one’s new Alpha-Dom definitely isn’t the right way to go about getting oneself fucked. He quickly opens his mouth again, an apology on the tip of his tongue, but suddenly Derek’s laughing, his smile wide and warm and amused, and the twinge of regret in his chest dies as quickly as it awoke.

“We’re really gonna have to work on your patience,” Derek muses, nuzzling his cheek gently. “But not right now. Right now I want you out of those pants.” He squeezes Stiles’s wrists. “Keep these up here for me, okay?”

“Yes, Sir.” Stiles nods quickly, determined that he’ll manage to obey at least one order properly this evening.

Of course, his confidence in his ability to keep himself still is shaken a moment later when Derek, having skilfully divested him of both pants and boxers in record time, suddenly licks a long, wet stripe up the length of his rock-hard cock.

“Oh shit!” he moans, grabbing fistfuls of the pillow as his legs jerk in an automatic response to the teasing stimulation.

The angle of his head and shoulders against the pillow gives him a clear view of what’s happening to his southern regions, and he might end up coming on the spot just from the sight of Derek nuzzling at the juncture between hip and groin, inhaling deeply through his nose, savouring his scent. And it’s a good thing he’s already horizontal, because his knees definitely would’ve given out at the look on Derek’s face when the Dom glances up at him again, his eyes shining Alpha-red in the dimmed lighting of the bedroom.

“We’re not testing the waters tonight,” the Werewolf tells him, voice gravelly but controlled as his thumbs brush against the curve of Stiles’s hipbones. “If you want me to stop, you say ‘stop’. If there’s something you don’t like, you say ‘no’. Alright?”

Stiles nods again, jerkily, although he secretly doubts there’s going to be any situation where he’ll feel the need to say ‘no’ to Derek. At least none that he can’t think of right now.

Although to be fair, a moment later he can’t think at all, because Derek starts trying to suck his brains out through his dick and it’s incredible.

He’s painfully close already, though, which makes it an excruciating form of torture because Derek probably doesn’t want to end up with a mouthful of spunk so early on in the evening, even though Stiles knows his own refractory period is short enough that a second or third orgasm won’t be all that difficult thing to achieve, not with the Dom of his dreams sharing a bed with him. Still, he wants to make his Dom proud, so he clutches at the pillow and whines, fighting off the fierce, electric build of his impending orgasm. He squirms his hips in Derek’s hold, panting garbled pleas and breathless nonsense as the Alpha’s head bobs at a slow, steady pace.

Apparently even Derek’s blowjobs are carefully controlled. Fuck. Fuckity fuck. He’s screwed.

Finally the building pressure becomes too great for him to bear and he gives a strangled scream behind clenched teeth, eyes squeezing tight shut, gripping the pillow hard enough for his fingers to hurt.

“No, no, no, stop!”
Derek pops off him so abruptly that Stiles’s eyes snap open again, only to find the Alpha peering towards him in concern, his brow creased a little as he slides a hand up from Stiles’s hips to rub his abdomen gently, soothingly.

“Stiles? What is it?” He starts to push himself further up the bed. “Did I hurt you?”

The Sub gasps for breath, trembling a little, his head already feeling foggy from the relentless barrage of endorphins pumping through him. The boat’s already been pushed a little ways out to sea, so he’s a teensy bit slow on the uptake, and it takes a moment from him to process the question, by which time Derek’s already leaning over him, stroking his sweaty cheek.

“Stiles?”

Shaking his head quickly, Stiles tilts his cheek into the gentle touch, still fighting to catch his breath.

“No, I just…” He wets his lips, embarrassment curling in his chest as he ducks his gaze away from Derek’s worried eyes. “I’m gonna come if you keep doing that, Sir.”

The Dom relaxes visibly, his frown smoothing out as a soft, amused smile curls at his lips.

“That’s kinda the point, sweetheart,” he murmurs, and the endearment sounds genuine rather than teasing. Stiles wants to bury his blushing face in the Alpha’s neck, but Derek doesn’t let him, hands curling around the Sub’s wrists again as he leans down to brush their lips together. “This is just to take the edge off. I plan on taking my time with you later on, don’t worry.”

Stiles blinks up at him slowly. “So…I’m allowed come?”

The Alpha’s smile twitches wider. “Yes, Stiles.” He dips down again, lips tickling the shell of the younger man’s ear. “I want you to come for me.”

Well, that’s certainly one way of phrasing it.

His body reacts to the words instantaneously, his hips arching up off the bed as a renewed wave of arousal floods him, and he cries out when Derek’s hips grind down against his own, the friction amazing and intense but fuck, fuck, not enough. Until, that is, Derek slides smoothly back down the bed again to settle on his lower legs, hands pinning the Sub’s hips firmly in place as the Dom’s lips close back over the head of his cock, his mouth fiercely hot and wet and tight as he sinks down to suck from root to tip, and oh god, Stiles is going to come, he’s coming, shitshitshit…

He isn’t entirely sure if he shouts Derek’s name, or a garbled mishmash of ‘yes’ and ‘thank you’ and ‘please’, or whether it’s just a wordless scream as his climax hits, muscles seizing, legs jerking as a wave of tingling heat washes over him. It’s the most intense orgasm he’s ever experienced and it seems to last forever, the pleasure spiralling higher and higher rather than dissipating after the initial wave.

He doesn’t register that Derek has moved to sit against the headboard until he’s being pulled into the Alpha’s arms, a hand settling on the back of his head, guiding it down to rest against the Werewolf’s shoulder as he’s settled securely in Derek’s lap. His Dom’s murmuring gentle words of praise in his ear – he’s so good, he did so well, Derek is so proud of him – and Stiles gets the distinct feeling he’s being shushed. Not that he minds it, of course; extended cuddle-time is totally fine with him. He just doesn’t get why Derek’s treating him so delicately.

That’s when he realises the judders running through his body aren’t just a consequence of being jostled and adjusted in Derek’s lap; Stiles is fucking trembling.
“Oh,” he manages, softly, once his foggy brain has remembered how his mouth’s supposed to work. “I…I don’t…”

“Shhh.” Derek strokes the back of his neck, brushing a kiss against his temple. “Easy, sweetheart. I’m here, I’ve got you. You’re okay.”

And it’s the easiest thing in the world after that, to let go of his lingering inhibitions and surrender himself to the swell of warmth and security and contentment, the judders subsiding in favour of his whole body going lax against Derek’s chest. Mmmmmm...

Usually post-orgasm is when he discovers that he’s sticky and sweaty and feels too hot and has bitten his lip too hard in an attempt to stifle any sounds so that his Dad won’t know what he’s up to. But he doesn’t acknowledge any of that unpleasantness now. He’s cosy and satisfied and protected and loved, and it’s the most relaxing headspace he’s ever been in. He feels awesome.

He drifts for a while, although it’s hard to say how long exactly because there’s nothing to indicate the passage of time beyond the slow, steady rhythm of Derek’s thumb as it brushes back and forth against his skin where the man’s hand rests on the back of his neck. His Dom doesn’t seem to be in any real hurry to pull Stiles down from his high, though, so he doesn’t force himself out of subspace, instead waiting until he begins to surface naturally, until he’s finally able to wriggle his fingers and toes and shift a little in Derek’s lap.

The Alpha’s thumb stops stroking immediately. “Hey there. Back with me?”

“Mmgh,” Stiles moans against the Alpha’s neck.

“Is that a yes?” Derek asks, his voice low and fond and amused.

Deciding that verbal answers are a little too tricky at the moment (his mind still feels slow and foggy, his head stuffed with cotton), he rubs his nose back and forth against the underside of Derek’s jaw instead, a sleepy nuzzle, and presses a kiss there. Derek shifts a little after a couple of minutes, gently easing Stiles away from him by half an inch so that he can peer down at the Sub, his smile warm and his eyes affectionate as he runs a hand through the younger man’s hair.

“Hey,” the Dom murmurs again, softer still, and Stiles manages a dopey, blissed-out smile in return.

“Hi.”

Derek leans in to kiss him, a tender brush of lips that feels deliberately careful, like Stiles might shatter if he puts too much force behind it. But Stiles is slowly coming back to himself now, and the kiss is just a little too chaste for his liking, so he tilts his head back a little further and pushes up into the contact, humming happily when Derek obligingly deepens the kiss.

It doesn’t take long after that for the remaining tendrils of subspace to detach themselves from his mind, although the feeling of security and contentment doesn’t dissipate in the slightest, solidifying further at ever touch, ever kiss, every caress.

“Fuck,” he breathes, when they both come up for air a while later. He’s moved at some point (he doesn’t recall the exact moment, it’s all a blur of lips and hands and lust) so that he’s straddling Derek’s lap, his arms wrapped loosely around the Alpha’s neck, Derek’s hands roaming over his shoulders, down his chest, up his bare thighs. He gasps, rolling his hips in his Dom’s lap. “Sir, I really, really need your cock. Like, right now.”

“Mm,” Derek concurs, nipping lightly (with very human teeth, Stiles is relieved to note) at his jaw. “I know.” He slides his hands down to cup the round curve of the Sub’s ass, urging him into a second,
deeper roll of his hips. “Do you remember what I told you about asking nicely?”

Stiles can feel Derek’s hard-on poking at him through the Alpha’s boxers – and he’s relieved to see that the Dom had apparently shucked off his pants off at some point, because that extra layer of clothing would’ve put a stopper on what he has planned. A Sub he may be, yes, but he has ways of getting what he wants. And what he wants right now is Derek’s cock.

Besides, it’s only fair to return the favour, right? The fact that Stiles has been fantasising about sucking Derek’s cock since the moment they met has got absolutely nothing to do with his determination to give the Alpha the best blowjob of his life.

Nothing at all.

He settles his hands on Derek’s shoulders for leverage and grinds his ass down against Derek’s crotch in slow, deliberate circles, leaning in to steal a quick, chaste kiss.

“I really wanna suck you,” he breathes, his voice wavering a bit with the strength of his arousal as he rocks his hips again. “Can I, Sir? Please?”

Derek’s eyes glow red again for as his fingers curl around the nape of the Sub’s neck, dragging him forwards into a hard, hungry kiss. But his low, guttural ‘yes’ is unmistakable, and Stiles wriggles out of his hold to scoot further down the bed, grinning when Derek spreads his legs obligingly so that the Sub can settle between them on his stomach, arms resting comfortably on Derek’s thighs as he noses at the lengthy bulge in the Alpha’s underwear.

Fuck. That thing is huge.

Stiles doesn’t quite manage to suppress his appreciative moan when he works the Alpha’s cock out from beneath the fabric, curling his fingers around the impressive girth and giving it a long, long, long (holy shit) stroke from root to tip.

There’s no way he’s going to be deepthroating this thing tonight, unfortunately. But Stiles has always relished a good challenge, and decides that by the end of the month, he’ll be able to take it without choking.

And since practice makes perfect, he’d better get started.

He angles the hard member towards his mouth, wrapping his lips around the head and letting it sit there for a moment as his hand continues to stroke, adjusting to the feeling of having a real Alpha-Dom cock in his mouth, rather than one of the toys he has at home, or the cute, sweet football jock’s cock that he’d lost his virginity to during his first year at college. Derek is so fucking big, and the weight of it on his tongue is just how Stiles imagined it would be, the flesh warm and smooth in his mouth as he sucks in another inch or so.

“God, Stiles.” Derek’s hands settle on his head, stroking, resting, but not guiding like Stiles suddenly wants them to. He wants Derek to palm the back of his head and force him further down, wants the Dom to buck up into his mouth, to take what Stiles has to offer. He wants, he wants, he wants.

Pity he can’t communicate all of that with his mouth full of cock.

Instead he whines around the flesh that’s gagging him, dropping his hand from Derek’s shaft so that both his arms are resting on Derek’s thighs, and peers up at the Dom through heavy-lidded eyes, his heart hammering fast in his chest as he rocks his hips into the mattress, growing impossibly hard all over again.
Derek watches him carefully, his lips parted a little as his (gloriously muscular) chest rises and falls in ragged, unsteady breaths and Stiles holds still, suckling on what’s already in his mouth but making no move to take Derek in any further, looking up at the Alpha hopefully.

One of Derek’s hands slides around to cup the back of his neck. “You want…? Do you want me to…?”

And ohhh, Stiles likes this new, lust-punched Derek. He sounds so wrecked. That Submissive part of him is preening happily again, even more so when he moans affirmatively around his Dom’s cock and Derek’s hand slides up to palm the back of his head, exactly the way he’s imagined it, only a thousand times hotter.

The hand guides him lower, and Stiles stretches his jaw wide and relaxes his throat to accommodate for the deeper penetration, letting saliva pool in his mouth to make the slide of his lips slick and smooth, eyelids shuttering almost fully closed as he loses himself in the sensation. Until Derek’s fingers curl in his hair and tug, and he whimpers around his Dom’s cock – a desperate, needy little sound that the Alpha hopefully won’t mistake for displeasure. Judging by the way his grip tightens and his guidance grows more confident, this isn’t the case. Thank fuck for Werewolf senses.

“Shit,” Derek breathes, and sounds so utterly debauched that Stiles has to sneak a quick glance at him through drooping eyelids. The Alpha’s flushed, his eyes a vivid red now, a sheen of sweat on his brow as Stiles continues to bob his head slowly under the gentle push-pull pressure of Derek’s hand. “Oh God, Stiles…you’re so good at this, baby. Fuck”

Hips rocking at both the praise and the endearment, Stiles doubles his efforts, swirling his tongue around the thick shaft on the next upwards stroke and earning himself a series of hoarse, strained expletives as Derek’s hips twitch in an obviously aborted move to thrust up into his mouth. He moans, sinking back down onto his Dom’s cock a little too eagerly and choking when it hits the back of his throat.

“Hey, easy,” Derek murmurs, his brow creasing a little as he tugs Stiles back up again until just the tip is sitting in his mouth. The Dom’s still breathing raggedly, but he seems oblivious to this as he strokes the backs of his fingers down the Sub’s cheek in awe. “You really like this, huh?”

Stiles tilts his cheek into the touch, eyelids drooping again as he tongues at the slit, savouring the salt-and-bitter tang of his pre-ejaculate.

“Fuck,” the Alpha curses softly, breathlessly, and takes himself in hand to trace the curve of Stiles’s lips with the tip of his cock. “I’m not gonna last much longer. Where do you want me to come?”

Mouthing at the head by way of an answer, Stiles grinds his hips into the mattress again, fairly certain he’s already left a significant wet patch in the duvet where he’s been steadily leaking.

“Yeah?” Derek cups the Sub’s cheek as he strokes himself quickly, pushing his thumb against the younger man’s spit-slick lips. “You want me to come in your mouth, baby?”

Stiles gives a whimpering moan at the endearment, sucking Derek’s thumb into his mouth and stroking the pad of the digit with his tongue, glancing up to meet the Alpha’s lust-blown gaze. Derek swears hoarsely, chest heaving as he pants, his hand stripping his cock in quick, short strokes as he pulls his thumb out. Stiles opens his mouth wide, holding his breath as Derek’s free hand moves to palm the back of his head again, keeping him in place.

And then the Alpha’s coming, flooding his mouth with come in short, hot spurts, and it’s a genuine effort not to go boneless at the sight of Derek, the Dom’s face lax in ecstasy, lips parting in a hoarse
cry as he seizes up, powerful thigh muscles tensing and trembling beneath the Sub’s arms.

_Shit_, those balls hold a lot of spunk.

He swallows what he can, trying to chase what trickles down his chin with his tongue, and moans appreciatively when Derek’s thumb catches it, raising the digit to his lips so that Stiles can clean it thoroughly.

Derek takes a moment to catch his breath, the hand on the back of the Sub’s head gentling, smoothing his rumpled hair back down again as Stiles nuzzles at the Alpha’s softening cock, something deep-set and instinctual within him finally, _finally_ satisfied at the knowledge that he’s adequately pleasured his Dom.

Derek strokes the back of his fingers down his cheek again, bringing his gaze up to meet Werewolf’s, and his insides go all warm and pleasantly squirmy at the soft, pleased smile on his Dom’s face as Derek reaches for him.

“Come here.”

He’s quickly growing to love that phrase from Derek. ‘_Come here_.’ It invariably seems to precede some major cuddle-time, and right now that sounds _awesome_. Stiles obeys willingly, and finds himself pulled to straddle Derek’s lap again, the Dom’s lips locking with his own in a series of slow, gentle kisses that lack the fire and desperation of their predecessors. Stiles can’t bring himself to mind them, though. Sure, he’s still rock hard and leaning, and pretty eager to reach orgasm at some point in the near future; but even so, there’s an intrinsic part of him that feels _sated_ now that he’s fulfilled biological drive to pleasure his mate. He doesn’t doubt that it’ll awaken again soon enough, but right now he’s content to cuddle up with his Dom and be petted.

Of course, ‘contentment’ is the last thing on his mind fifteen minutes later when Derek’s busy sliding a second lubed finger inside him.

“Hnnnng!” he groans into the Alpha’s shoulder, arms wrapped around Derek’s neck, clinging on for dear life as his legs tremble. “Oh my god, _please_!”

“Please what, Stiles?” Derek asks lightly, casually, pushing the fingers further inside and crooking them just-so, his arm tightening around the Sub’s back to anchor him in place when Stiles bucks in his hold and _wails_. “Please can I have another finger? Please can we go to sleep now?”

Oh, that _bastard_. If Stiles wasn’t ten seconds from losing his mind, he’d give Derek a piece of it. As it is, he finds himself somewhat incapable of speaking in articulate sentences at the moment, and settles for pushing back against Derek’s fingers instead, whining.

“Shhh,” the Dom soothes, and the arm that’s clamped tightly around his back slips away, Derek’s hand stroking slowly up his spine to cup the back of his neck. “I’m sorry, I shouldn’t tease. But _fuck_, Stiles, you’re beautiful like this.”

He turns his head, brushing a quick kiss against the shell of the Sub’s ear (there’s _no_ way Stiles is emerging from the safety of Derek’s shoulder, it’s literally the only thing keeping him from losing himself in his own headspace) before carefully crooking his fingers inside Stiles again.

Choking on a strangled, needy sob, Stiles clings to him harder, a garbled litany of _‘please’_ and _‘yes’_ and _‘no’_ and _‘Sir’_ tumbling from his mouth as he pictures the last dregs of his sanity slowly slipping away (it’s _very_ dramatic: there’s a sombre orchestral accompaniment playing in his head and everything).
But then the fingers are gone all of a sudden, and something in his chest aches at the loss, jerking him violently from the brink of that foggy headspace.

“Nooo,” he whines, squirming in Derek’s lap. “Put them back!”

He knows it’s a ridiculous demand. And he doesn’t fucking care.

“Easy now,” Derek murmurs, both arms circling him now. “I’m just getting us comfortable, okay?”

“Fuck comfortable!” Stiles grousches, the ache inside him growing worse at the knowledge the fingers aren’t immediately going to reinsert themselves.

Derek’s chuckle is a soft, warm puff of breath against his ear as the Dom kisses him again. “That’s the idea. Hold tight.”

And suddenly they’re rolling, goosebumps breaking out over his skin as he’s settled on his back against the cool fabric of the bedspread, Derek looming over him.

“There.” The Dom brushes a kiss against his slack, panting mouth, and reaches up to gently unwind Stiles’s arms from around his neck, grabbing his wrists again to pin them down against the mattress like he’d done the first time. “Are you gonna keep these here for me?”

Stiles nods jerkily, and Derek’s lips twitch into another smile.

“Good boy.”

He doesn’t quite manage to be good, though. Not when Derek finally slides into him and starts thrusting slowly, his cock long and hard and thick and so good, stroking that innermost centre of pleasure and stretching him fit to burst and oh god, oh fuck, oh shit!

“Stiles.” Derek stills, mid-thrust, and raises an eyebrow at the hand that Stiles has thrown down to clutch at the Dom’s wrist where his hands are resting on Stiles’s hips. He’s not cross though, just fondly amused. “What did I say?”

The Sub yanks his arm back again quickly, but not without a whimper, because now Derek’s gone and stopped, and that’s not what he’d intended at all. He wants more. He wants faster, deeper, harder. He never, ever wanted Derek to stop, fucking fuckballs, now look what he’s done.

“Good boy.” His Dom leans over him, the flex of his hips driving his cock deeper into Stiles so that the Sub keens and spreads his legs wider to accommodate for the position change. Strong, warm fingers curl around his wrist again.

“Maybe I should just hold these here myself,” he muses, like that hadn’t obviously been his plan all along. “What do you think?”

The Sub yanks his arm back again quickly, but not without a whimper, because now Derek’s gone and stopped, and that’s not what he’d intended at all. He wants more. He wants faster, deeper, harder. He never, ever wanted Derek to stop, fucking fuckballs, now look what he’s done.

“Good boy.” His Dom leans over him, the flex of his hips driving his cock deeper into Stiles so that the Sub keens and spreads his legs wider to accommodate for the position change. Strong, warm fingers curl around his wrist again.

“Maybe I should just hold these here myself,” he muses, like that hadn’t obviously been his plan all along. “What do you think?”

“Yes,” Stiles gasps, when the grip tightens and Derek pins him back against the mattress firmly, with clear intent. “Fuck, yes Sir, please, oh my god…”

“You’re so pretty when you beg for me,” Derek murmurs, a predatory smile curling at his lips, before he resumes thrusting, slowly at first but quickly building up the pace to a fast, thorough fuck.

Between the powerful thrusts and the way Derek’s pinning him and the sweet, although sometimes filthy, words of praise that are being murmured to him (breathlessly), Stiles doesn’t really last as long as he would’ve like. He tries his hardest, honestly he does, and fights his building orgasm for as long as possible, but he’s already so deep into subspace that his extremities are starting to feel a little
numb, so the control he has over his penis isn’t exactly at its best.

He lacks the verbal wherewithal to warn Derek of his impending orgasm, but the Werewolf seems to figure it out anyway. It probably has something to do with the strangled, inarticulate noises that are coming out of his mouth (entirely against his will), and the fact that they jump up at least two octaves as he feels himself spiralling upwards towards his peak.

Derek thrusts into him in slow, hard strokes, transferring both of Stiles’s wrist to one hand so that he can slide the other between them and loosely grip the Sub’s leaking cock.

“Come for me.”

Stiles does. Enthusiastically.

He hopes Derek’s neighbours aren’t in.

“The apartment’s pretty well soundproofed,” Derek tells him later on, once he’s cleaned them both up and Stiles is cuddled up in his lap again, blinking sleepily but fully up from his deep trek into Subspace. “In case you were worried about the neighbours.”

Stiles shrugs, taking another sip of his Gatorade. “I wasn’t.”

“Liar,” Derek says with a smile, and taps the centre of chest. “You’re heart’s singing a different tune.”

“Ugh,” Stiles complains, capping the bottle and tossing it aside so that he can snuggle back up against the Dom’s chest properly. “Werewolves.”

Derek strokes his hair, grabbing the bottle and leaning across to set it down on the bedside table out of the way. “It’s been a long night. We should get some sleep.”

“Mmfnn.”

“You’re fine?” Derek translates, a smile in his voice, and Stiles smacks the back of his hand against the Alpha’s shoulder sleepily. “Ah. I see. Resorting to physical violence now, are we? Have you forgotten that I’m morally obliged to spank you if you step out of line?”

Stiles buries his face in the crook of Derek’s neck and clings to him harder, whining. “Nooooo.”

Derek chuckles, soft and fond, and lands a feather-light pop against his still-naked ass before leaning over to switch off the bedside lamp, scooting down the bed a little with Stiles still in his grasp until he can lay back comfortably against the pillows without knocking himself out against the headboard.
Stiles shifts in his hold so that his back’s pressed against Derek’s front, determined to be the Little Spoon, and hugs Derek’s forearm to his chest when the Alpha obligingly wraps it around him.

They lay there in comfortable silence for a few minutes, Stiles too sleepy and well-fucked and riding the tail-end of his endorphin high to do much more than cling to his Dom’s arm like a lifeline, eyelids drooping. Then Derek shifts behind him, pressing his lips to the back of Stiles’s neck just above his collar.

“You were so good for me tonight,” the Dom murmurs, and even though Stiles has heard it at least a dozen times over the course of the evening, it still makes his insides flutter pleasantly. “You’re amazing, Stiles. Seriously.”

Smiling into the darkness of the room, Stiles squeezes the Alpha’s arm in a tighter hug. “Right back atcha, Sir.”

Derek presses a second kiss to the same spot, then a third, before curling himself more fully around Stiles and settling his chin on top of the Sub’s head.

“Goodnight.”

“Mm. Night, Sir.”

Derek Hale, badass Alpha-Dom Werewolf, is not a morning person, as Stiles discovers when he wakes up at seven-thirty with a full bladder and tries to carefully extract himself from Derek’s arms so that he can go to the bathroom.

“No,” the Dom rumbles, pulling Stiles back against his chest before he can fully escape. “S’too early.”

“I’m not getting up,” Stiles assures him quietly, beginning his quest again to squirm his way out of the muscular prison. “I’m just gonna go take a leak. I’ll be back in a sec.”

“No.” Derek’s forehead settles between his shoulder blades. “Stay.”

He can’t help the grin that curls at his lips. “Dude, I gotta pee.”

“Sleep now, pee later. Dom’s orders.”

“Derek.” Stiles can’t quite believe this is the same calm, patient, self-confident Dom who fucked his brains out last night. Sleep-grumpy Derek is adorable. “C’mon, Sir, I’ll only be gone, like, three minutes max. Please?”

The Alpha sighs resignedly, loosening his hold on Stiles with obvious reluctance. “You have two minutes. Go.”
Stiles scoots off the bed, grinning again. “Or what?”

Derek cracks an eyelid open to peer at him. “Big trouble.”

Although he doubts that his backside is in any real danger, Stiles nevertheless keeps a mental countdown in his head as he relieves himself and washes his hands, and has just enough time to give his teeth a quick brush before darting back into the master bedroom scooting across to snuggle up with Derek again.

His Dom squints at him, sleepy and confused, but smiles when he sees the Sub watching him expectantly, leaning in to press a kiss to the centre of his forehead.

“Good boy.” He slides his arms around Stiles again, nuzzling his throat. “Now go to sleep.”

Stiles does.

Chapter End Notes

Initially this chapter was just going to be that long Stiles/Derek bedroom scene, but those two additional scenes snook up on me and demanded to be written. What can I say? I'm a sucker for cute domestic moments. Plus not-a-morning-wolf Derek was something I simply couldn't resist. It's a personal headcanon of mine.

Hope you enjoyed! <3
It’s early afternoon before either of them leaves the bedroom.

That’s mostly because they end up falling asleep again after a slow, lazy morning-fuck. It’s nothing like the desperate, burning passion of the previous evening; in contrast, there’s something tender and gentle about the way Derek slowly opens him up with his fingers and slides easily inside. The Dom’s still spooning him from behind, both of Stiles’s wrists pinned against the Sub’s chest by one of the Alpha’s hands as Derek kisses his neck and rocks into him at a steady, easy pace that allows his orgasm to build right from the tips of his toes and swell into a vision-whitening crescendo that leaves him floating pleasantly in Subspace for a good thirty minutes.

Coming down from a high always leaves him sleepy, so he’s grateful when Derek cleans him up and tucks him back into bed. And apparently the Dom’s equally as keen to grab another forty winks or so, because Derek falls asleep again before even he does, Stiles cuddled up against the Werewolf’s chest like an oversized teddy bear. Stiles is quickly warming to the notion of fondly dubbing his Dom ‘Slumber Wolf’, but he hasn’t quite mustered up the courage to say it out loud yet.

When they finally roll out of bed just before two o’clock, they make use of Derek’s ridiculously large walk-in shower (avec un petit blow-job a la Stiles, of course, since he’s presented with the glorious sight of Derek Hale all hot and soapy and naked standing two feet away from him and a guy’s got needs, man). Independent non-traditionalist Sub or not, he doesn’t feel obliged to protest when his Dom gently takes the soap from him and insists on washing Stiles himself.

Derek’s warm, gentle hands rubbing confidently over ever inch of him? Like he’s going to say no to that. He’s not an idiot.

Naturally, it’s not long before Stiles finds himself pinned against the cool, wet tiles of the shower wall while Derek sucks love-bites into his throat, gripping onto the Alpha’s shoulders like a lifeline as a large, soapy hand fists both their cocks, stroking them slowly to completion (huzzah for Derek’s almost non-existent refractory period). They have to wash themselves down again afterwards, but that’s a fairly small price to pay, all things considered. Stiles is too busy feeling awesome to complain about anything at all, really.

He’s still riding that cozy, post-orgasmic buzz ten minutes later, so it takes a few seconds for him to react when Derek slips one of his too-large shirts over Stiles’s head and fastens the soft leather collar back around his throat with gentle hands.

“Is this a scent thing?” he guesses, tugging at the hem over the baggy t-shirt, watching the fabric hang loosely off his slighter frame.

Derek, midway through scrubbing Stiles’s hair dry with a towel, gives him a wry smile and shrugs. “Something like that. You don’t mind, right?”

Stiles tilts his head up to steal a quick kiss by way of an answer, laughing against the Alpha’s lips when Derek loops the towel around the back of his neck to keep him from pulling back and licks his way into the Sub’s mouth.
“Dude, c’mon, you promised me breakfast,” Stiles wheedles after a minute or so, all too aware of the gnawing sensation in his stomach – that being said, he’s quite happily rucking up Derek’s shirt to get his hands on the Werewolf’s abs again.

“True,” Derek acknowledges with a sigh, and tosses the towel aside so that he can replace it with his hand, exerting just enough pressure to gently steer Stiles out into the hallway of his apartment and through into the kitchen.

“Um.” Stiles glances down at his lower half, his short boxer-briefs barely visible beneath the bottom of his shirt. “Not that I’m complaining or anything, but do you want me to put on pants before we eat?”

“Only if you’re cold.” Derek gently nudges Stiles towards one of the stools at the breakfast bar. “It’s not like we’re expecting company.” He ducks his head inside the fridge and pauses, before straightening up again slowly to glance over towards the Sub. “Unless it makes you uncomfortable?”

Stiles props his chin in his hand, elbow braced on the edge of the marble surface as he grins across at his Dom. “Derek, I just had, like, six orgasms in sixteen hours. I’m not gonna get all flustered about showing you my ankles.”

Derek shrugs and disappears behind the open door of the refrigerator again, but Stiles can tell he’s smiling. It warms something inside his chest, this laid-back, cosy domesticity of theirs. The sex had been amazingly hot, of course, and had warmed him in a different way, but there’s this easy atmosphere between them now that the initial burst of fiery passion has blown over, and it’s doing stuff to him. That little Submissive voice inside his head is preening, and now every time he looks at Derek the voice says Mate. Every time he glances around the apartment, it says Home.

And that’s scary as fuck.

He’s never been a stay-at-home Sub; never fantasised about keeping house while his Dom heads out to work, never felt satisfied at the prospect of limiting his skillset to cleaning and cooking and grocery shopping. There are plenty of Subs who enjoy that, who yearn for that level of security and protection, and that’s cool. Each to their own. But that’s never been what Stiles has wanted for himself. He has plans; he has dreams and aspirations and personal goals, and being a cutesy House-Sub has never featured on that list. Until now. Right now, deep down inside, there’s a part of him that’s insisting he’ll be more than happy to perform those duties for the rest of his life; anything, everything, if it means it’ll make his Dom happy.

Oh shit.

He has to remind himself that he’s only been asked to stay the night. One night. They haven’t moved in together. They’re not even legally registered yet. Derek’s not his Bonded. These uncharacteristic urges are all just part and parcel of the honeymoon phase; hormones and biological instincts coming into play and messing with his head a bit.

Besides, Derek doesn’t strike him as the kind of Dom who’s incapable of handling things around the house. Like, the apartment is impecably neat. And Werewolves, on the whole, aren’t usually keen about letting strangers into their territory even if it’s just to clean, so Stiles doubts the Alpha’s gone and hired maid or something. He won’t be expecting Stiles to don an apron and play House-Sub for him.

Alas, the visual connotations that evokes are vivid enough stir interest in his southern regions, so he quickly has to push the topic to one side before things get out of hand. His dick needs a break. Seriously.
He’s relieved to discover that Derek seems completely at ease in the kitchen, too, whipping up a quick batter for waffles and setting bacon and sausage under the grill while Stiles carefully washes and halves a punnet of strawberries under the Alpha’s direction.

“Trying to fatten me up?” he asks, propping his chin on Derek’s shoulder as he sets the bowl down on the worktop beside the Werewolf, watching as his Dom whisks scrambled eggs in a pan on the stove.

Derek turns his head just enough to bump his nose against the Sub’s cheek. “You missed breakfast and lunch. I intend to get at least one good meal into you before you have to leave for work.” He pauses in his whisking to take a halved strawberry from the bowl and lift it up to the younger man’s lips. “You don’t have to eat everything if you don’t want to, I just wasn’t sure what you liked.”

“Generally, if it’s edible, I’ll eat it,” Stiles assures him, and takes the proffered berry carefully, sucking off the residual red juice from Derek’s thumb when it stays pressed against his lips. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.” Smiling, Derek nudges him back a little with his hip. “Could you set the table for me? There’s syrup and powdered sugar in the cupboard above the spice rack.”

Stiles can’t quite fathom how one person living on their own could possibly make use of that many spices, but he doesn’t comment on it beyond a bemused glance (and yeah, okay, he turns the little metal crank so that the rows of spices rotate slowly like a culinary Ferris wheel). Maybe it’s a gift. Most of the little glass jars still seem to be full, so Derek can’t be using them all that often.

“It was a house-warming gift from my sister, Laura,” Derek explains without turning around, and Stiles freezes guiltily, the Ferris-wheel-rack squeaking mid-rotation. “A not-so-subtle hint that she wanted me to expand my repertoire beyond steak and pasta.”

Stiles snorts, taking the syrup and powdered sugar over to the small dining table on the far side of the spacious kitchen. “The two most important food groups, according to my dad.”

“Well,” Derek flashes him a wide smile. “Who am I to argue with the Sheriff?”

“Oh god, don’t let him hear you say that,” Stiles groans. “I’ve spent the past five years trying to lower his cholesterol, but it’s still an uphill battle. Even if I throw away the original packaging, he always knows when it’s not the real deal; I swear he’s half Werewolf sometimes.”

“Or maybe it’s because that veggie-replacement crap tastes like salty cardboard,” Derek suggests dryly, opening the oven door to take the sizzling meat out from beneath the grill.

“Oooh,” Stiles crows, grinning. “Sounds like someone’s pretty passionate about their bacon.”

“Werewolf,” the Alpha reminds him evenly.

“No shit.” He tilts his head to the side, leaning casually against the edge of the dining table. “So what would happen if you woke up one morning and discovered that I’d replaced all your meat with Quorn?”

His Dom glances across at him, an eyebrow arched. “You wouldn’t be sitting comfortably for the rest of the day, that’s what.”

Stiles has enough common sense to feign an innocent ‘of course I would never actually do that’ look, but from the way Derek rolls his eyes, trying (and failing) to suppress a smile, it doesn’t really come across as genuine. At least the Alpha seems amused rather than annoyed at the notion of Stiles
He’s still got a few hours to kill before he needs to get ready for work, and Stiles is secretly hoping for another round or two of sexy-sexy times.

Unfortunately, he suspects that Derek intends to sit him down for The Talk. Which yeah, okay, is probably kind of important since neither of them wants this to be a temporary fling and they need to establish relationship boundaries and personal limits and hash out some sort of preliminary agreement regarding discipline and consequences, but still. Sex. Sex is always good.

That being said, he can’t find cause to complain when Derek leads him out into the living room a little while later, taking a seat on one of the expensive-looking couches and pulling Stiles down to sit in his lap. It’s quickly becoming the Sub’s favourite locations. He kinda hopes that the warm, pleasantly squirmy feeling in his chest isn’t just a knock-on effect of the honeymoon phase, because he wants to feel this level of security and satisfaction every day. Preferably for the rest of his life.

“Stiles,” Derek says after a minute or two of comfortable silence, his hand lightly stroking the younger man’s bare thigh. “There are a couple of things we need to talk about.”

The Sub hums absently, nosing along Derek’s jawline.

“And I need you to concentrate,” the Alpha presses, although he tilts his chin up to allow the nuzzling to progress.

“Sounds exhausting, Sir.”

A quiet sigh. “Stiles.”

Acknowledging that there’s a time and a place for sassing one’s Dom and this isn’t it, he presses a quick, apologetic kiss to the Werewolf’s throat and sits up a little straighter.

“Okay. I’m all ears.”

To be honest, he doesn’t quite know what to expect from this conversation. He’s had casual flings before at college – one night stands and ‘friends with benefits’ arrangements – but never a proper relationship, never dating on a long-term basis, and certainly not with the intention of becoming
legally registered under another Dom. He knows the basics of how these negotiations are supposed
to go down, but most of that comes from SSC advice sites on the internet and the standard Smart,
Safe, Consensual programme that’s a compulsory element of everyone’s education in Senior Year at
high school.

But that hadn’t really taught him anything he didn’t already know. It was mostly a combination of
common sense and basic human decency. There’d been helluva lot about the importance of using
and strictly maintaining limits; the benefit of clear communication between a Dom and a Sub; the
importance of seeking help or informing others if safewords are ignored or overlooked by either
person in the relationship; the need for Submissives to be able to understand the difference between
domestic discipline and spousal abuse so that individuals don’t suffer in silence.

Pretty important stuff, there’s no denying that, but nothing groundbreaking.

What those workshops hadn’t told him was how he went about explaining to Derek that, despite his
overabundance of sarcasm and wit, he’s actually a complete wuss when it comes to discipline and
verbal reprimands and he’ll probably end up bursting into tears if his Dom ever shouts at him. He can
cope with strangers being loud and angry and aggressive; that just pisses him off more than anything
else, and when he’s cross, he tends to be more of a stand-up-to-the-bastard-and-kill-them-with-
sarcasm kind of Sub, rather than the sensible kind who’ll wisely back away from a fight they’re likely
to lose. But if it’s someone he cares about, someone he’s close to – like his Dad or Scott or Melissa
(hell, probably even Danny at a pinch) – he crumples like a leaf in the face if their stern Dominant
persons.

It sucks.

His Dad hardly ever raises his voice – Stiles can probably count on one hand the number of actual
shouting matches they’ve had, and most of those were during his more difficult teenage years – but
he doesn’t really need to, either. A frown, a firm “Stiles”, and he’s already halfway to repentant even
if he’s not sure which of his misdemeanours his father has discovered. Suffice to say, by the time his
Dad’s done lecturing him, Stiles is already regretting whatever idiotic stunt he’s pulled and promising
to never do anything like that again, not ever, and his Dad hasn’t even landed the first swat yet.

He’d like to think that he’s the epitome of the New Age Submissive – strong-willed, independent,
tough – and maybe he is, most of the time. Just not when he’s in trouble.

“Are you listening to me?”

Stiles blinks, eyes widening a little at the expression on Derek’s face. Although the Alpha’s still calm
and perfectly in control, he’s got an eyebrow arched, and there’s a mildly frustrated look about him
that makes Stiles want to duck his head and avert his gaze. It’s the first time since the crash that he’s
seen Derek without a smile.

He doesn’t like it.

“Sorry,” he blurts, gaze skittering down to look at Derek’s chin instead, because the expression on
his face is making his chest achy and tight and ugh, dammit, emotions.

“Maybe we should discuss rules and consequences first,” Derek suggests, and his voice has gentled
again. He gently cups the Sub’s chin and guides his gaze back up again, and Stiles is relieved to see
that the look in his eyes has vanished. “Does that sound alright to you?”

Stiles nods carefully, not wanting to dislodge his Dom’s hand. “Yes, Sir.”
Derek rewards him with a soft, easy half-smile that curls at the corner of his mouth, keeping his palm where it is so that his can brush his thumb back and forth against the Sub’s cheek.

“I don’t have a lot of rules,” the Dom states, calm and casual but still effortlessly authoritative. “I’m not traditional in the least, so I’m happy to let go of formalities if kneeling isn’t something you’re keen on doing?”

“I liked kneeling for you at the restaurant,” Stiles admits when Derek’s pause goes on long enough to indicate that he’s waiting for an answer. “But I’m not…I’m crap at keeping still for more than a couple of minutes. I fidget. And then I get annoyed because I’m fidgeting, which makes it even harder to keep still and…yeah. It’s not fun after that.”

“I’ll keep that in mind,” Derek replies with a nod, completely serious, despite the ridiculous nature of Stiles’s admission. (Like, seriously, what kind of Sub can’t fucking kneel? He hates his body sometimes.)

Derek traces his fingers down the Sub’s throat to run them along the woven leather cords of Stiles’s collar. “I don’t expect you to address me formally all the time, either,” he continues. “I’ll be more than happy to let you drop the ‘Sir’ when we’re around friends and family, although I do expect you to be respectful around other Dominants when formalities are appropriate. Although I’m confident you won’t have any trouble there; you’ve already made a good impression with my junior team at the Centre. I’m proud of you.”

Smiling, pleased, the Sub leans in to steal a quick kiss. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.” The Dom smiles at him a moment longer, before taking a deep breath and growing serious again. “But before you go thinking that I’m a complete pushover of a Dom, I ought to warn you that the few rules I do want you to follow are strictly enforced, and I won’t hesitate to discipline you if I find out you’ve disobeyed me.”

Stiles nods slowly, curling into his Dom’s chest a little. “What if I break a rule accidentally?”

“Then it’s an honest mistake, not deliberate disobedience,” Derek reasons calmly, threading his fingers through the Sub’s hair and brushing a kiss against his temple. “I won’t punish you unless you break a rule intentionally, and I’ll always give you a chance to explain your actions. Okay?”

“Okay.” Relaxing a little (because Stiles makes a helluva lot of mistakes, he just seems to be unlucky like that, and it’s nice to know bad luck won’t result in trip over his Dom’s knee), he snuggles closer feeling the nervous butterflies begin to settle.

“But Stiles?”

He pulls back a little to glance up at the Dom. “Mm?”

Derek strokes his cheek gently. “If I decide you need a spanking, that’s the end of the discussion. There’ll be no negotiating, no wheedling your way out of a session over my knee, not if I think it’s necessary. Even if you don’t agree.”

Stiles wonders if Derek’s been talking to his Dad, because that principle sounds a helluva lot like the one the Sheriff enforced years ago. Given the freedom, Stiles would try to negotiate his way out of every punishment, even if he desperately needed it, even if he’d fucked something up big time (like when he’d picked a fight with the drunken Dom at college for telling him to ‘get back to the kitchen’). It’s just an automatic thing with him. And he knows how quickly he succumbs to his own emotional turmoil and hormonal imbalance if he’s left to deal with a guilt-induced drop on his own,
so he should be fucking grateful that Derek’s enforcing the no-negotiation card regarding discipline.

Except he’s not. Because while there’s a part of him that’s relieved beyond belief that his need for boundaries and consequences won’t be neglected, there’s an even bigger part of him that hates, hates, hates being disciplined.

He smushes his face into his Dom’s shoulder in an attempt to hide the fact that he’s pouting, but he hears Derek sniff a quiet grin above him, so he has a feeling the Alpha saw it anyway. Drat.

"You'll always have your safeword," Derek reassures him quietly. "If you ever feel like I'm overstepping my boundaries as your Dom, if I ever do or say something that makes you feel uncomfortable or unsafe, I need you to use it. I'll never do anything deliberately to harm you, Stiles."

The Sub nods, pressing a kiss to Derek's throat. "I know."

Because he does. Derek's so much like Scott in that regard, he's clearly a nurturer by instinct, with discipline a safety measure put in place for Stiles' benefit, not a platform to uphold the Dom's own authority. Stiles isn't going to like being spanked by Derek any more than he does when Scott takes him to task, but knowing that safety net is there for the odd occasion when he might need some form of discipline to maintain his equilibrium, that's a reassurance in itself.

Derek strokes the back of his head for a few minutes, his touch soothing, before dropping another kiss against the Sub’s hair. “Would you like to hear the rules now? Or do you want to sulk for a little while longer?”

The Dom’s tone is gently teasing, and Stiles thumps Derek’s chest half-heartedly. “Shuddup, Sir.”

Chuckling, Derek starts gently pushing him away a few inches until their eyes meet. “You already know the first rule,” he points out. “We talked about it on the phone the other night.”

Stiles tilts his head to the side a little. “The one about lying?”

Derek nods. “I won’t spank you for little white lies or for anything intended as a joke,” the Alpha reassures. “But if you outright lie to me about something important, something that involves your safety or your wellbeing, or if you try to evade punishment by making up a phony story, you’ll find yourself over my knee and on the receiving end of a far more thorough spanking than you would’ve gotten in the first place. Understood?”

Stiles nods quickly. He’s a terrible liar, as Derek found out first-hand during that phone call, so he has absolutely no intention of trying to spin a tall tale in order to weasel himself out of trouble. Of course, intending to avoid doing something and actually avoiding it are two different things, and he’s not feeling particularly optimistic about his success rate on this one. It’s just that…sometimes his mouth says things before his brain can catch up, and before he knows what’s happening, he’s gone and made up a ridiculous story about an old lady and her three-legged Corgi and yes, Dad, that’s why I have a black eye, I tripped over Mrs Binworth’s disabled dog…what do you mean you don’t believe me, that could totally happen!

“Lying by omission goes into that category too,” Derek adds, brushing the Sub’s fringe back from his forehead. “If something happens to you, something that concerns your safety or your health or your emotional stability, I need you to tell me about it. You’re mine to look after, and I can’t take care of your needs or protect you from harm if I’ve only got half the facts.”

‘Mine to look after.’ Mmmm. That’s nice. It warms Stiles right down to his toes, and he doesn’t really care that the intended message is that Derek will turn him over his knee for a spanking if he
withholds important information about his wellbeing; the realisation that Derek’s looking after him now, that the Alpha’s fully invested in keeping him safe…well, it’s fucking mind-blowing, to put it mildly. And awesome. Awesomely mind-blowing. Fuck yeah.

“What are you smiling about, you lunatic?” Derek murmurs, but there’s a smile in his voice and a fond warmth in his eyes as he brushes a kiss against the corner of Stiles’s stupid grin.

“Nothin’, Sir.” Stiles leans in to nuzzle the Dom’s jaw, still grinning. “I’m just really glad I’m yours.”

Unfortunately his statement leads to a brief pause in their discussion, wherein Stiles finds himself pinned back against the couch cushions and kissed senseless, which leads swiftly onto other activities, since Stiles’s cock decides that six orgasms in sixteen hours just isn’t enough, and Derek apparently agrees.

Seventy minutes, two orgasms and one hot shower later, they finally manage to finish their interrupted conversation, propped up on pillows against the headboard of Derek’s bed, Stiles cuddled up into his side.

The Dom hadn’t been lying when he said he didn’t have a lot of rules. In addition to the one about telling fibs, there’s also one about general safety; Derek doesn’t expect Stiles to anticipate trouble around every bend, but he does expect him to use common sense and to avoid putting himself in harm’s way through rash or stupid actions.

“I remember Scott telling me about needing to discipline a certain friend of his back at college,” Derek mentions, a quiet note of amusement in his voice as Stiles slowly dies inside. “Something about trying to abseil out of his dorm window using bedsheets?”

Stiles buries his flaming face in Derek’s chest. “Oh god.”

“And then there was the story about Isaac and this particular friend sneaking off to a midnight rave with a few senior Frat-Doms and getting so goddamn drunk that they forgot they were supposed to be keeping it a secret and called Scott invite him to join them.”

“Please stop,” Stiles groans.

“And do I really want to know the full story behind the Boa Constrictor incident?”

“No. You really, really don’t.”

And the final rule turns out to be a fairly simple one – Stiles has to keep his phone fully charged and on him at all times so that he can call Derek if anything happens to him. He has to text Derek if there’s a change in plans and he has to go somewhere unexpectedly, especially at night. And if he wants to go out somewhere unaccompanied, even if it’s just to the local store for milk, he has to tell Derek before he leaves and text him again once he’s safely back home.

“It’s not a control thing,” Derek reassures him, rubbing the Sub’s back in slow, soothing circles. “I’m not trying to limit how often you go out, or who you visit, or how late you stay up. I just need to know where you are, in case something happens to you. I need to know that you’re safe, Stiles.”

Stiles nods, accepting the rule easily enough. His dad enforced a looser version of that same rule when he was still a Neutral in high school, and Scott had instigated something similar during their college years in an attempt to keep tabs on his whereabouts. It’s nothing new. He’s got the new Sub Alert app on his phone too, the one that can be both touch- and voice-activated and will alert local WPDS centres and the police department to his whereabouts if he doesn’t deactivate the distress call within two minutes.
“Do you have any questions?” Derek asks softly, once he’s given Stiles a few minutes to think.

The Sub shakes his head. “Not right now. Have you seriously only got three rules?”

Derek tilts his chin up for a quick kiss, smiling. “Would you like me to think of some more?” Then his voice gentles a little as he studies the Sub’s face. “Do you need me to think of some more?”

Stiles runs his fingers along the Sub-band circling his Dom’s wrist, dropping his gaze briefly. Does he need more rules? Boundaries and relationship parameters serve to create a safe, secure environment for Submissives, that’s just common sense, and there are plenty of bonded Submissives who find a sense of self-achievement and satisfaction in following more specific rules. Curfews and bedtimes and how many cups of coffee they’re allowed to drink, what coloured tie they need to wear to work that day, what music they should listen to in the car. Some Subs prefer their Doms to take away the responsibility of making minor choices, and that’s fine. Stiles is cool with that.

He’s not saying that he’d be entirely happy if Derek told him to listen to Miley Cyrus or wear polka-dot shirts or switch to decaff coffee (dear god, no), but he gets why people might find that level of Domination comforting.

“No.” He shakes his head again. “No, I’m good.”

“Mm,” Derek agrees, pressing their foreheads together. “Yes you are.”

Unfortunately, with Stiles working nightshifts at the Lunar Palace Hotel that weekend and Derek working dayshifts Saturday through Monday, they’re not able to meet up in person for a few days.

The Alpha still calls him once a day, though, late in the afternoon when things are winding down at the Centre and Stiles has finally woken up enough to manage an intelligent conversation as he sips carefully at too-hot coffee. Weekends at the hotel are always crazily busy, and he’s usually exhausted by the time he gets to his third consecutive nightshift, but the money’s good and he gets to meet some pretty interesting characters working as a receptionist-slash-filling-in-for-whoever’s-off-sick, so he figures he could do worse.

When Monday finally rolls around, he only lets himself take a quick morning nap until noon before waking himself up with two cups of coffee and a hot shower and rolling into some comfortable clothes. He tends to hang out with Isaac and Scott on their days off (and by ‘hang out’ Stiles means he drives over to the McCall-Lahey residence and crashes on their couch for six hours), so it’s not
like he needs to look fancy. That being said, he *does* pick a shirt with a low enough neckline to show off his collar.

If you’ve got it, flaunt it, right?

“It suits you,” Isaac comments, running his fingers along the plaited band of leather as Stiles keeps his chin tilted up.

It isn’t something he’d do if Isaac wasn’t one of his close friends (and a Sub), but they’ve seen each other at their most vulnerable, so there aren’t a lot of secrets between them. Still, it feels weird to have someone other than Derek touching his collar like that.

“So, tell me everything,” the curly-haired Beta demands eagerly, once they’ve hunkered down on the couch with a plate of sandwiches and a bag of potato chips between them. “How did he collar you, was it romantic? Is he any good in bed?”

Stiles grins, delighted as always that Isaac’s a Sub after his own heart when it comes to raunchy gossip, and launches into a detailed account of their date on Thursday night, and the steamy evening that followed.

“His *abs*, man, oh my god,” he moans around a mouthful of smoked turkey sandwich. “You should’ve warned me.”

Isaac shrugs, taking a gulp of his soda. “Must’ve slipped my mind.”

“Uh-huh.” Stiles kicks the Werewolf’s knee with his sock-clad foot, but he’s grinning. “Where’s Scott run off to, anyway? I thought his shift finished at two.”

“He called earlier,” the other Sub answers. “Laura asked him to work a few extra hours while they finish setting up the Hub near Kinsly Square.”

Stiles feels his brow crease. “My dad was talking about that the other day; said everyone at the station would be pulling double shifts so that they could help staff the Hub. Is something going on that I should be worried about?”

“Nah,” Isaac dismisses, crunching on a chip. “It’s mostly just precautionary. The Equality Reform debates are due to start in a couple of weeks, but the kick-starter is next Tuesday. The DRA have gotten more publicity than usual this year, so we’re expecting a big crowd. And a helluva lot of protesters. Derek and Laura are worried that Dominant protesters might start picking fights with members of the DRA, so we’re posting a couple of teams in the square on rotating shifts, and your dad’s sending us some of his deputies to help with formal arrests.”

“Dude.” Stiles looks at him incredulously. “That kinda sounds like something I should be worried about. Especially if I’m in the crowd.”

It’s Isaac’s turn to frown now, lowering his sandwich from where it was poised halfway to his lips. “You’re not seriously considering going, are you?”

“And what if I am?” Stiles asks warily, and decides not to disclose that he spent the better part of six hours helping Lydia and Allison design their badass protest signs last week.

“I’m just not so sure Derek’s gonna approve, that’s all.”

Stiles shrugs, although the notion of doing something, *anything*, that his Dom wouldn’t agree with makes his insides squirm uncomfortably. “There wasn’t a rule about asking permission before I go
“No, but you said he’s asked you text him,” Isaac points out. “And I’m pretty sure he’s gonna tell you to stay at home instead. I dunno, man, he gets pretty het up about public events like this, especially if there’s any danger of violence breaking out. Hell, he’s not evening letting my team do crowd-control unless we promise to work in pairs.”

“Dude, I’m not going on my own,” Stiles protests, because he’s stubborn and determined, maybe, but he’s not stupid. “Danny and Jackson are picking me up at ten, and we’re meeting the girls in town. Safety in numbers and all that shit.”

Isaac visibly relaxes a little. “Alright. But you should still run it by Derek. I know Scott would be pissed off if I went to a public protest as big as this one and didn’t tell him about it first.”

Stiles sighs, but acknowledges the truth behind the Beta’s warning. Derek does seem like the type of Dom who’d dislike the idea of Stiles going to such a crowded (and potentially violent) event, but he also seems reasonable enough to allow him to go as long as the Sub sticks with Danny and the others. To be fair, even Stiles wouldn’t feel safe going to such a large protest on his own, not with the presence of so many displeased Doms, not when the air’s going to be thick with tension and people might start throwing punches. He’d be fighting the instinct to run and hide all day, and he doesn’t find that notion an appealing one.

“I’ll talk to him about it,” he relents with a sigh. “Okay?”

Isaac smiles, leaning in to wrap an arm around his shoulders and nuzzle his temple, one packmate to another. “Thank you.”

The following week is busy enough that Stiles forgets about his promise entirely.

He and Derek manage to meet up for dinner dates most days (the Dom meeting him after work and treating Stiles to some of the nicest restaurants in town). He sleeps over at the Alpha's apartment Monday to Thursday, and by the end of the week he's got enough clothes at Derek's place that he uses the Dom's washer to do a load of laundry. Derek seems to approve - Stiles uses unscented detergent all the time (because Scott and Isaac have sensitive noses, and he'd be a jerk not to), but clearly his Dom prefers Stiles using the same brand as him. It's a Werewolf thing, he knows that. Derek keeps dressing Stiles in his own too-large t-shirts whenever they're at the apartment for the same reason (not that the Sub minds).

He heads home on Friday to begin another weekend of nightshifts at Lunar Palace, and it isn't until his bi-weekly lunch date with Isaac on Monday that he's reminded about the DRA protest.
"Things are gonna get pretty heated," Isaac remarks, thumbs flicking over controller keys, his gaze focused on the TV as he annihilates Stiles' character. "Laura says they've heard rumours about the DRA bussing in supporters from out-of-state to build up their numbers. Pretty sure the protesters will still outnumber them by a significant gap, but they've doubled the security teams for tomorrow just in case. Is Derek still okay with you going?"

Stiles' silence apparently says it all.

"Dude." The 'wolf pauses their game and turns to look at him, both resigned and exasperated. "You promised me you'd talk to him about it. You've had a whole week!"

"I know, I know. It totally slipped my mind." Stiles rubs the back of his neck with a wry grin. "Kinda been a little preoccupied recently."

Isaac rolls his eyes, but his smile his fond. "Uh-huh." He nudges Stile with his foot. "You've got a date tonight. Talk to him, okay?"

He nods, raising a hand in surrender. "Okay, okay. I will."

He forgets about the issue altogether in the rush to get showered and dressed for dinner, and the moment he claps eyes on his Dom again when he opens the front door, tomorrow’s protest is the last thing on his mind.

“Missed you,” he murmurs, face smushed against the Alpha’s shoulder as he feels warmth blooming in his chest again, that sense of security and contentment renewing now that he’s wrapped up safely in Derek’s arms. “Feels like forever since Friday.”

“A full weekend was definitely too long,” Derek agrees with a quiet smile, cupping Stiles’s chin so that he can guide him upwards into a gentle, lingering kiss. “Do you want to stay the night again? I have to leave early for my shift tomorrow, but I can give you a key.”

Stiles is so totally on board with that plan, and yanks Derek back down again by the lapels of his jacket for another, deeper kiss.

For the rest of the evening, he’s quite thoroughly distracted by the rush of delighted satisfaction (and internal preening) over the prospect of getting a key to Derek’s apartment, and consequently doesn’t even think about the protest until much later that night, when they’re curled up together in bed, Derek’s hand tracing random, lazy patterns across Stiles’s chest and abdomen beneath the bedclothes while his thoroughly spent cock makes an admirable effort to appear interested again (it fails miserably, but he’s blaming that on his Dom’s incredibly talented mouth and hand and dick, since there’s a limit to how many times he can orgasm in a single hour).

“I need to be at work by seven-thirty,” Derek murmurs, brushing a kiss against the patch of sensitive skin beneath his ear. “I’ll try not to wake you when I leave.”

“No, do,” Stiles requests sleepily, hugging the Alpha’s arm a little tighter. “Wanna say g’bye.”

His Dom’s lips brush against his neck again. “I finish at five. You’d be welcome to stay the night with me again if you wanted to. Unless you’ve already made arrangements?”

“Nope, free as a bird,” Stiles promises. It’s not a lie. It’s not. He is free in the evening. And please stop asking questions now.
“How about during the day? Got anything exciting planned?”

He bites his lip, grateful for the darkness, grateful that he’s facing away from his Dom and that the long pause before his answer can be blamed on post-sex sleepiness rather than an uneasy conscience. Deep down, he knows that he ought to tell Derek about going to the protest. But if Isaac’s right and the Dom’s going to forbid him from going, then he’ll end up disappointing the guys. Lydia had made him fucking pinky-swear that he’d be there, and it’s been ages since he last saw Jackson; the other Sub’s always so busy managing his Little League lacrosse program these days.

And it’s not like he’ll actually be in any danger, not with two Doms and two fierce Switches around. Not to mention Jackson would have no difficulty marching up to a violent Dom and punching them in the face. Stiles is pretty safe. Plus he’s been going to self-defense classes since he was six (a great way for his parents to get him to work off all that excess energy), and he’s pretty sure he could take a human Dom any day. He’s not going to be putting himself in harm’s way, so that’s surely not breaking one of Derek’s rules, right?

And besides, Derek’s a decent Dom, so he’ll probably say yes. But then he’ll spend the whole day worrying about his Sub’s safety because he’s also ridiculously protective (that much is clear, at least), and Stiles doesn’t want to be indirectly responsible for something bad happening because Derek was too distracted to notice.

Why are decisions so difficult now that he has a Dom?

“M’not sure yet,” he finally answers, and is relieved that his voice sounds groggy and sleepy, thus adding to the illusion that fatigue has delayed his reply. “Need to think about it some more. And I guess I still need to finish writing chapter fourteen. I’m stuck between ideas.”

Those aren’t lies either, but his heart still feels like it’s beating faster than normal, and the horrible, squirming discomfort inside his chest has never felt worse.

Derek squeezes him gently from behind. “You’ll have a breakthrough soon enough, I’m sure,” he says, because apparently he thinks Stiles is upset over temporary writer’s block. The Alpha kisses his neck again. “Get some sleep.”

Stiles closes his eyes in the darkness and hugs Derek’s arm more securely, willing that growing ache in his chest to subside. Maybe he won’t go. The guys won’t be too disappointed, right? But then the protest is important to him. He used to protest at DRA events when he was a senior in high school – him and Scott and the girls. He’s older now, but they still mean something to him. It still feels good to stand up against sugar-coated bigotry. He wants to go.

He mulls over the issue in his mind for hours, long after Derek’s breathing has evened out behind him, and daylight’s already started to creep through the curtains by the time he drops off.

He doesn’t wake up when Derek leaves.
Thanks for your continuing support!
I'm also happy to announce that I will be making this universe into a full series so that I can explore various characters/pairings in more detail, and potentially cover some of Stiles and Scott's college years, too. :)

Let me know what you think! <3
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Fair warning, folks - here there be spanking. Although not until the very end of the chapter. Skip the last Sterek scene if discipline isn't your thing. <3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Morning, gorgeous. Just to let you know, I’m heading out to Kinsly Square with a few friends. There’s a protest on. Don’t worry, I’ll be fine. xxx

His thumb hovers over the ‘send’ icon on his screen for a good thirty seconds, his bottom lip caught between his teeth as he frowns down at his cell phone. Then he swears under his breath and deletes it, again, shoving the device further across the dining table and reaching for his bagel instead.

He can’t do this. He was an idiot not to have told Derek about the protest last night. He hadn’t lied, no, but he’d somehow convinced himself that maybe he wasn’t going to go to the protest (that had never even been an option, get real, Lydia would eviscerate him) so that he could maintain a legitimate excuse not to tell his Dom about it.

And now he has to tell him, somehow. He can’t keep this a secret, it’s going to drive him insane with guilt. But fuck, he’s going to be in so much trouble.

Groaning, he lets his forehead drop down against his arm where it’s resting on the tabletop, fist tightening around the skin-warmed metal of Derek’s spare key. He’d found it waiting for him on the breakfast bar when he’d finally rolled out of bed, beneath it a hand-written note that read ‘Text me later. Stay safe. Don’t touch my bacon. – Derek’ with a fucking smiley face drawn on the bottom right-hand corner. Ugh. His badass Alpha-Werewolf Dom drew smileys. Fucking hell. Stiles doesn’t stand a chance.

He reaches for his phone again, trying to summon the strength of will to send a quick text to Derek; to tell him about his plans, to apologise for not talking to him sooner, and to reassure the Dom that he’ll stay out of trouble. But his thumbs freeze over the keypad for the hundredth time that morning, his mind torn. He wants to tell Derek. But he also doesn’t want his Dom to be angry and/or disappointed with him for keeping it to himself for so long. And he wants to avoid causing Derek undue stress, because he just knows the Alpha’s going to worry about him if anything happens at the protest.

He’s still debating the issue twenty minutes later when his phone buzzes, and his heart jumps halfway out of his chest in panic because oh god, what if it’s Derek? What if he knows? What if he’s disappointed? Shit!

But it’s only Jackson telling him that he and Danny are waiting in the parking lot outside Derek’s apartment. He sighs, relief slamming into him, and runs his fingers through his stress-rumpled hair in an attempt to flatten it a little, slipping the spare key into his back pocket for safekeeping. He takes a quick detour into Derek’s en-suite bathroom to brush his teeth and grabs his wallet and jacket from the living room before heading downstairs.
“Late night, Loverboy?” Jackson asks with a knowing grin as Stiles slides into the backseat of the Sub’s silver Ford Fusion.

“Shut up,” Stiles grouches, but leans between the two front seats so that Jackson can twist around and give him a one-armed hug. “Good to see you, man. Have you broken any kids yet?”

“You’re an asshole,” the other Sub informs him with a laugh, pulling back and starting the engine.

“Hey.” Danny catches hold of Stiles’s wrist as he starts retreating into the backseat again. “How come Jacks gets all the love and I don’t even get a ‘goodmorning, Danny’?”

“Goodmorning, Danny,” Stiles parrots obligingly, leaning forwards again to brush a quick kiss against the Dom’s cheek.

The PhD student nods, satisfied, and offers him a Starkbucks carafe. “I bought you coffee.”

“Oh god, I love you,” the Sub enthuses, grabbing for the cup with both hands and sinking back in his seat to take a deep draught of the hot, caffeinated liquid.

“Hands off my boyfriend, Stilinski,” Jackson warns, but his voice lacks any real heat. “And put your goddamn seatbelt on; I haven’t gotten a ticket from your dad since I was seventeen.”

Stiles sticks his tongue out at him, because he’s mature like that, but obligingly fumbles for the belt with one hand, unwilling to part with his coffee for so much as a second.

“Pretty sweet digs for a WPDS officer,” Danny comments as they pull out onto the main road, glancing back at Stiles in the rear-view mirror.

He gives a one-shouldered shrug, glancing out of the window at the tall, flashy-looking apartment block. “I guess. He’s a team manager, though, so that’s pretty high up the ranks.”

“And he comes from a family of millionaires,” Jackson tacks on neutrally.

Stiles feels his cheeks heat. “Yeah. That too.”

He’s tried not to the think about the money thing, to be honest. He knows his Dom’s family is loaded (how can they not be, they’re the Hales), and he’s aware that, by extension, Derek’s probably fairly well-off himself and only works full-time because he wants to. Whereas by contrast, Stiles works weekend nightshifts every week all year round because he needs the money, because without it his Dad would have to work full-time while Stiles sat at home and tried to get something published, and that’s just wrong.

But still, money isn’t exactly tight. He and his Dad live pretty comfortably, if a little more simply than the Hales.

Besides, he doesn’t envy them the extra cash. Especially given how much the Hales have invested in the county over the past fifty years or so. It was their wealth that had turned Beacon Hills back into a beacon again, after Derek’s grandmother moved her pack to the outskirts of the city and started channelling funds into failing business and financially supporting struggling public services such as the education board and police department. Within a decade, the population had boomed, with abandoned industrial areas refurbished as office blocks and a new county college built, and by the time his Dad had moved here (twenty-three and fresh from the Academy) in the early 90’s, Beacon Hills had become a hotspot for growing businesses.

That being said, Hale Industries is still based in New York, and there’s never been any indication
that its founders tend to move things closer to home. Stiles had spent a good six or seven hours googling about the company’s Submissive internship programmes and Pan-Dynamic college recruitment drives, and watching Youtube clips of Hale Industries’ current CEO, Peter Hale, cut down bigoted interviewers with a level of witty sarcasm that Stiles had immediately loved, even if the Werewolf had looked like he could turn around and rip someone’s throat out at any moment.

“They’re decent folks, though,” Jackson continues after a pause, perhaps in an attempt to break the awkward silence that’s momentarily settled over the car. "That's a pretty rare trait in millionaires, from experience."

Stiles arches a curious eyebrow at him. “And you’d know that how, exactly?”

“One of their kids is on my preschool Little League team,” Jackson replies. “Saturday mornings, ten ‘til twelve. Most kids usually have one parent watching from the stands, but there’s always at least four Hales. And they’ve sponsored my junior programme for another year until I can get official funding from the State, so I can’t fault them.”

The notion of being responsible for a team of hyperactive five-year-olds for two solid hours is abhorrent enough to make Stiles cringe. He loves kids, don’t get him wrong, but he was enough of a handful as a child to know just how much trouble one energetic kid can be, never mind twenty. He literally can’t think of anything he’d like to do less.

“Nah. They’re good kids, man,” Jackson insists when Stiles voices his distaste. “Most of ‘em lose that kind of energy by the time they get to Middle School; if you want to make a kid fall in love with lacrosse, you gotta start young. Besides, we’ve made progress these past few weeks. I’ve finally made a breakthrough with the Lacrosse-sticks-aren’t-for-hitting-people-with rule, so we’re getting there. Another couple of months and we might be able to switch the sponge balls for real ones.”


But he admires Jackson for his achievements, and the other Sub knows that. To go against his father’s wishes to study at Harvard Law and take PhysEd at a less reputable college instead had been a big step for Jackson, and re-registering as a Sub rather than a Dom when he turned twenty-one had been an even braver move. Stiles knows that things between Jackson and Mr Whittemore have been pretty rocky since then, especially after Jackson had worn Danny’s collar around his neck for the first time when he’d walked onto the stage to receive his Bachelor of Science in Physical Education last year; but the Sub had never looked happier. He and Stiles are closer friends now than they’d ever been in high school.

“Hey,” Jackson says suddenly, slowing the car down a little. “Is that Kira?” Before Stiles has chance to look for himself, the Sub has rolled down the window and is leaning out to holler, “I thought you said you weren’t coming?”

Stiles spots her across the street, the pole of a protest sign resting on one shoulder, her body angled towards the car as she lifts a hand in a wave, the glass beads on her Sub-band catching the sunlight. A car horn honks behind them, and Jackson waves her over quickly as Stiles opens the door and scoots across to the other side of the backseat to make room, lifting his arms protectively so that he doesn’t get clobbered over the head by Kira’s sign when she chalks it inside the car ahead of her.

“Crap, sorry.” She pulls it off of him quickly, using her other hand to close the car door and is leaning out to holler, “I thought you said you weren’t coming?”

Stiles spots her across the street, the pole of a protest sign resting on one shoulder, her body angled towards the car as she lifts a hand in a wave, the glass beads on her Sub-band catching the sunlight. A car horn honks behind them, and Jackson waves her over quickly as Stiles opens the door and scoots across to the other side of the backseat to make room, lifting his arms protectively so that he doesn’t get clobbered over the head by Kira’s sign when she chalks it inside the car ahead of her.

“Hey, guys. Thanks for the ride – I managed to persuade my Mom that I wouldn’t attack anybody for being a bigoted asshole, so she’s letting me go.”
“A little tame for you, isn’t it?” he asks with a knowing smile, glancing across at her.

The grin she gives him in return is positively wicked. “Turn it over.”

Stiles does, and lets out an explosive laugh at the printed picture of Kira decked out in her white and black Aikido garb, arms raised in a graceful defensive stance, the logo of the Yukimura martial arts training centre (a Kitsune with its flaming tail wrapped around a sword) printed in the upper right-hand corner of the sign, and beneath it the words:

‘You won’t be calling me the weaker Dynamic when I’ve got you in a chokehold.’

“I’m guessing your mom didn’t see the sign then?” Danny asks, amused, when Stiles reads the slogan to the pair in the front seats.

“She said I couldn’t physically attack anybody,” Kira answers, busy tying her long, dark hair back into a high ponytail. “She said nothing about thinly veiled threats.”

“But she’s definitely cool with you being here, right?” Jackson queries when the car slows to a halt at a red light, and turns in his seat to fix the other Sub with a look. “You’re not grounded or anything? Because I refuse to get into trouble with your Mom again for aiding and abetting a fugitive.”

Kira rolls her eyes, but she’s smiling. “Seriously? That happened four years ago, Whittemore. When are you gonna let it go?”

“She threatened me with a sword, Kira.”

“Green light,” Stiles points out helpfully, mostly because he’s heard this argument a hundred times before and he knows it’s bound to escalate if he doesn’t intervene early on.

Besides, all this talk of breaking rules and getting into trouble is making guilt swell in his chest again. His cell phone has been burning a hole in his pocket ever since he put it there, and he knows he’s gonna have to text Derek eventually, even if it’s just to keep himself sane. Maybe now’s as good a time as any. Even if his Dom gets disappointed, at least Stiles won’t be actively lying to him by omission like he’s been doing since last night.

His mind made up (and before his stupidly stubborn brain can talk his Submissive side out of it again), he snatches his cell from his pocket and thumbs a quick text to the Dom, sending it before he even allows himself to read it through more than once.

I’m going to the protest in Kinsly Square with my friends. x

Message sent, he relaxes his grip on his phone, although his heart’s beating double-time in his chest. He reads the text again, and feels his brow crinkle into a frown at the way it sounds. Stubborn. Defiant, even. That’s not what he wants to convey at all, so he decides to send a second.

Sorry for not telling you sooner, I forgot. You’re not mad, right? x

He immediately regrets hitting ‘send’ without thinking it through, because he realises with another twinge of guilt that he just told his Dom a bare-faced lie. He didn’t forget. He’s been fixated on the issue all morning. He’s just been fighting an internal battle of willpower against his own conscience, and his conscience won. But why did he lie? Why? He sucks at lying face-to-face. Why did it
“Oh my god!” Kira suddenly blurs, and seizes Stiles’s face between her hands, tilting his head back sharply as she leans in close. “Is that the collar Derek gave you? It’s gorgeous.”

“Thank you,” Stiles manages, wincing at the ceiling of the car. “Please don’t break me.”

“Oh, sorry.” She lets him go, but throws her arms around his neck instead to squeeze him into a tight hug. “I’m just so happy for you. I know you’ll be great together, Cora says Derek’s an awesome brother.”

Stiles blinks. “Sorry. Who’s Cora?”

“Derek’s sister,” Kira elaborates, in case he missed that part. “She helps run the drop-in self defence program when she’s not at college, and she’s a total godsend; my summer slots are always fully booked. That being said,” she kicks the back of Jackson’s chair, hard, “I didn’t see your name on the list. Even though you promised.”

“It’s summer,” the other Sub protests. “You realise how eager parents are to foist their kids onto someone else during the holidays? I’ve got at least three sessions running most days because I’ve had to split Grades five and six into two teams, there were that many of them, and Finstock’s been nagging at me to coach the high school team on weekends so that they don’t all fall outta shape over the summer. I’m swamped.”

“It’s true,” Danny laments with a sigh. “Believe me, I ought to know. My sex life has dwindled drastically these past few weeks.”

“Danny!” Jackson squawks, cheeks reddening as Kira bursts out laughing.

Stiles laughs too, although quieter and more reserved than usual, his mind focused on other things. Like the fact Derek hasn’t replied to his text yet. And the possibility that the Alpha might actually be working at the protest today with Scott and Isaac, rather than running the Centre. Which means that Stiles might be forced to confront his guilt head-on when he sees the inevitable disappointment on his Dom’s face.

Fuckity fuckballs.
“Lydia’s already here,” Kira tells them jovially, darting ahead. “I’d recognise that god-awful perfume anywhere.”

“Don’t run off,” Danny cautions, as they approach rear of the crowd that’s spilling out of Kinsly Square, but the Kitsune’s already weaving her way between the throng of people gracefully, her protest sign bobbing above the sea of heads. “Kira!”

“She’ll be fine,” Jackson dismisses, unzipping his jacket and shrugging it off to reveal a white t-shirt underneath that reads ‘You can’t take my freedom without my consent’ on the front and ‘Submissive and proud’ on the back. “Good thing we arrived so early, this place’ll be packed by midday.”

Stiles eyes the crowd warily. He’s totally a people person, but he’s not overly fond of them in large doses, and as a rule he tends to avoid crowded places as much as feasibly possible. Sometimes if there are too many voices, too many faces, too much happening all at once, he’ll start to feel claustrophobic, and the last thing he wants to do is have a panic attack in front of hundreds of strangers. Things haven’t been that bad in years, though, and he knows Lydia and Allison arrived deliberately early so that they could get a spot near the front where Stiles will be able to see open space and won’t feel so fenced in.

Seriously, he has awesome friends.

He can’t help but feel on edge, though. Not as a result of the crowd, but because he can see at least a dozen light beige WPDS uniforms dotted amongst the protesters. Derek still hasn’t answered his text, and with every passing minute he’s growing more and more convinced that his Dom must be here already and is too busy working on crowd-control to pay attention to his cell phone. What if he sees Stiles before he has a chance to read the text? What if he assumes that Stiles has been keeping secrets from him deliberately? Shit, shit, shit…

“You okay?” Danny asks him, a warm hand curling around his elbow, and when he glances up the Dom’s eyes are full of quiet concern.

Stiles nods, shooting him a smile that he hopes looks more convincing than it feels. “Yep. Fine. Awesome. There’s just, y’know…a lot of people.”

“You suck it up, Stilinski,” Jackson grunts, but once his hand has thumped Stiles’s shoulder it stays there, and doesn’t slide off again until they’ve meandered their way towards the front of the square where waist-high barriers have been erected to keep the crowd a few metres back from the stage in front of the town hall.

“Stiles, over here!”

He breaks into a wide smile when he spots Allison a little farther down the barrier, one hand raised in an enthusiastic wave, the other resting protectively on the swell of her stomach through her dress. He breaks away from Danny and Jackson to jog over to her, darting around a few protesters on his way, and wraps his arms around her carefully.

“You lookin’ good, Momma,” he comments with a grin. “Jellybean’s behaving himself today, huh?”

He’s been referring to the baby as such ever since Allison first broke good news to them, and it’s a habit he’s unwilling to break even now, when the due date’s only a couple of months away.

“Well, he let me sleep for more than four consecutive hours last night,” Allison acknowledges, raising her voice enough to be heard above the crowd as she pulls back from the hug, brushing a kiss
against his cheek. “I’m counting that as a win.”

Stiles moves his hand to hover above her stomach, glancing at her with a hopeful expression, and grinning when Allison just smiles and takes his wrist to press the flat of his palm against the right side of her swollen abdomen. He feels the irregular thud of kicking feet even through her clothes, and crouches down quickly.

“Hey, little man,” he coos. “It’s your favourite uncle here. Be nice to mommy, okay? She needs to help us kick political ass today.”

Allison laughs, dropping a hand to run her fingers through his hair. “He’s doing plenty of kicking for the both of us.” Her fingers trail lower, sliding down to where the leather sits snugly against his neck. “Is your Dom treating you right?”

“Derek?” Stiles straights again with a sunny smile, despite the twinge of guilt in his chest at the reminder of his own idiocy. “Yeah, he’s awesome. A total sweetheart. I think you’d like him.”

“We can’t wait to meet him,” Lydia says as she sidles up behind her wife. The words are both a reassurance and a subtle demand that Stiles will eventually introduce his Dom to the rest of them, and Stiles rolls his eyes.

“Okay, okay. I got that message, like, four cryptic emails ago.” But he still leans in with a smile to accept her hug and a kiss on the cheek. “Gotten any juicy gossip for your article yet?”

The strawberry-blond taps the silver clasp of her designer handbag with one perfectly painted fingernail, and Stiles knows there’s a camcorder and a Dictaphone and a handful of other sneaky-journalist gadgets hidden within its folds.

“Bumped into a few DRA officials while they were still setting up the barriers earlier this morning,” she says, a note of smugness in her voice. “It’s amazing how much someone will tell you if you smile prettily and compliment them on their questionable fashion choices.”

Stiles grins. “Did you manage to score an interview with the party representative?”

She purses her lips. “Not yet. But they’re here all week; I’ll get there eventually.” Then she smiles suddenly, her eyes focused on something over the Sub’s shoulder. “Nice shirt.”

“Danny made me wear it,” Jackson tells her, tugging on one of her dark curls on his way past and avoiding the smack she aims at his thigh, wrapping his arms around Allison instead.

“Lies and slander,” Danny protests, settling his hand between Stiles’s shoulder blades as he leans around to kiss Lydia’s cheek. “Thanks for translating those pages for me. It would’ve taken me weeks; archaic Latin was never my strongest language.”

“I’ll email the rest of the transcript to you tomorrow night,” she says with a smile, then shifts her attention to Stiles and taps the centre of his chest. “And I’ll be expecting payment in full, you understand?”

“One fresh batch of banoffee-choc muffins heading your way,” Stiles promises, as Danny squeezes him in a grateful hug from behind.

“The baby says ‘thank you’,” Allison pipes up, busy showing Jackson and Kira her latest ultrasound pics on her cell phone. “They’re definitely his favourite.”
Stiles sends her a sloppy salute as he moves over to lean against the barrier, taking a look around. The stage is still empty, but he can see a small group of people gathered on the steps of the Town Hall behind it, and there are deputies and WPDS officers lined up in front of the grand entrance, ostensibly to keep the crowd from trying to enter, although Stiles privately entertains the notion that it’s to keep the DRA party housed inside the building as long as possible. Officially, anyone in a uniform is supposed to act as a neutral party and refrain from showing support towards either side of the upcoming debates while they’re on-duty, but Stiles practically grew up around BHPD officers and he knows the kind of guys that his Dad employs.

A lot of his more positive childhood memories come from hours spent in the break room down at the station, or curled up on the couch in his father’s office. The deputies used to sneak him candy bars and comics when his father wasn’t looking, and often acted as babysitters when John had to work nightshifts. They’d dubbed him the ‘official station tour guide’ to rookie officers during their first week on the job (he’d been given a laminated badge with his name on it and everything), and his eight-year-old self had taken role very seriously, carefully hand-drawing maps of the station using marker pens and printer paper so that the new officers would know where the bathrooms and locker rooms were. And as he grew older, they’d taught him tricks of the trade – how to protect himself against fraud and how to stop somebody from picking your pockets – and if one of the cruisers passed him by on his way back from school when it was raining, they’d stop to drive him home so that he wouldn’t get wet. And of course they’d all been there to support him after that god-awful night when he’d rejected Matt’s offer to collar him and the psychopath had set out to put a bullet in his brain.

They aren’t the sort of officers who’ll turn around and start telling people that Submissives belong in the kitchen, and should be seen but not heard. He knows them. They’re good people.

Well, mostly. Deputy Haigh’s a dick, but he usually works desk duty, so that’s okay.

There’s a smaller crowd standing to the right of the stage, separated from the main throng by a couple of strategically placed barriers, and Stiles only needs to glance briefly at a couple of their protest signs before he realises they’re all Dominants Rights Activists. He arches an eyebrow at the group – there can’t be more than fifty of them, and there are at least a few hundred protestors standing on his side of the barrier.

“You think maybe everyone went a little overboard on security?” he asks over his shoulder, indicating the gathered DRA’s with a jerk of his thumb. “They don’t look all that threatening.”

“You say that now,” Lydia remarks dryly. “If my informant was telling the truth, there are three buses full of supporters due to arrive this afternoon. They knew the party wouldn’t sway a lot of Beacon Hills folk in their favour, so they brought along their own cheerleaders from across-state.”

Stiles pulls a face, because that sort of sounds like cheating, but he doesn’t say as much. A small slither of unease settles in the pit of his stomach, though. Because assuming that a bus can hold up to forty people, three of them adds another one-hundred and twenty supporters into the mix, and even though the protesters will still outnumber them easily, the probability of things turning ugly goes up by a good eighty percent if the supporters aren’t from Beacon Hills county. He’s seen the news reports and he’s read about some of the damage caused by DRA supporters – Centres attacked, Submissive-owned companies targeted, Switch and Neutral support clinics trashed. He isn’t keen on seeing that kind of thing happen in his hometown.

He wipes his sweaty palms on the tops of his jeans, sliding his cell phone out of his pocket when he feels it through the material and thumbing the screen to check the time. His heart leaps into his throat when he sees there’s an unread message from Derek Hale. He licks his lips, his stomach fluttering.
unpleasantly as he taps in the passcode to unlock the phone and opens his inbox.

Don’t worry about it. Stick with your group and steer clear of the supporters. I’ll text you later. x

Stiles reads the text at least six times, trying to work out if the ‘don’t worry about it’ is his Dom forgiving him for neglecting to tell him earlier, or whether the Alpha’s dismissing his apology because he’s cross. He reads the text again and the Derek-voice in his head sounds stern now and it fits, oh god. He knew it. Derek’s disappointed with him for coming here behind his back. And why does he needs to text him later? Is he going to cancel their evening plans? Shit, is he that angry?

Stiles takes a steadying breath and gives himself a firm mental slap, forcing the internal rush of panic back down again. He’s letting his Submissive tendencies get the better of him. Derek’s probably just busy and doesn’t have the time to talk things through right now. He is on duty, after all.

“Hey, something’s happening,” Kira says, bumping against his side as she leans over the barrier to look, almost taking Stiles’s eye out with her sign again. “Look, someone’s coming out!”

And she’s right; the doors to the town hall are opening, and as he watches, a handful of people emerge, preceded by BHPD officers. They’re dressed smartly in business suits despite the summer humidity, and Stiles vaguely recognises some of them from the campaign ads and the one-sided debates he found on Youtube (the ones he could barely suffer to watch right through to the end because they pissed him off so much). The DRA supporters to the right of the stage go crazy, and Stiles has to admit that they make an impressive amount of noise for such a small group, but the loud boos from the protesters drown out the ruckus easily enough.

But it’s one of his father’s deputies that ascends the metal steps on the side of the stage first, and the jeering of the crowd abruptly changes to applause as the man waves, the Sub-band on his wrist obvious against his pale skin as he walks up to the microphone mounted on the podium in the centre.

“Good morning, Beacon Hills,” he says cheerfully, and Stiles immediately recognises the voice as being Jordan Parrish, one of the BHPD’s newest transfers (the one who’s completely and obviously smitten with his father, seriously, it’s adorable, and Stiles has actively been trying to set them up for over three months now).

The crowd cheers loudly, Stiles among them, and Parrish’s smile stretches wider into a youthful grin.

“Before we can officially announce the start of the Equality Debates, a quick safety notice,” the officer continues with effortless charm. “I know there are a lot of us here today, and we’ve all got our own thoughts and opinions to contribute, but let’s keep our disagreements limited to verbal altercations, alright, guys? Violence and aggressive or harmful behaviour will not be tolerated, and anyone found violating the law will be subject to legal ramifications. Please be mindful of those around you, and don’t hesitate to report any concerns to myself or any of my colleagues.”

“Except that guy,” Parrish adds, and points to one of the deputies who’s standing in front of the stage, and the older officer (Greg, a tender-hearted Dom in his late forties who Stiles has known since he was six) rolls his eyes and grins. “That guy stole my coffee, he’s not to be trusted.”

There’s an easy round of laughter from the crowd, followed by a smattering of applause before Parrish raises his hand again for silence.

“Also, please be aware of the temperature outside today, and take necessary precautions,” he advises. “Make use of the water fountains towards the rear of the square, and seek medical advice from our first-aiders over in the med-tent if your start experiencing symptoms of heatstroke. Stay safe, ladies and gentlemen.” He nods and gives another wave. “Thank you for your time.”
The crowd cheers and applauds as Parrish descends the stairs again, joining the officers who have remained with the DRA officials at the foot of the steps to the town hall. Stiles spots his father moving closer to clap the young Sub on the back, his hand lingering there as he says something into the deputy’s ear, and it’s impossible to miss the wide, beaming smile Parrish him gives in return.

Yep. Smitten.

The morning session is actually fairly tame, compared to other protests that he’s attended. Maybe it’s because this is day one of seven, so the animosity can be a little more staggered. Still, it’s almost civilised, the way that leading members of the DRA group ascend onto the stage and give short, to-the-point (and fairly well-scripted) speeches about what their Equality Reform campaign aims to do. The crowd even offers each speaker a smattering of applause after they’re done.

There’s still the occasional burst of shouting from a few riled-up protestors, echoed enthusiastically by the crowd as a whole and countered by the DRA supporters, but it tends to settle down after a few minutes as the speaker at the podium ploughs onwards through the hubbub. Each speech seems to last almost exactly fifteen minutes, and Stiles begins to suspect that they’ve been told to stick to a strict time schedule in order to cram all of the campaign information into the morning session, thus leaving the afternoon free for open public debate before the official conference begins inside the town hall the next day.

Stiles finds himself struggling to concentrate on what’s going on, though. It’s not because he’s feeling claustrophobic – his friends have intentionally put him against the barrier so that there’s open space in front of him, and he’s got Lydia and Allison on his left and Kira on his right, with Danny and Jackson directly behind him. The crowd hasn’t been bothering him in the slightest.

It’s fucking Derek.

Well, no, that’s not fair. It’s not his Dom’s fault that Stiles can’t get a fucking grip. The guilt’s firmly planted root in his chest now, and he feels it every time he lets his mind wander, the Alpha’s text and his own stupid, ill-conceived lie springing to the forefront of his mind, driving that knife in his sternum ever deeper. Usually he loves a good debate, but by the time the crowd breaks for lunch and the overly-dressed speakers go back inside the town hall along with a good portion of the DRA
supporters, he’s wishing it were five o’clock already so that he could go and find his Dom and apologise to him properly. He’ll even bear the inevitable scolding and disappointed looks, he just wants a fucking hug.

“You smell upset,” Kira murmurs to him while they’re waiting in line with Danny at the crowded sandwich shop down the road. She slips her hand into his and gives it a squeeze. “What’s wrong?”

Stiles shakes his head and gives her a cheerful grin, although the falseness of it brings a sour taste to his mouth. “Nothing, I’m fine.”

Kira gives him a look, making it abundantly clear that she knows he’s lying, but doesn’t push the matter further. Although she sticks close by after that, linking their arms together as they carry bags of drinks and snacks and freshly-made wraps back to Kinsly Square, where Jackson and the girls have been waiting for them so that nobody tries to steal their spot at the front near the stage.

Allison’s sitting on the ground with her back against the barrier when they arrive, sipping from a water bottle as Jackson fans her with her own protest sign.

“What’s wrong?” Stiles asks, hurrying closer and dropping into a crouch beside Lydia, who’s kneeling on the ground (albeit on top of Jackson’s jacket) with Allison’s bare feet resting in her lap as she massages them diligently).

The pregnant Switch sends him a shaky smile, looking a shade paler than normal. “Low blood sugar,” she dismisses easily. “It’s too hot out here, and I should’ve eaten something before now. It’s my own fault.”

Stiles rummages in his paper bag for the barbeque pulled pork and mozzarella wrap he’d picked out for her, unwrapping the sandwich and passing it over, shrugging when Allison raises an eyebrow at the sheer size of it.

“Jellybean’s hungry too,” he insists cheerfully, and does an inner celebratory dance when that wins him a more genuine smile.

By the time they’ve polished off the food between them, she’s back to her usual, boisterous self (although Stiles stashes a couple of candy bars away in Allison’s purse in case she gets dizzy again later on), and cheers along with the rest of the crowd when another deputy mounts the stage to deliver the same safety announcement (alas, bereft of Jordan’s easy humour) to the growing crowd.

The DRA group has definitely quadrupled in size, louder and more enthusiastic than before as they chant something along the lines of “strong foundations for a brighter future”, whatever the fuck that’s supposed to mean. He assumes they’re suggesting that Submissives in the workforce are ‘weak links’ in the chain that will inevitably lead to the downfall of society or something equally as dramatic. Same old, same old.

But soon the chanting disintegrates into something less goal-focused, with members of the DRA singling out protest signs amongst the crowd and twisting the words to work in their favour, starting arguments and yelling insults and generally contributing to the animosity of the crowd as a whole. The supporters have somehow commandeered a loudspeaker, even though Stiles is pretty sure that town officials had prohibited the use of such devices (given that the focus is supposed to be on whoever was standing at the podium making speeches). But the stage still stands empty at the moment, and the crowd is growing increasingly more restless.

“What the fuck did you just call him?” a deep voice booms above the general hubbub.
The crowd falls silent, perhaps sensing that something exciting is about happen, raised cell phones swivelling towards the source of the shout. And as Stiles watches, a burly-looking man vaults over the barrier on the other side of the square and starts marching towards the blond-haired Dom who’s holding the loudspeaker.

“You said something about my husband,” the man repeats, as the DRA supporter backs away several paces at his rapid advance. “Want to say it again to my face?”

A beige-uniformed individual intercepts the protester before he can reach the spokesperson, and Stiles’s heart leaps into his throat when he sees that it’s Scott, the young Dom raising both hands up in front of him in a placating gesture and holding his ground even as the taller, broader man barrels straight into him, finger still pointed accusingly at the mouthy activist.

“You’re lucky, you know that?” the man bellows, trying to side-step Scott, who effortlessly moves with him to block his advances. “You’re lucky this kid’s here to protect your sorry ass, since you’re not tough enough to stand your fucking ground and face me like a Dom.”

Stiles can see Scott’s lips moving, probably in an attempt to calm the other Dom, but the man’s fists are still clenched tightly at his sides, arms trembling like he’s an inch from breaking point, and Stiles is legitimately worried that the guy might take a sudden swing at his best friend.

Suddenly Isaac’s there at Scott’s side, settling a hand on the protester’s shoulder and another on his wrist, his lips moving as he speaks too quietly to be heard above the murmuring of the crowd. But Stiles sees the tension easing from the man’s posture at the Were-Sub’s touch, and he’s nodding now, shoulders rising and falling as he takes deep, steadying breaths. Scott takes a step back, removing his hands from the other Dom but still blocking the way to where the DRA group have gathered.

“Damn,” Jackson murmurs appreciatively behind Stiles. “They’re good.”

He feels a swell of pride as he nods, grinning, because those are his bros and he’s always thought they were fucking awesome, but now everybody else knows it too. The crowd certainly seems to share the sentiment, because cheers and whistles break out among the protesters as Scott and Isaac slowly lead the Dom over to the far side of the square, where a few more officers are waiting with a shorter blond man, who wraps his arms around the Dom immediately. Judging by the way the man returns the embrace and buries his nose in the man’s hair, that’s the husband the picketer had insulted.

Stiles returns his attention to the mouthy activist only to see Deputy Parrish confidently wading his way through the throng of supporters to reach him. The officer comes to a halt in front of him (the DRA member is at least a good six inches taller and 80lbs bigger than Parrish) and holds out his hand expectantly towards the loudspeaker. Stiles sees the Dom scoff and glance around at his fellow supporters for aid, but they’re all looking decidedly less confident in themselves now that there’s a uniformed police officer in their midst. Stiles wonders if this dumbass is one of the activists who’s been bussed here from the other side of the State, because the small DRA following in Beacon Hills County will know well enough not to mess with their police department.

Stiles can see his Dad and a couple of other officers hurrying towards the group of supporters to provide backup in case it’s needed, but wading through the throng of people is proving more difficult now that the crowd’s attention is focused on whatever’s brewing between Dumbass and Parrish, so their progression is slow.

Too slow.

The deputy says something to the picketer, then reaches for the loudspeaker as if to physically take it
from the uncooperative Dom instead, only for Dumbass to hold it up out of reach with an arched eyebrow, a smile playing around his lips.

“Uh-oh,” Allison says softly beside him, but there’s a soft note of amusement in her voice, no doubt realising the activist’s fatal mistake, having worked shifts with Deputy Parrish right up until her maternity leave started a few weeks ago.

“Bad move,” Stiles concurs cheerfully.

Parrish doesn’t give the Dom long to gloat. Stiles sees him relax his posture and shoot the Dom a calm, bland smile, before abruptly grabbing the arm that’s not raised and twisting it around the man’s back, bodily marching him through the crowd of supporters (who part like the Red Sea before the pair), and taking him smoothly to the ground once he’s at a safe distance from the group to minimise the risk of injury.

Dumbass doesn’t seem keen to stay down without a fight, though, and flings the loudspeaker over his shoulder with a bellowed, “Fucking take it, then!”

Unfortunately, busy as he is pinning the thrashing Dominant down, Parrish isn’t able to block the heavy projectile that hurtles full-pelt towards his head, and the resounding ‘clunk’ as it collides with the side of his face echoes loudly in the brief moment of stunned silence that has fallen. Sounds of shock and outrage and sympathetic hisses ripple through the crowd as Jordan cants sideways sharply, catching himself with one arm before he can faceplant against the ground, somehow still managing to keep hold of the Dom’s wrist.

The other police officers have broken into a sprint, but beige-uniformed WPDS officials reach the Sub first, and Stiles recognises the Boyd’s dark skin and muscular frame as the Werewolf effortlessly takes over from Parrish, securing both of the activist’s wrists behind his back as Erica – her curly blond hair pulled back in a high pony-tail today rather than hanging loose – crouches down to assess the deputy’s condition. Parrish has a hand pressed against the side of his head, but he seems otherwise unhurt, and has already started climbing slowly to his feet (with Erica’s aid) by the time the Sheriff and the other deputies have wrestled their way through the DRA group to reach them.

Stiles’s heart is still in his throat, his fingers aching where they’re gripping the rail of the barrier, the panic slowly receding as he watches the Sub being shepherded towards the Med-tent on the far side of the square by his father and a handful of WPDS officers as Boyd and the other deputies cuff the activist and yank him upright to march him in the opposite direction, towards where a few cruisers are parked along the main road. The crowd cheers enthusiastically, but it’s all white noise to Stiles, whose ears are ringing as he takes deep, steadying breaths in an attempt to calm his racing pulse.

“Stiles?” Kira settles a hand over his clenched ones, her gaze worried as she gently tilts his chin towards her. “You okay?”

He nods, taking another deep breath as he slowly, carefully relinquishes his grip on the rail. Everything’s okay. Nobody pulled a gun on anyone, none of the deputies are dead. That isn’t going to happen to him again. Jordan’s fine. Or at least as fine as someone can be after being gifted with a heavy piece of technology right to the face.

He eyes the Med-tent, anxiety still brimming near the surface, and slips his hand out from underneath Kira’s quickly as he steps back. “Wait here, okay? I won’t be gone long.”

He hears his friends call after him, but he’s already weaving his way through the crowd
determinedly, gritting his teeth against the feeling of being crushed from all sides, blocking out the overwhelming surge of noise by focusing on how many footsteps it takes to reach the peripheral barrier of the square. He squeezes through the narrow gap between two barriers that haven’t been linked together properly, and jogs across the grass towards the large Med-tent.

Stiles is so focused on reaching his intended destination that he fails to slow down when a beige-uniformed figure suddenly steps through the entrance and right into his path.

But instead of the disastrous collision his mind immediately envisions, the other person doesn’t even react when he smacks right into her at top-speed, other than to catch him gently by the shoulders when his momentum causes him to bounce backwards again.

“Oh god, I’m so sorry,” he apologises, breathless and a little stunned, blinking to refocus his gaze before glancing up at the unfortunate victim of his klutziness. Only to freeze, eyes wide, and stare at her stupidly, because he’s just gone and collided with Laura freaking Hale, co-manager of the town’s Werewolf Pan-Dynamic Services.

“Ma’am,” he tacks on after a second, because he can be polite. Sometimes.

The smile she gives him in return is bright and easy. “Don’t worry about it, hun. No harm, no foul.” Then her gaze flickers downwards briefly to glance at his collar and her nostrils flare, and suddenly she’s grinning and sliding her hands from the Sub’s shoulders to grip his upper arms instead. “Hey, it’s Stiles, right? I’m Laura Hale. Derek’s my dorky kid brother.”

He returns the smile, inwardly praying to any and all deities that she didn’t just get a whiff of the sexy-sexy times he and Derek partook in last night. He did shower this morning. Quite thoroughly. But Werewolves, man; their noses are pretty sharp.

“Nice to meet you, Ma’am,” he says, and means it, because her smile is like Derek’s – wide and genuine and full of warmth – and it settles his frazzled nerves a little. “And sorry again about, y’know, tackling you like that. I just wanted to check up on Deputy Parrish.”

“Friend of yours?” Laura asks, her countenance gentling a little, perhaps sensing the anxiety that’s still bubbling close to the surface.

“Sorta.” He’s the guy I’m kinda hoping will eventually be my Step-Dad, he thinks but doesn’t say. “He works down at the station, and I tend to spend hang out there a lot, y’know? Uh, with my Dad,” he adds hastily, before she gets the wrong end of the stick and labels him as a repeat offender or something. “My Dad’s the Sheriff.”

The Dom grins, her eyes crinkling at the corners just like Derek’s do, and lifts a hand to ruffle his hair as she steps back. “I can see why my brother likes you.” Then she wraps a companionable arm around his shoulders and steers him towards the tent opening. “The deputy’s fine, sweetheart. Lucky his head’s so hard.”

“That’s verbal harassment, Ma’am,” Jordan pipes up from where he’s sitting beside the Sheriff on a padded examination table, swinging his legs idly to and fro over the side. He’s got an ice pack pressed against the side of his head and there’s a nasty-looking bruise sitting high up on his right cheekbone, the skin broken and bleeding a little, but he’s still smiling and seems otherwise unaffected by his injuries.

“It’s factual, Deputy,” Laura counters, amused. “Why is it that every time we work an op together, you wind up injured?”
Parrish grins charmingly. “Natural talent.” Then his gaze shifts over to look at Stiles and the expression softens into something warmer. “Hey, kid. Please tell me you have video footage, I wanna see if it looked as dramatic as it felt.”

Stiles rolls his eyes, but the casual comment has the desired effect – he can feel the anxiety receding in his chest, his pulse slowing, some of the tension seeping from his shoulders as they sag in relief. His father doesn’t miss the movement, the man’s brow crinkling a little as he drops his hand from Jordan’s neck and hops down from the med-cot, crossing the tent towards him.

“Are you alright?” his Dad asks quietly, settling a hand on his shoulder.

Stiles shoots a quick glance towards Laura, but the Werewolf has wandered over to chat with one of the medics on the far side of the tent. He sighs and allows his body to sag against his father’s chest. What he really needs is a hug from Derek, but his Dad will do at a pinch.

“Long day,” he dismisses, because it has been. He doesn’t say why it’s been a long day, or that guilt and worry and self-reproach have left a permanent ache in his chest that’s making it hard to focus, because he doesn’t want to worry the Dom.

“Mm,” John agrees, wrapping his arms around the younger man. “Do you need me to take you home?”

Stiles opens his mouth to say no – he doesn’t want to abandon his friends, and he’s never ditched on a protest halfway through before – but then he pauses to reflect on what he really wants to do. He’s tired, and so fucking emotional that watching Parrish take a loudspeaker to the face had almost triggered him, and the longer he stays here, the worse that’s going to get. At least at home it’ll be quiet, and he can distract himself with a movie or the internet or his writing until five o’clock rolls around and Derek comes to pick him up. He can keep it together until then. Probably.

“Stiles?”

He sighs again and nods. “Yeah. Maybe.”

John brushes a kiss against the side of his head before turning to face Laura, although he keeps an arm around Stiles. “Hey, Laura, you mind keeping an eye on my deputy for me?”

“Sure, Sheriff,” the Dom agrees cheerfully, smiling as Jordan groans in protest. But her smile fades a little when her gaze shifts to Stiles, and she reaches out to squeeze his hand when they walk past on the way to the exit. “You need me to call Derek, hun? He’s still at the Centre.”

Stiles shakes his head quickly. The last thing he needs is Laura telling Derek that he smells miserable, it’d only worry the Dom unnecessarily, and the Alpha has a job to do. Besides, it’s not like he’s dropping or anything. Things aren’t that bad just yet.

“No thanks, I’ll be okay. But I’ll text him,” he promises, because Laura doesn’t look particularly reassured. “We’ve already arranged to meet up later anyway.”

She nods and gives his hand another squeeze, smiling warmly. “We’ll talk more when you’re feeling better. Get Derek to give you my number, we can go for coffee or something later this week. I’d love to get to know you better.”

Stiles finds himself returning the smile, despite the turmoil of emotion building to a fractious broil in his chest. Maybe all the Hales have the same weirdly soothing effect on people. Derek and Laura are certainly experts at it. Or maybe that’s just part of their WPDS training.
“Sure,” he agrees. “That’d be awesome.”

*Let’s just hope Derek hasn’t dumped you by then for being a shitty Submissive,* remarks the self-deprecating voice in the back of his mind, and Stiles resolutely ignores it.

Or at least he tries to. Judging by the concerned looks his Dad keeps shooting him once they’re in the cruiser and driving away from the crowded square, he’s not entirely successful.

……………………………………..

It feels like an eternity before five o’clock rolls around. He’s managed to placate his Dom’s concerns with numerous texts (*I’m fine, Derek, it just got a bit too crowded for me.* / *Wasn’t really feeling it, and Dad offered to drive me home so I said yes.* / *Dude, no, you don’t need to come over. I’m fine. Just tired. And I’ll see you after work in a couple of hours, right?*), but the long wait has only served to worsen the ache in his chest.

He’s *tried* distracting himself with Youtube and Netflix and Tumblr, but nothing really worked, and he spends an age staring at the ceiling of his bedroom while he hugs a pillow to his chest and reflects on how much he’s fucked up over the course of the day.

He knows his Dad’s worried about him, and seriously he feels this close to crying that if the Dom comes in to ask if he’s alright one more time, he’ll end up having a total breakdown. Which is *not* allowed to happen.

Fucking emotions. He *hates* it when he gets like this.

His phone buzzes; it’s a text from Derek to let him know that he’s just arrived. Stiles exhales a shaky sigh, combing his fingers through his hair to neaten it (he always tugs at it when he’s nervous or stressed) before grabbing his jacket and heading downstairs. He calls a quick “later, Dad!” through the door of the living room before he leaves, grateful when his voice doesn’t waver, and jogs over to where Derek’s parked at the foot of the driveway, hoping that his frantic pulse will be dismissed as a consequence of physical exertion rather than emotional distress.

Derek’s got the windows rolled down, and he shoots Stiles a warm smile as the Sub opens the door and climbs inside, leaning across the gearstick to cup the Sub’s cheek and brush their lips together.
Stiles can literally feel the moment when his Dom senses that something’s wrong, Derek’s mouth stilling against his lips as he freezes, before pulling back an inch or so to look at him, nostrils flaring as he inhales and oh god, Stiles probably smells like a Sub-drop waiting to happen.

“What’s wrong?” the Alpha murmurs, and his eyes are so full of concern, the backs of his fingers stroking his cheek so tenderly, that it’s all Stiles can do not to burst into tears right then and there.

As it is, there’s a horrible lump in his throat, hot and achy and hard, and he can’t swallow past it enough to speak so he just shakes his head and clings onto the Alpha’s wrist with both hands to keep him close. Derek makes a noise of distress in the back of his throat, leaning in closer to press their foreheads together, his brow still creased.

“Stiles,” he says, quietly, helplessly, like the sight of his Sub so emotionally distressed is physically painful for him, too. And maybe it is. Stiles knows Scott experiences similar symptoms whenever Isaac starts to drop.

The Dom nuzzles his cheek, kisses the corner of his mouth, and pulls back to look at him again. “I’m taking us home, okay?”

Stiles nods, grateful that Derek isn’t pushing him for answers now; that he’s willing to wait until they’re somewhere more private and more secure where Stiles can unashamedly bury himself in Derek’s arms and confess all of his recent fuck-ups without fear of being overheard.

Still, it’s a painful drive. Even though Derek’s touching his hand or his neck or his knee almost the whole time, it’s still not enough. And it’s torture, to have the Dom so close but to be confined to sitting in his own seat rather than in the Alpha’s lap like he feels compelled to do. His throat feels achy the whole way, his eyes stinging with the promise of tears, and fucking shitballs, he’s going to cry the moment they reach the apartment, he just knows it.

He’s not wrong.

No sooner has Derek closed the door behind them and pulled Stiles into a hug than the dam breaks, and before he can even put his brain into gear, his heart’s spilling secrets all over the place. And once the words start, there’s no stopping them, confessions bubbling up to the surface one after the other – how he deliberately evaded his Dom’s question last night so that he wouldn’t have to tell him about the protest, how he’d delayed texting the Alpha until the last possible minute and then fucking lied by claiming that he’d simply forgotten. About how he’d spent all day regretting it and feeling like shit, only to text his Dom with false reassurances that he was fine, that he was just tired, and how those lies had made him feel even crappier.

Derek holds him close, rubbing his back, and lets Stiles yammer on for God knows how long without interruption, until he runs out of words and slumps against the Dom’s chest, feeling utterly wretched.

But rather than scolding him straight away, his Dom steers him gently along the hallway and through to the living room, taking a seat on the couch and pulling Stiles down to sit in his lap, tucking the Sub’s head under his chin and wrapping his arms around him securely. And ohhh, that feels better. He still feels like shit, but the emotions are dampened now, and the self-deprecating voice in his head has finally been muted.

He takes a deep, steadying breath, although it hitches in his aching throat, and curls his fingers into Derek’s shirtfront. “I’m really sorry, Derek.”

The Dom squeezes him gently. “I know. And I forgive you.”
Stiles blinks, frowning a bit against Derek’s neck. “But I should’ve-”

“Shh,” Derek hushes him, cupping the back of his neck. “No. I need you to listen to me for a minute, okay?” He waits until the Sub nods miserably against his shoulder before continuing. “You made a couple of bad decisions today, but that doesn’t mean I’m angry with you. Or disappointed.”

The Sub’s frown deepens, because that’s not how it works. Derek’s not just supposed to dismiss things like that. He fucked up. He disobeyed rules and he feels so fucking awful about it, he can’t just accept forgiveness like that. He needs…he needs Derek to react in some way, dammit.

“And although I’m proud of you for owning up to your faults,” Derek continues before Stiles can grow too frustrated over how easily it has all blown over, “you did lie to me.”

Stiles curls himself further into his Dom’s hold, the ache in his chest growing sharp again. “I know.”

“But not about the protest,” the Alpha murmurs, and Stiles’s brow furrows again because wait, what?

He pulls back a little to peer up at the Dom, meeting Derek’s calm gaze. “But I should’ve told you about it,” he insists quietly, his voice still shaky. “And I didn’t. Isn’t…isn’t that lying by omission?”

“But you did tell me,” Derek points out gently, stroking the backs of his fingers down the Sub’s cheek again. “Granted, you left it until you were en-route to the protest, but you still let me know where you were going. And that was the rule, Stiles. You just have to keep me updated on what you’re doing, you don’t need to warn me in advance.”

“Oh.” Stiles sags a little, relieved. He’s been beating himself up over the lying-by-omission thing all day, so it’s nice to know that he can strike that item off his lengthy list of crimes.

“But you did lie to me this afternoon,” his Dom tells him, cupping his chin to keep their eyes locked. “You told me you were ‘fine’, and now it’s pretty clear that you’ve been beating yourself up over this all day. A few more hours and you might’ve Dropped. You know how important it is to tell someone if you’re struggling, and you should’ve called me the moment it all became too much.”

The Dom’s tone is sterner now, although his voice his still calm and soft, and Stiles can feel his throat tightening again at the gentle scolding. He’s already so fucking raw from the emotional turmoil he’s shouldered over the past six hours, and Derek’s careful but ultimately chiding words are nudging him dangerously close to the brink of tears again. His jaw’s threatening to tremble, so he grits his teeth and tries not to blink, knowing that the dampness in his eyes is bound to spill over if he does.

Derek studies his expression for a moment, before leaning in to press a kiss against the Sub’s forehead. “Okay,” he murmurs, and presses another kiss to the same spot. “Okay. How about we take care of this now and then put it behind us, alright?”

On the one hand, Stiles is so fucking relieved that Derek’s going to offer him a method of absolution, but on the other hand he really, really doesn’t want to be spanked. Because it’ll involve his Dom and discipline and more crying, and that’s always going to be something he doesn’t want.

“I know,” Derek murmurs when Stiles shakes his head and clings to him harder. “Okay. How about we take care of this now and then put it behind us, alright?”

And then the Dom’s hands are sliding down, one deftly unbuttoning the front of Stiles’s jeans as the other settles on his hip, and a moment later he’s being carefully flipped over to rest across Derek’s lap, the Dom’s strong thighs supporting him at the waist and his upper body resting partially on the
padded seat of the couch, and it’s all so smooth and sudden that it takes him a moment to realise that this is really happening, that his Dom’s about to spank him, oh fuck, oh fuck, oh fuck…

“I’m sorry,” he says again, because he is, and his voice is thick with tears this time, his eyes brimming with moisture like they always are when he finds himself in this position.

He can’t help the miserable whine of protest when Derek gently tugs his pants down all the way to his ankles, pausing to carefully tug his shoes off (the soft thunk as they hit the floor one by one sounds scarily loud in the sudden silence of the room) before pulling the jeans off altogether. Then he gently eases Stiles’s underwear down to mid-thigh, and the Sub whines again, reaching for a nearby cushion to give him something to wrap his arms around and bury his face into. His dad never leaves his pants up, either, but it’s always so much quicker than this. Derek’s adjusting him in his lap so carefully and diligently, and it just makes the whole situation feel so much worse, reinforcing the realisation that it’s his Dom who’s about to spank him and not his Dad or Scott.

The first spank takes him completely by surprise, because it’s hard. Like, really hard. And for a moment the breath’s knocked out of him, he’s that stunned, mouth open and eyes wide as the white-hot sting fades to something deeper and fans out across his cheek. And just as he’s managed to suck in a breath to compensate for the temporary asphyxiation, the second swat falls on the opposite cheek and ow, ow, no, no, he doesn’t like this, not one bit.

“Derek,” he whines, tearfully this time, and presses his lips together when his chin threatens to tremble, and tries to twist away from the third swat.

The arm around his waist (the one that’s been draped over him loosely so far) tightens a little to anchor him in closer, leaving him with no means to escape the next blow. And soon enough the swats begin to fall in a slow, steady rhythm, and although they’re lighter than the initial few spanks, they still feel awful, terrible, and he wants it to stop.

The worst thing is, it’s nothing like how his Dad or Scott spank him. His Dad’s swats are firm and heavy and rapid-fire, so that Stiles is bent over and spanked and then up again for a cuddle in under a minute with a thoroughly scorched behind, and Scott’s method is similar, with two-dozen or so spanks delivered in less than ten seconds over his jeans so that Stiles has barely had a chance to do more than burst into tears and kick a bit before it’s all over.

Derek’s method of discipline is so completely different. He’s slow and steady, and every spank feels deliberate and carefully measured, and it’s just awful. He was already on the brink of tears before they started, so by the time Derek establishes a rhythm, he’s crying miserably into the cushion, face hot and nose running and throat achy and ugh, it’s horrible.

But that god-awful pain in his chest has gone, and he can feel every lingering shard of guilt and regret and self-reproach fading with each passing second, because he doesn’t need to punish himself any more, Derek’s disciplining him for his disobedience, his Dom’s taking care of it.

And maybe it’s relief more than anything – more than Derek’s steadily falling hand or the stinging fire in his backside – that finally tips him over the edge and leaves him muffling loud, guttural sobs into the cushion beneath him, wanting nothing more than to be cocooned safely in his Dom’s arms.

Which is exactly where he finds himself seconds later when Derek stops spanking him abruptly and has his underwear pulled up, Stiles righted in his lap and his arms wrapped around the Sub all in the blink of an eye.

“Shhh,” Derek hushes, as Stiles clings to him and cries into his shirtfront. “It’s done, it’s over. You were so good for me, Stiles, such a good boy. I’m here, I’ve got you.”
“M’s-sorry,” Stiles says again, breath hitching as he tries to bury himself closer into Derek’s hold.

“I know,” the Alpha murmurs, stroking a hand through his hair and pressing tender kisses to his brow, his nose, his damp cheeks. “I know, Stiles. We’re okay, everything’s alright.”

It takes him a while to stop crying, but he doesn’t really mind. It’s not the same miserable, wretched crying as before, but rather just an after-effect of having been disciplined by his Dom; soft, sniffling sobs and a steady flow of tears. His ass is hot and stinging, but even a paddled backside feels a thousand times better than the internal torment he’d suffered through during the afternoon. And it’s hard to feel put-out over a stinging rear when Derek’s holding him so tenderly and telling him how good he is, how brave, how much Derek loves him and-


He lifts his head from Derek’s shoulder to nuzzle along the Alpha’s jaw, breath still hitching every few seconds. “Love you too.”

Derek cups his cheeks, tilting his head up for a gentle kiss. Stiles melts into it, feeling so amazingly calm inside now. The emotional turmoil of before had been so overwhelming, he’d almost forgotten what it was like to be burden-free. And he’s sore, and tired, and feels kinda dehydrated after all that crying, but Derek loves him so everything’s perfect.

He scrubs the back of his hand over his eyes when he finally pulls away, the lids scratchy and stinging after all that crying, and he winces once his gaze has refocused and he spots the large damp patch he’s left on the shoulder of Derek’s uniform shirt.

“Sorry,” he says, his voice croaky.

His Dom smiles gently, brushing a thumb over one tear-damp cheek. “You don’t need to apologise for crying, Stiles. That’s sort of the point.”

Stiles shifts a little in Derek’s lap and winces. “My ass hurts,” he complains, a petulant grumble as he sags back against the Dom’s chest.

“Also the point,” Derek murmurs, amused.

But the Dom’s hand still slides down to grip his wrist gently, and a moment later the worst of the sting is gone, criss-crossing up the Alpha’s arm in thick black lines. Derek’s brow creases, the briefest flicker of pain, but it’s gone in a split second as soon as the lines have disappeared, and the smile he gives the younger man is warm and affectionate.

“There.” He raises the appendage to his mouth and kisses the back of Stiles’s knuckles. “Better?”

The Sub smiles and snuggles closer. “Mm.”

He’s fast asleep in less than a minute.
Thanks for reading! Sorry about the slightly delayed update, this chapter just kept growing and growing until it was double the usual size. Hope you liked it! I didn't want to rush the protest because it's an important universe point, and I didn't want to rush the Sterek scene because the first discipline session was an important relationship milestone for the pair too, so I ended up taking my time with both and the chapter was close to 12000 words by the end of it. Ooops. :P

Let me know your thoughts!

Also, Hale Family mayhem coming up. Can I hear a HELL YEAH? :P
Stiles wakes up at six-thirty the next morning in Derek’s bed, half-sprawled across the Alpha’s chest, feeling warm and safe and…and absolutely *ravenous*.

Which is hardly surprising, really – he hasn’t eaten anything since the Thai sweet-chilli chicken wrap he’d practically inhaled for lunch yesterday. He’d felt too guilt-ridden to stomach anything after his Dad had driven him home, and given the fact that he’d fallen asleep right after Derek had spa-

*Oh god.*

The events of the previous evening return to him in a sudden rush of clarity. He cringes, feeling heat creeping into his cheeks as he curls into Derek’s loose hold a little further.

He’s not…he’s not *embarrassed* about what had happened between them, not exactly. Derek had given him exactly what he’d needed to pull him out of that horrible downward spiral of internal self-flagellation. But even so, there’s a part of him that’s a teeny-tiny bit ashamed that it had to happen so *soon* in their relationship - especially after he’d promised himself that he wasn’t going to screw up as often as he did at home.

Still, maybe it’s for the best. He doesn’t have to worry about Derek’s disciplinary methods anymore – he knows exactly what to expect. And while admittedly, the spanking itself had been *horrible*, Stiles had desperately needed it. His mind’s at peace now. Hell, he can’t even feel any lingering soreness from his trip over Derek’s knee, which is a pleasant surprise. The burning sting had been painfully intense last night; but then it always is when he’s being punished, and there’s rarely any evidence left by morning.

Now all that’s left is a growing warmth in his chest; a feeling of security and contentment that brings a sleepy, happy smile to his face and induces a renewed surge of affection for the dozing Alpha he’s tucked up against.

Stiles leans in to steal a quick kiss. “Hi.”

Derek’s mouth curls into a smile beneath the Sub’s lips, even as his eyes slide closed again. “Hey.” He draws in a deep breath, stretching one arm above his head with a tired groan. “What time is it?”

“Oh…” Stile glances towards the bedside alarm clock briefly, then dips back down to nuzzle Derek’s jaw, hoping that affection will benefit his cause. “Six-thirty?”

His Dom makes a disgruntled sound, moving his arm back down again and sliding a hand beneath Stiles’s shirt to rub his lower back. “S’too early, babe. Go back to sleep.”

“I’m not tired,” Stiles protests, smiling at the way Derek’s words slur when he’s sleepy. He kisses a line down the Alpha’s throat. “And besides, you need to get up for work in, like, an hour anyway.”

“E’zactly,” Derek mumbles, and adjusts his hold around the Sub, tugging Stiles down to lie facing
him and tucking the younger man’s head beneath his chin. “Sleep.”

Stiles huffs a quiet laugh against the Alpha’s throat. “Derek.”

“Hn-nn.”

Yup. Grumpy, sleepy, cuddly, early-morning Derek might just be his favourite kind of Derek.

“But I’m hungry, Sir,” he wheedles, stroking his hand lazily up and down Derek’s side while the Alpha holds him close. “You don’t want me to starve, right?”

“I’ll make you pancakes,” Derek promises, the words muffled by the Sub’s hair.

Stiles grins. “Awesome.”

“When the alarm goes off.”

Groaning in exaggerated frustration, Stiles wriggles in Derek’s hold, which only serves to make the Alpha grunt and cuddle him closer. Stiles wonders, with a dopey, indulgent smile on his face as he rests his cheek against his Dom’s collarbone, if Derek’s pack are aware that their big, strong, dominant Alpha is a serial hugger; whether he’s like this with Erica and Boyd, and with the other junior WPDS college recruits who count themselves as his Betas, or if it’s a behind-closed-doors thing. Werewolves, as a rule, tend to be pretty tactile, but not everyone’s as free with their affection as Scott, who snuggled up with Stiles during naptime on their first day of Kindergarten and has never really let go.

But then he remembers Isaac, and how quick Derek had been to pull the distressed Beta into his arms the other week when the Sub was showing signs of a guilt-drop. And afterwards, how natural they’d looked together on the couch; Derek calm and at ease with the younger Wolf curled up against him; Isaac red-eyed and sniffling but ultimately contented in the Dominant’s arms.

But is Derek like that with all of his Betas? Maybe he makes an exception for Isaac. People often do make an exception for Isaac, although that’s not really the Sub’s fault. He just tends to awaken a fierce protective instinct in every Dominant he meets. (It’s the big eyes and the curly hair and that does it, Stiles is certain.)

“What are you thinking about?” Derek murmurs, startling him from his thoughts. The Alpha’s thumb traces the fond smile that’s curling at the younger man’s lips.

Stiles kisses the digit gently. “Your pack.”

He can feel it when Derek pauses, the Dom’s hand stilling where it’s been absently stroking back and forth over the curve of his buttocks and upper thighs.

“My pack,” he echoes, confused.

“Mm.” Stiles bumps his nose against Derek’s collarbone. “They’re important to you. I’d like to get to know them. And Laura, too.”

“Laura,” Derek repeats, his confusion still evident.

“Sorry, yeah, I forgot to tell you. We bumped into each other yesterday – hah, kinda literally, actually.” He grins at his own pun and snuggles closer. “Anyway, she wants to go for coffee.”

“Coffee.”
Stiles huffs a quiet laugh and kisses the base of Derek’s throat. “I think there’s an echo in here, Sir.”

Derek stirs beneath him, pulling away enough to look at Stiles properly, a hand sliding up to curl lightly around the front of his neck over the soft leather collar. The Alpha still looks half asleep, but his gaze is more focused than before as he studies Stiles carefully.

“You want to meet my pack?” he reiterates.

“Dude, yeah.” Stiles grins. “Scott talks about them, like, all the time – and all good things, I promise. I know he and Isaac are both super happy with you. Happier than they ever were with the faculty Alphas at UCLA, anyway. You take good care of them.”

“They’re my Betas,” Derek answers simply, and the warmth in his voice is unmistakable as he traces the woven pattern on his Sub’s collar. Then he pauses again, his gaze flickering up again, a hopeful sort of look in his eyes. “You really want to meet them?”

Stiles can’t resist leaning in to kiss the corner of his mouth. “Yes, Sir.”

Derek’s answering smile is gorgeous – wide and warm and happy in a way that makes the corner of his eyes do that crinkling thing Stiles likes so much. The Alpha cups his jaw to slot their mouths together properly, pulling him close with his other arm, and morning breath is a forgotten detail as his Dom kisses him thoroughly, rolling them over so that Stiles is beneath him and plundering his mouth like it’s a competitive sport until Stiles finally has to pull away half an inch in order to avoid asphyxiation.

“Come to work with me,” Derek says, a breathless request against his open mouth. The Dom steals another kiss, lighter this time. “Please?”

Stiles grins and rolls his hips up to meet the Alpha’s (because hey, he’s a young Submissive with a hot, mostly-naked Dom on top of him – he has needs, man), reaching up to run his fingers through Derek’s hair.

“Duh.”

“Duh?” Derek echoes, brow arched, a playful glint in his eyes. He gently snatches up the Sub’s wrist to pin his arm against the mattress. “Is that any way to talk to your Dom?”

“I can be polite,” the younger man assures him, still grinning, and adds (after a deliberate pause), “Sir.”

“Mm-hm.” Derek snatches up his other wrist for good measure and leans down to nose along the Sub’s jaw, growling low in his throat when Stiles obligingly tilts his chin up to expose his neck.

“You wanna try that again without the attitude?”

“Maybe.” Stiles sucks in a sharp breath when Derek gives his skin an answering nip. He bucks his hips up again, straining against the hands holding his wrists just so that he can bask in the feeling of being so effortless immobilised by his Dom. “But only- hnnn! Only if there’s pancakes.”

Derek snorts a quiet laugh against his throat, then pulls back a little to hover over him, grinning.

“You’re a brat,” he says, fondly. “You know that, right?”

Stiles shrugs as best he can with his arms pinned, smiling dazedly up at the Alpha. “You might’ve mentioned it once or twice, yeah.” He rolls his hips up a third time against Derek’s crotch, moaning appreciatively at what he can feel swelling there. “But you like that, don’t you, Sir?”
“I like you,” Derek tells him, low and sincere, as his eyes slowly bleed red. And there isn’t a whole lot of talking after that.

In the end, Stiles gets smoking-hot sex and pancakes. Booyah.

“Are you sure they won’t mind?” Stiles asks for the twentieth time when they finally pull into the rear parking lot of Beacon Hills’ WPDS centre.

Derek sighs softly, reaching across to cup the back of his Sub’s neck, stroking his thumb against the sensitive patch of skin behind the younger man’s ear. “You don’t have to do this if you don’t want to.”

“No, I want to,” Stiles insists, chin dipping down towards his chest, an instinctual motion at the Alpha’s touch. “I just don’t want to get in anybody’s way.”

“You won’t,” Derek promises. “Like I said, a lot of employees bring their partners to work. The clinic wing and emergency drop-in centre are swipe card access only, so they’ll be off-limits, but you’re free to wander anywhere else. Besides,” and here he gently grasps Stiles by the chin, turning his head so that the Sub is looking at him, the Alpha’s smile warm and affectionate, “I’m your Dom. You’re already Pack to them.”

Stiles feels his nerves settling at the words, and manages to return the smile. He unfastens his seatbelt and leans across to brush a kiss against Derek’s cheek, a wordless ‘thank-you’.

“Okay. Let’s do this thing.”

It’s only just gone eight o’clock, so the Centre’s fairly quiet when Derek swipes his card against the access panel beside the staff entrance and leads him inside. Stiles hasn’t seen this part of the building before, having entered through the main door last time he’d visited, and he peers around keenly at the closed storerooms and locked offices, sunlight streaming in through the rows of windows that line one side of the long corridor.
"This wing’s primarily used by the Admin team,” Derek tells him, taking Stiles by the hand and interlocking their fingers together as they walk. He nods at another closed office door, the narrow window giving Stiles a view of a vast room beyond filled with desks and high-tech looking computers. “Finance and management.” He gestures towards the next door. “Media and broadcasting.”

“Like the radio slots?” Stiles queries.

Derek nods. “Mm. And apparently there’s a Youtube channel, although I have to put my hands up and admit that I haven’t actually had time to check it out yet.”

Stiles has. Extensively. But he’s not about to admit to his insomnia-driven, stalkerish ways.

“The community Health and Social Care team are based here,” Derek continues, gesturing down a shorter corridor that branches off from the main one. “They mostly do home-visits, although they’ve got a few rooms in the clinic wing, too. They probably account for about fifty percent of the Centre’s annual workload. Great team.”

They’re nice people too, from what Stiles remembers. He didn’t get a lot of home visits after the whole nightmare with Matt Daehler, since it wasn’t a family incident and there weren’t any domestic concerns, but he’d gone to the adolescent drop-in clinic every day for weeks after that night, and had attended regular appointments with a couple of the HCS therapists right up until he’d graduated from high school. Although by the time he’d left for college, the appointments had only been every couple of months, the nightmares infrequent enough that they weren’t interfering with his schoolwork anymore.

He’d gone to the student support centre at UCLA too, but only once or twice. Living with Scott (and later on, Isaac) had made additional counselling unnecessary. Scott would wake him from nightmares before they’d even fully taken shape in his subconscious, and sharing an apartment with two Werewolves meant that there were very few secrets between them. They knew when he needed space, when he needed a hug, when he needed to be dragged outside to play Frisbee for hours at a time until he’d burned off all of his pent-up nervous energy…and often they’d initiated a plan of action before Stiles had even acknowledged these needs himself.

Not that he’s still battling with those kind of issues nowadays. At least not as often. Sometimes a scene in a movie or a late-night TV show will yank unwanted memories to the forefront of his mind for a short period of time, but he’s past the point now where he’d class things as ‘triggering’. The panic attacks stopped long ago, and all he experiences these days is the occasional spike of fear-fuelled adrenaline before rational thinking and calm reasoning (from a voice in his head that it’s taken years to empower) take over and remind him that the memories can only harm him if he allows them to. And he doesn’t. Not anymore.

The whole ‘Matt’ thing isn’t a subject he’s brought up around his Dom yet. Not because he still struggles with the psychological ramifications of going through something like that, but because it’s simply not an easy topic to breach. There never seems to be a good time. They’ve talked about boundaries and personal limits, of course – about what they both want and need from each other – but since blood-play and consent-play had both been a firm no from Derek before Stiles had even brought them up as two of his own limits, there hadn’t really been any point in him explaining why. And that’s the only opening that might’ve worked. There’s no easy way of saying “hey, so when I was sixteen there was this creepy Dom at my school who went psycho and shot three of my dad’s deputies because I wouldn’t go out with him”.

“Morning, dorkface!”
Stiles pulls himself from his thoughts to find that they’ve reached the Centre’s staffroom. It’s the same one Erica had led him to last time – a vast, well-lit room that overlooks the gardens, filled with beanbags and cushions and couches and armchairs. It’s empty at the moment, except for Laura Hale, who’s standing over by a refreshments bar on the far side of the room, filling up a thermos with coffee from the expensive-looking coffee machine.

Derek sighs, resigned. “Morning, Laura.”

She pauses in her coffee-making, tilting her head to one side before spinning around to glance their way. Her smile widens into a grin when she spots the Sub, raising her hand in a wave.

“Hey, Stiles. Great to see you.” She stuffs a couple of apples and a handful of granola bars into her handbag before screwing the lid on her flask and ambling across the room towards them. “My brother didn’t drag you here against your will, did he? He’s a whiner when he wants something, and almost impossible to say no to without years of practice.”

“Laura,” Derek complains, affronted, as Stiles lets out an explosive laugh.

“No, Ma’am,” he assures the Dom. “I asked to come along.”

“He wanted to meet my pack,” Derek elaborates, and there’s a warm note of pride in his voice as he settles his hand on Stiles’s hip and squeezes gently.

Laura’s grin widens anew. “Well then, as the only resident member of Derek’s other pack, I guess it’s only right that I start things off.” She reaches out to brush her hand against the side of his face gently, rubbing with her palm from jawline to temple as a means of scenting him, before ruffling his hair. “Welcome to the family, Stiles.”

He returns the grin somewhat goofily, pleased by her easy acceptance. “Thank you.” Then he glances between the two wolves for a brief moment. “By ‘other pack’, you mean your mom’s pack, right?”

“Right,” Laura confirms. She loops an arm around Derek’s neck, yanking the taller Wolf down so that she can press their foreheads together briefly with an affectionate sort of rumble (the type he’s used to hearing from Scott or Isaac whenever one gets home from work and greets the other). “Doofus here likes to pretend he’s all strong and independent with his own pack, but he’s totally a momma’s boy at heart.”

Derek makes a low growl at the back of his throat. “Laura Hale, I’m going to kill you.”

“I heard it sigh, you told a lie,” Laura sing-songs (a snippet from an old Were’ rhyme that Stiles can remember from kindergarten), tapping the centre of the Alpha’s chest as she pulls away, winking at Stiles and flashing him another grin. “I’ve gotta run, honey-buns. Stiles, you’re coming over for dinner, right? It’s Family Night, and my folks can’t wait to meet you.”

“Uh,” Stiles stammers, blinking. “Sure. I’d love to.”

“Great.” She reaches out to flick Derek’s nose. “Seven o’clock, Der. Don’t be late.”

And then she’s gone, and Stiles is left feeling a little windswept in the wake of her. Derek sighs beside him, and it has that same resigned tone to it as he curls an arm around his Sub’s waist a little more in a sideways hug.

“Sorry. My sister’s kinda…”
“Awesome?” Stiles inserts when he pauses.

“Infuriating.”

Stiles sniggers and turns in Derek’s hold to press a kiss against the corner of his mouth. “I like her.”

“I was worried you might,” the Alpha intones, but he rubs his nose along the side of the younger man’s face, the side that Laura had touched, and gives an approving rumble. Stiles knows he probably smells more like Pack now. More like family. And speaking of…

“When Laura said ‘my family’, did she mean, like, her family?” he asks, recalling from previous snippets of conversation with both Scott and Derek that Laura is married with kids of her own. “Or does she mean, like, the whole family.”

“She means the whole family,” Derek confirms, stroking a hand up Stiles’ spine to rest on the nape of his neck as he pulls back to look at him briefly. “My birth-pack. But if you’re not ready for that yet, I’ll understand. You don’t have to go just because Laura wants you to.”

Stiles fiddles with the belt loops at the back of Derek’s uniform pants. He knows he’s not the sweet, perfect little house-Sub that they tend to romanticise in novels (not that there’s anything wrong with Subs who are, mind you) – he’s sarcastic and opinionated and he’ll probably end up saying something inappropriate before dinner is over – but from what he’s seen of Derek, and what he’s gleaned from his interactions with Laura, the Hales aren’t exactly a traditional family anyway. But still. A meet-the-parents dinner. They’ve only been dating a week so far; he doesn’t want Derek to feel rushed into anything either.

“I want to,” he answers softly. “Do you want me to?”

Derek’s brow crinkles a little. “What kind of question is that? Of course I do.” He leans in to press a kiss against the younger man’s brow. “Shut up.”

Stiles huffs a quiet laugh, even as his eyes slide closed at the tough. “Rude.”

“Mm.” Derek uses the pad of a finger to tilt his chin up for a proper kiss.

The sound of a camera shutter startles them both, and Stiles pulls away in time to see Erica grinning down at her phone in gleeful triumph.

“Erica,” Derek chides, although he sounds more amused than scolding, and holds out a hand towards her. “Give me that.”

She laughs and backs away a few paces. “No can do, Papa-Bear. I’m under orders from a higher authority.” Her thumbs work frantically against the touchscreen. “And she bribed me with the good stuff.”

Derek sighs again. “Have I ever told you how much I regret introducing you to my grandmother?”

“Every day, Boss,” Boyd informs him cheerfully, stepping into the doorway behind Erica and curling an arm around her waist as he peers down at the screen. His lips kick up at one corner, dark brown eyes flickering upwards to meet Derek’s gaze, brows arching.

The Alpha holds up a hand. “Not a word.”

Stiles wriggles out from under Derek’s arm and moves over to join the pair, smiling when he sees the snapshot. Damn. They look so freakin’ good together. “Ooh, I want a copy.”
Erica gives him a sideways glance, grinning, and pushes the phone into his hands. “Here, send it to your cell. That way we’ll have each other’s numbers.”

She moves behind Stiles while he taps away on the device, draping herself over his back with her arms wrapped around his midriff, a warm cheek pressed against the side of his head as she inhales deeply. He spends so much time around Scott and Isaac that he probably smelled like Pack long before he started dating Derek, but he understands why wearing the Alpha’s collar would suddenly make him accessible to such intimacies in a way he hadn’t been before.

“Mmm. You’re squishy,” she mumbles approvingly, and rubs her cheek against his hair.

Stiles, who is totally on board with the idea of being cuddled by Derek’s Betas, smiles and leans back against Erica’s slender but sturdy frame. Like all adult Werewolves, there’s plenty of muscle hidden beneath her soft beige uniform, and Stiles knows for a fact that she’ll be as formidable as they come when the situation calls for it. But she’s also a damn good hugger.

“Boyd,” she huffs after a moment, without relinquishing her hold on Stiles. “Stop being all stoic and aloof and hug the human. Packmate initiation rules.”

“Is that what this is?” Stiles asks. Not that he’s complaining.

He shoots a glance towards Derek and finds his Dom perched on the arm of a nearby couch, his lips curling up at the corners as he regards them with a fond sort of look. The Alpha glances at Boyd, who seems to have been waiting for some sort of cue, because at Derek’s shallow nod, he steps closer to the pair and wraps one arm around Erica’s back and the other around Stiles, leaning down to bump his forehead against the younger man’s temple in a brief, companionable nuzzle.

Erica sighs happily against his neck. “Welcome to the pack, sweetcheeks.”

“God help you,” Boyd adds.

Stiles closes a hand loosely over Boyd’s thick, muscular forearm, since he’s unable to return the hug properly with two Werewolves curled around him; but that’s not really an issue. He’s totally one-hundred percent okay with being the one in the middle. He’s also totally one-hundred percent certain that he’ll be coming to work with Derek every day for the rest of his life.

Because cuddles, that’s why.

……………………………………………….
“So what’s the handover meeting for?” Stiles asks, blowing on his coffee to cool it. He’d burnt his tongue on the first sip, and he’s not willing to damage his taste buds any further, not when the coffee’s so fucking good.

“It’s so the nightshift team can pass on any concerns to the Alpha in charge of the day shift,” Scott explains, passing him a raspberry pastry from the box he and Isaac had picked up from the local patisserie on their way to work. “Emergency drop-ins, precautionary red-zones, things like that.”

“Weekday nights aren’t usually so bad, touch wood,” Boyd tells him, tapping twice on the arm of the couch (even though it’s leather) and accepting a bite of pastry from Erica’s fingers, one muscular arm curled loosely around her waist to keep her comfortably perched in his lap. “But if there’s been an emergency call overnight, the day team always have to do a follow-up check the next morning.”

“Even if the situation’s been resolved?” Stiles asks, covering his mouth with the back of his hand so that he doesn’t spit pastry all over the place.

Boyd nods and shrugs. “Standard protocol.”

It makes sense. Stiles knows that the police department are bound by law to do likewise if there’s been a genuine domestic 911 call, and since the Werewolf Pan-Dynamic Services were once merely a specialised branch of most inner-city police departments (before they separated over fifteen years ago and became their own independent public service), it’s not surprising that some of their protocols still mirror the ones used by the BHPD.

Scott nudges him in the side and passes him the box of pastries, nodding towards where Brett and Mason are curled up together on a pile of cushions in front of the couch. Brett is using the arm of a couch as a backrest, sitting close enough to the rest of the pack that his shoulder is touching Stiles’s knee, his hand resting between Mason’s shoulder blades while the analyst lies sprawled on his stomach on the cushions, using the Werewolf’s thighs as a makeshift desk, thoroughly engrossed in whatever he’s researching on his tablet.

“Thanks,” Brett grunts when Stiles offers him the pastries, and elbows him non-too-gently in the leg in an apparent expression of gratitude. But the wink and cheeky half-smile that Mason flashes him when he lowers his tablet to inspect the selection makes up for his Dom’s faux-surliness.

He figures Brett’s probably a lot like Jackson in that regard; Jacks still showers Stiles with insults on a weekly basis (via text if they aren’t able to meet in person due to conflicting schedules), but none of it’s ever said with any real malicious intent. And similarly, when Brett had adamantly protested against the idea of a Pack-pile, making a fuss out of being dragged into it forcefully by Scott and Erica while Mason laughed at him, it had all been for show. The hug he’d given Stiles when the he’d finally relented to partake in the impromptu Packmate Initiation Ceremony had been just as firm as Boyd’s, without the awkwardness that might have existed if his reluctance had been genuine.

“I don’t think there’ll be a whole lot for us to do,” Mason comments, sitting up properly so that he can eat his Danish. “We bumped into the twins in the parking lot; Ethan said Deuc actually let a couple of the guys go home early this morning because the place was dead. And they only had one community call last night – that club on the edge of town, near Forest Avenue.”
“What, again?” Scott’s brow crinkles into an incredulous frown. “Isn’t that, like, the fifth time this month?”

Mason nods, sucking sugar glaze off his thumb. “Yup.”

“It’s because the security guards are idiots,” Isaac points out plainly, absently playing with Stiles’s hair as he shifts in his perch on the back of the couch. “The only de-escalation tactic they ever seem to go for is attempting to out-Dom anyone and everyone who stirs up trouble, regardless of whether or not the perpetrator is actually a Dominant. They’ve already received an official caution about the unlawful use of Dynamic enforcement against Submissives.”

Stiles turns his head a little to glance up at him, curious. “What did they do, trigger a Drop or something?”

Isaac nods, running his fingers through the other Sub’s hair to spike it up at the front. “The last victim wasn’t bonded, so he didn’t have a collar on, and the security guards couldn’t see his Sub-band because his jacket sleeves were too long. So they assumed he was a Dom and tag-teamed him into submission.”

Wincing sympathetically, Stiles takes a bite of his pastry to distract himself from the thought of ever finding himself in a similar predicament; alone, against two burly security guards pulling the bad-cop routine, with his defences already weakened by alcohol and the ambient pheromones of the packed nightclub having set his hormones into overdrive. He probably would’ve Dropped too.

“Dude was fine after a few hours in one of the Quiet Rooms,” Boyd reassures him after a beat of silence, perhaps reading the expression on the younger man’s face. He sends the Sub a warm, calm smile. “Derek managed to pull him out of it.”

“Mm,” Stiles acknowledges, brushing the remaining pastry crumbs from his hands, lips curling into an answering smile at the memory of Derek’s arms holding him close for the first time, the warmth of him seeping into his bones, the leathery smell of the Alpha’s jacket filling his nostrils. “He’s good at that.”

He reaches for his coffee mug again and takes another sip, glancing around at the otherwise-empty staffroom. “There were a lot more people in here last time I came.”

“Most of the clinics don’t start until after ten, so a lot of staff don’t tend to arrive until nine,” Scott explains, fishing for his cell phone when it buzzes in his pocket. “Same goes for the Admin folk.”

“To be fair, usually there is a second emergency response team working with us on a day shift,” Isaac says, making grabby-hands at the other Sub’s coffee until Stiles sighs and obligingly passes it up to him.

“So how come it’s just you guys today?”

Isaac takes a sip of the hot beverage and gives a pleased hum before handing the mug back down to him. “They’ve been relocated to The Hub to help your dad out with crowd control for the next couple of weeks.”

“Hey, while we’re on the subject,” Stiles mentions, “how come you guys aren’t in Kinsly Square? You were there yesterday.”

“There’s a rotation system in place,” Erica tells him, licking chocolate frosting off her lips from the cupcake Scott and Isaac had bought for her (and Stiles has already made a mental note of the blonde’s apparent sweet tooth, because if there’s one thing he knows, it’s that cookies buy him
cuddles). “The atmosphere there’s pretty intense, especially when you’re on full alert the whole time. There’s a lot of background noise and a fuckton of scents to deal with – it’s not really fair to force one team to work in those conditions for more than a couple of days at a time. We’re back there on Friday, though.”

Boyd leans around Erica to pluck his smoothie glass from the coffee table. “How’s that deputy doing, by the way? We didn’t get a chance to check up on him after we’d given our statements and filled out all the paperwork.”

Stiles smiles and waves away the Dom’s concern. “Parrish is a tough guy, he took it all in his stride. Honestly? I think my Dad probably had a harder time dealing with it than he did.”

Erica looks keenly interested in the subject all of a sudden. “Oh?”

Stiles heaves a put-upon sigh. “Don’t even…I’ve been trying to hook them up for months.” he discloses. “It’s infuriating. They’re both blind and stubborn and hard-headed and can’t take a fucking hint.”

Mouth curling into a grin, Erica drums her short, unpainted nails against the side of Boyd’s smoothie glass as she steals a sip through the straw.

“That crazy about each other, huh?”

“You have no idea,” Stiles sighs, frustrated, and slumps down in his seat a little more.

Scott’s hand squeezes his knee gently, his thumb brushing against the denim there. Stiles suspects it’s probably a subconscious effort to help him cool off, because the Dom still seems thoroughly absorbed in reading his text message. But before he can enquire about the sender, Derek returns, a couple of manila folders tucked under one arm and a cardboard box of files held under the other, braced against his hip.

The Betas straighten automatically, although in Erica’s case this simply means she turns in Boyd’s lap to face the Alpha properly rather than maintaining her previous semi-recline against his chest.

Derek’s gaze flickers over them as he strides across to their corner of the deserted staffroom, setting down the box on the coffee table before straightening with the beginnings of a frown wrinkling at his brow.

“Where’s Liam?”

“Running late,” Scott replies, lifting his phone to indicate the text. “Forgot to set his alarm again.”

Mason snorts, shaking his head with a fond grin. “Doofus.”

Derek just nods, pulling a squishy-looking footstool closer to the group so that he’s sitting on the other side of the coffee table. “As you know, we’re acting as both the onsite and on-call team today,” he says, flipping one of the manila folders open and sliding it across the table towards Boyd and Erica’s armchair. “I know the two of you are familiar with the ongoing case at Eclipse. There was another incident last night that needs following up. Think you can handle it?”

“Sure thing, Boss,” Boyd agrees readily, leaning around Erica again to pick up the file so that they can peruse it together.

“Keep your phones on,” Derek cautions. “Follow-ups may be a legal requirement, but ultimately an emergency call is our priority. We can always pick up the slack later on.” When the pair nod, he
redirects his attention towards the couple curled up together on the floor. “Central Office just sent us a heads-up about three Omegas who escaped police custody on the other side of the state earlier last week. They were spotted last night two miles outside county borders. I need the two of you to get a profile on each of them and fax it over to Sheriff Stilinski’s department by the end of the day.”

Brett nods seriously, and Mason sends Derek a sloppy salute. “Roger that, mon Capitan.”

The Alpha’s lips twitch but he quickly shifts his gaze back up again, eyes alighting on Isaac. “Deaton’s asked if you’d be willing to help staff the drop-in clinic this morning; they’re down a couple of therapists and Alan’s expecting the place to be busier than usual, given the current tensions surrounding the upcoming Equality Reform debates. You don’t have to go if you’d rather work with Scott, but it’d be a big help if you could.”

Isaac nods, smiling cheerfully. “No, I’d be happy to.”

Derek’s answering smile is warm, pleased. “Good boy. Scott, will you be alright manning the front desk on your own? I’ll send Liam through to join you as soon as he arrives.”

Scott gives him a thumbs-up. “No sweat.”

Derek stands, which seems to be some sort of nonverbal cue, because the rest of his Pack climb to their feet too, apparently dismissed. But as they pass Derek, they stray near enough so that the Alpha can reach out to squeeze a shoulder or nuzzle a cheek as appropriate.

“Are you gonna stay?” Isaac asks him, once Scott’s hugged them both goodbye and bounded off towards the door, bumping into Derek playfully on the way.

Stiles nods, draining the last dregs of his coffee. “For a little while. I’m meeting my dad for lunch, but I can stay until then, as long as I’m not getting in the way.”

“Yeah, because this place is so packed,” Isaac drawls, and grins when Stiles shoves at him.

“I’m here,” Derek calls, softly, and the Sub leans in briefly to bump his nose against Stiles’s temple in a farewell-nuzzle before half-skipping over to the Alpha with his usual youthful exuberance.

“Sir?”

Derek regards him carefully. “Are you sure you don’t mind working the clinic without Scott?”

“Sure, I’ll be okay.” The Sub shrugs easily. “I’ll holler if I need him.”

The Alpha’s lips twitch again. “Alright. Be good.” He curls a hand around the back of Isaac’s neck and tugs him closer so that he can brush his lips against the younger man’s brow. “I’ll come check on you in a couple of hours.”

Isaac nods cheerfully, and laughs when Derek propels him towards the door with a playful push, glancing back at Stiles briefly to shoot him a sunny smile before disappearing off down the corridor.

“C’mon,” Derek says, picking his box of files back up and tucking them under his arm, holding out a hand towards Stiles. “I’ll show you where the library is.”

Stiles jumps to his feet, grinning, and hurries around the coffee table to slide his hand into Derek’s.

“Dude, you never said there was a library.”

“Must’ve slipped my mind,” Derek dismisses casually, but the glint of mirth in his eye says
otherwise.

As it transpires, ‘library’ is an understatement. What Derek should have more accurately described it as is ‘a book-nerd’s heaven’. It’s packed with old tomes and aging, leather-bound journals that Stiles doubts he’d ever be able to find in a public library, and the décor’s at least a century behind the times, right down to the polished table-globe that seems to have been plucked right out of the early 19th century. There’s a balcony over on the far side of the room, accessed by a spiralling metal staircase, where another dozen or so bookcases tower all the way up to the high ceiling.

“A lot of these books came from my family’s collection,” Derek tells him, apparently having deduced that Stiles is too gobsmacked to talk at present. “My grandfather spent years transcribing them, and now my uncle’s got them all saved electronically, so Mom figured the hard copies would be of more use to people in here rather than gathering dust in our own library.”

Derek’s family have their own library. Stiles is going to marry Derek, has he mentioned that yet?

An arm winds around his waist, Derek’s lips pressing a brief kiss against the shell of his ear. “You remember where my office is, right?”

Stiles nods, eyes still trailing over the seemingly endless rows of literature.

“Pick a couple of books and come find me when you’re done,” Derek tells him, giving him a gentle squeeze. “I need to get to work, but the couch in my office is all yours. I don’t have a meeting scheduled until two.”

He nods again, and feels Derek’s arms slip away. But a moment later the Dom’s words register and he feels his brow crinkle into a frown as he darts back towards the door and opens it to call after him:

“Only a couple?”

Derek doesn’t reply, but Stiles can hear his rumbling laughter echoing back up the corridor.

Naturally, it takes him at least thirty minutes to make his selection, given that he wants to read everything, all the books, right now. Eventually he just closes his eyes and grabs two at random, and decides to seek out Derek’s office before he can change his mind again.

He manages to locate the right corridor without getting lost (okay, so maybe he has to ask a few people for directions first), and he glances back down at the handwritten, leather-bound journals in his hands as he approaches the door, wondering whether or not Derek’s read these two in particular. There are so many that he figures his Dom couldn’t possibly have read all of them. It would take half a lifetime.

He lifts a hand, ready to knock, but freezes with his knuckles only a hairsbreadth from the wood when he hears an all too familiar sound coming from within the room; the slow, steady thwap-thwap-thwap of a firm hand striking bare skin, and answering choked, tearful noises of the unfortunate recipient, muffled by the door.

He cringes in sympathy, lowering his hand again and taking a step back, respectful enough not to interrupt the proceedings but also insatiably curious as to the identity of the poor soul who’s already managed to earn themselves a spanking only half an hour into their workday.

The echoing swats cease after half a minute, and Stiles hears Derek’s low, calm voice rumbling soothingly, although he can’t make out the words through the wood of the door. He hugs his books to his chest and bounces awkwardly on his tiptoes, unsure if he should dart back to the library
quickly to give them a little more privacy, or whether Derek would prefer him to wait. After all, he had told Stiles to find him when he was done. And he’s trying to be good today. So, so good.

“You can come in, Stiles.”

He startles at his Dom’s voice, still muffled but clearly discernible now, and winces at the realisation that Derek must have known he was there all along. He pauses for the briefest of moments to gather his scattered wits before opening the door and poking his head inside.

Derek’s seated on the couch just like before, only this time the beige-uniformed officer in his lap isn’t Isaac. Rather it’s somebody significantly smaller than the curly-haired Sub, evidenced by the fact that he can tuck his sock-clad feet up to fit all of him into Derek’s lap-space. And unlike Isaac, who’d been relaxed and at ease in the Dom’s arms after his spanking, the chastised kid (because that’s what he seems to be – Stiles wasn’t aware that WPDS were taking high school interns) is far from settled. He’s still crying softly, his chest turned towards Derek’s, arms wrapped around the Alpha’s shoulders and face buried in the older man’s neck, his body trembling with every shuddering breath.

“Hey,” Derek says softly, and Stiles only realises the Dom is addressing him rather than the boy in his arms when their eyes meet. Derek’s hand is rubbing slow, soothing circles between the Sub’s shoulder blades, his other arm looped securely around the kid’s waist, but he seems perfectly calm and at ease despite the boy’s crying. “It’s alright, we’re done here. Shut the door, please.”

Stiles obliges, being as quiet as possible, still feeling like he’s intruding on something private even though he probably isn’t, at least not by Werewolf standards. They tend to be a lot less self-conscious about things. And technically he’s Pack now, so it makes sense that certain formalities have fallen by the wayside. Stiles has certainly seen Isaac spanked by Scott often enough, and the curly-haired Sub has never so much as hinted that his presence makes him uncomfortable, simply shrugging and saying “it’s fine, you’re family” when Stiles had previously him about it.

Derek sends him a reassuring smile as he approaches, sliding his arm from around the kid’s waist to squeeze his knee gently when Stiles takes a seat beside them on the couch.

“Hey,” the Alpha introduces, his voice still a low, soothing murmur. He turns his head a little, enough that he can brush a kiss against Liam’s hair. “Pup, this is my Sub, Stiles. Think you can say ‘hi’?” When the kid shakes his head, Derek just rests his cheek against the Sub’s head and hugs him tighter. “Okay. You just take your time, kiddo.”

It’s odd, seeing his Dom handle the after-effects of a discipline session without Stiles being the one whose backside has just been spanked. Last night he’d been too wrapped up in his own overwhelming emotions to acknowledge the finer details of the comforting process, beyond how good it had felt to be held afterwards, and how light and calm he’d felt inside with the slate wiped clean, despite the discomfort in his rear. But now, watching Derek soothe Liam, murmuring gentle words of praise and reassurance, all the while holding him and touching him and letting the kid cling to him as though his life depends on it, he can’t help the fierce swell of affection that rises up inside of him.

Careful not to interrupt the pair, but driven by instinct to press himself up against the Alpha, he shifts closer along the couch to lean against Derek’s side. And that’s how they remain until Liam finally shifts in the Alpha’s arms several minutes later, pulling back enough to swipe a forearm across his eyes.

Derek loosens his hold a little, his expression tender as he gently bumps his nose against the boy’s sweaty temple. “Hey. Feeling better?”
Liam nods, dropping his arm, and oh dear god, he’s adorable.

He looks fresh out of high school (the flushed, tear-stained cheeks only accentuate his youthful features), with big, wide, bloodshot blue eyes that rival Isaac’s on the puppy-dog scale, and a mop of light brown hair that’s sticking up in all directions, no doubt ruffled by every staff member he’s passed in the corridor this morning. Stiles kinda wants to ruffle it himself and cuddle the kid to death, and he’s not even a Dom.

“M’sorry,” Liam mumbles, his voice sounding a little hoarse, and scrubs at his eyes again. “I’ve kinda wrecked your shirt.”

“Don’t worry about it,” Derek reassures, and shoots Stiles an amused sideways glance. “You wouldn’t be the first.”

Stiles wrinkles his nose in a faux-disgruntled look, but he’s fighting a smile so the effect is somewhat ruined. Liam seems to catch on to the inside joke, because his lips twitch up at the corner in a shaky half-smile as his gaze shifts to meet the other Sub’s.

“Isaac and Scott talk about you all the time,” he says, wincing a bit as he shifts in Derek’s lap. “It’s great to finally meet you in person.”

He offers Stiles his left hand, palm facing upwards and fingers slightly curled, and Stiles is momentarily stunned by the gesture because it’s not just a Pack-greeting, it’s open submission. It’s Liam acknowledging that Stiles is Derek’s Sub (not only that, but Derek’s mate); and recognising the authority that comes with the title. And Stiles knows enough about Werewolf culture and Pack tradition to have realised that this would eventually become an element of his interaction with Derek’s submissive Betas, but he hadn’t expected it immediately. The amount of trust that Liam has placed in Stiles with that one simple gesture is astounding.

He doesn’t let shock keep him from responding in kind, though; curling his hand around Liam’s, he squeezes the appendage gently.

“It’s great to meet you too, man.” He tilts his head a little to the side so that the Sub knows he sees them as equals and smiles sympathetically. “You okay?”

Liam huffs a quiet, self-deprecating laugh and nods, scrubbing at his flushed cheeks again to dash away the dampness there. “Yeah, m’good.” He sniffs again and sits up a little straighter, turning his gaze back towards Derek. “Can I go and find Scott now?”

“Mm,” Derek grants with a nod and a quiet smile, and pulls the kid closer briefly to brush another kiss against his temple. “I’ll come check on you in a little while. Tell Scott if you feel yourself Dropping again, okay?”

“Mm,” Derek grants with a nod and a quiet smile, and pulls the kid closer briefly to brush another kiss against his temple. “I’ll come check on you in a little while. Tell Scott if you feel yourself Dropping again, okay?”

“I haven’t spanked him because he dropped?” Stiles asks after a pause (long enough that he hopes Liam’s out of earshot).

“No.” Derek winds an arm around his shoulders and drops a kiss against his hair. “I spanked him because he neglected to tell anyone about it. You and he are a lot alike.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” Stiles denies, but he’s smiling as he reaches for one of
his discarded books. “And since when did your department start hiring high-schoolers?”

“Liam’s in college,” Derek replies, amused. “He goes to BHCC, but he takes night classes. Completed his twelve-month Fast Access course back in July, and he’s been working with us ever since.” The Alpha stands slowly to his feet and stretches, before making his way over to his desk. “He’s a good kid.”

Stiles carefully thumbs the edge of an age-worn page in the journal. “You two seem pretty close,” he remarks, because it sounds like the kid’s only been in the department for a month or so, but the scene he just witnessed looked like something that had played out a hundred times before.

Derek hums distractedly, rummaging through the box of files. “I’ve known him since he was a Freshman in high school. He was my first Beta.”

Stiles blinks, the journal slipping from his suddenly slack grip to fall into his lap with a quiet *thunk* because wait, what?

“I’d only been working here a couple of weeks,” Derek elaborates without glancing up. “I’d just gotten my degree, so I was still a junior officer, and I was about as inexperienced as they came. It was completely down to chance that I was working a minor follow-up case near the school when an emergency call came through about a rogue-Alpha attack at Beacon Hills High.”

Stiles sucks in a sharp breath, the bottom dropping out of his stomach. “Liam was bitten by a rogue?”

Derek nods, his face tight. “The Alpha had gone completely feral, there was nothing left of his human side to reason with. He was running on pure instinct. It was a kill or be killed situation, something I was embarrassingly underprepared for, and it was dumb luck more than anything else that gave me the opening I needed.” He shrugs, the tension easing again. “Anyway, when I killed the rogue, I became Liam’s Alpha by proxy. His parents agreed that it was safer for him to live with my family for the first few months, at least until he learned how to control the shift. He caught on pretty quick, though.” The Dom smiles suddenly, something soft and fully of affection. “When he registered as a Submissive on his sixteenth birthday, he put me down as both his legal Alpha and Dominant guardian.”

Stiles feels his eyebrows climbing. “His parents didn’t mind?”

“His step-dad’s pretty open-minded,” Derek replies, taking a seat in his desk chair and booting up the computer. “He and Megan are both Switches, so the registration process was always going to be a little complicated.”

That’s probably an understatement. The government’s still a bit vague on whether or not registering a Switch as an individual’s legal Dominant is deemed an acceptable practice, so there’s a helluva lot of paperwork involved for those who choose to make that decision. In a lot of States, Switches are still struggling to be allowed to register together as Bonded partners, never mind legal Dominants. California was among the first to ‘Vote Yes’ just under a decade ago, but a lot of the common laws are still playing catch-up, and for a long time Switch parents could only register as legal guardians rather than legal Doms. Most people get around the law by registering the Submissive under a Dominant uncle or grandparent or a family friend instead, as is often the case in single-Sub households.

Stiles knows that’s one of the apparent ‘issues’ that the DRA are trying to change in their ‘Equality Reform Act’. One of their more controversial slogans is ‘Save our Subs, Cut the Switches’; their continuing outcry against the government’s decision to recognise Switches as an official Dynamic. In the various inflammatory articles and video debates that he’s studied over the years, the DRA have
refused to even *use* the term ‘Switches’, referring to individuals that are registered as such as either ‘pushy Subs’ or ‘weak Dominants’.

It’s not an opinion that’s widely shared, thank god, and certainly not in Beacon Hills, which is known for its supernatural and Dynamic diversity. Bigoted idiots who start mouthing off around here generally get shunned by the rest of the community to the point that they decide to up and leave town altogether. Beacon Hills is far from perfect, and Stiles would be the first to point that out if asked. But in terms of Dynamic rights and social progression? It’s sitting pretty high up on the score board.

“*You mind if I make a few phone calls?*” Derek asks, startling him from his thoughts.

He shakes his head, picking up his book again. “Dude, it’s your office. And I don’t mind going back to that *awesome* library if you’d rather work in peace?”

“*Stay,*” Derek insists, his tone amused, and points at him with a faux-stern look.

Stiles grins and kicks off his shoes, tucking his legs up underneath him on the couch. “*Sir, yes, Sir.*”

………………………………………….

“*You’ve got something on your face,*” Stiles calls as he pushes through the door to Beacon Hills’ police department.

Behind the reception desk, Jordan Parrish glances towards him, a hand coming up to rub at his mouth. He frowns at the back of it when it comes away clear, and rubs at his fully-healed cheek instead, looking puzzled.

“*Dude, where?*”

“*Hold on a sec.*” Stiles moves over to brace his hands against the counter, leaning in close to study the man’s features carefully, his eyes narrowing in an exaggerated squint. “*No, wait…hang on…* sorry, my bad. The ugly’s stuck there permanently.”

Parrish tries to frown again, but his grin renders the expression unconvincing, even as he grabs Stiles
in a headlock to rub his knuckles against the younger Sub’s scalp in a too-gentle-to-actually-be-

painful noogie.

“You’re a brat, kid.”

Stiles yelps, flailing, and manages to knock over a mug of pens in the process, trying to use the desk
as leverage to pull back. But Jordan’s supernatural strength is impossible to beat, and to be fair Stiles
isn’t really trying very hard, so he doesn’t budge so much as an inch.

“Deputy.” The Sheriff is leaning against the doorjamb to his office, arms crossed over his chest as he
watches the scene with a neutral expression. “Is there any particular reason why you’re torturing my
son?”

“I’m performing a public service, Sir.”

Stiles makes an offended sound, but he’s laughing, so the sentiment doesn’t quite hold true.

“Also, he called me ugly,” Parrish adds glibly.

His dad studies them a moment more, then nods and turns back towards his office. “Fair enough.”

“What? No! Dad!” Stiles protests, over the sound of Jordan chuckling. He kicks a bit, sending the
pens on the floor skittering away in all directions. “I was gonna treat you to lunch! I was gonna let
you eat processed meat!”

John reappears in the doorway as quickly as he’d vanished. “On second thoughts, I think he’s
learned his lesson. Let him go, deputy.”

Parrish releases him after a quick pat to the cheek, still grinning. “Your dad’s appetite saved you this
time, sport. It’s not gonna save you next time.”

“You hear that?” Stiles asks, spinning to face his father as he attempts to smooth down his rumpled
hair, pointing towards the deputy with his free hand. “I’m being threatened. He’s threatening me
right now. Threats are being made.”

“Uh-huh.” John steps back into his office to collect his jacket, badge and the keys to his cruiser,
Stiles following him to lean against the side of the man’s desk. “You seem pretty chipper today. Did
you and Derek have a talk last night?”

Stiles winces at the question. It’s been carefully phrased, but he knows what his dad’s really asking.
If he’d been inquiring about their conversation, he wouldn’t have specified it as being a talk; a
singular event that requires additional emphasis. He’s asking about something else entirely.

“Yeah,” he finally admits, drumming a tuneless beat against the side of the desk with the tips of his
fingers. “Kinda.”

“Kinda?” his dad echoes, sending him a knowing look.

Stiles cringes. “Okay. Yeah, he did. But it was fine.” He glances up a moment later to find his father
still studying him closely, and rolls his eyes with a sigh. “Dad. Can we not talk about this? Please?
You didn’t pull the Daddy-Dom routine when Scott spa-” He swallow the rest of the word, flushing,
and rephrases, “When Scott did it in college.”

“Scott wasn’t dating you,” the Sheriff points out.
“Oh my god,” he groans, dragging a hand down his face.

He’s about to say something else, but suddenly Parrish is standing in the doorway, kitted up and sliding a radio into the side-pocket of his vest.

“Someone just called in an ABWIK,” he reports, calm and professional. “Possible 187. Henly and Miller are still dealing with the DUI across town; dispatch says we’re closest to the scene.”

John nods, clipping his gun to his belt. “Tell McKinsey and Goswani that they’ve got the front desk, we’ll take this one.” He reaches out to squeeze the back of his son’s neck. “Looks like we’re gonna have to cancel lunch plans, champ. You free for dinner?”

Stiles shakes his head. “Sorry. Laura and Derek kinda invited me over for Family Night.”

The older man arches an eyebrow, smiling. “Did they now?”

“Shut up,” Stiles grouches, cheeks heating again. But he still leans in to give his dad a quick hug. “Don’t do anything crazy. And call me when you get back.”

“Will do.” John taps him beneath his chin. “Can I offer you some fatherly advice? Talia Hale always loved your mom’s cookies. And you know what they say about the quickest way to a wolf’s heart.”

And with a final pat to his shoulder, the man’s gone, leaving Stiles alone in the office. He stands there for a moment, processing the words carefully, before quickly shoving his hand into his pocket to grab his cell phone and call for a cab.

He has some major baking to do.

Chapter End Notes

I'm afraid this chapter was getting a little too long to add in the Hale Family segment at the end - I want to be able to dedicate an adequate portion of time to their introduction, and at this rate the chapter wouldn't have been posted for another few days at least. So I decided to halve it. Hope nobody's disappointed!

For the sake of this story, Liam is significantly younger than Scott and the others (nineteen, while the rest of them are twenty-three or somewhere around that mark). I wanted to illustrate how Derek's grown into the Dom he is now - rather than being thrust into the role and given a handful of Betas, he didn't actually take up the mantel of 'Alpha' for a year or more, not until Liam chose to legally appoint him as such. And he didn't form a pack of his own at the Centre for another eighteen months or so after that, which gave him time to learn from his mother and grandmother, and work out for himself what sort of Alpha-Dom he wanted to be. So for those who are wondering about Derek's backstory and how he came to be such a calm, level-headed Alpha compared to the one we know from the TV show - voila! All he needed was time, support and a little breathing space.

I very much intend to ensure that Jordan Parrish becomes the step-dad Stiles deserves. Because John needs a little romance in his life, and Parrish has been protective of Stiles
right from the get-go. I'm praying that Jeff Davies doesn't kill him off. :/

Hope you enjoyed the chapter! Let me know your thoughts; likes, dislikes, requests - I love to hear from you!
Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The doorbell rings at six-fifteen on the dot, just as Derek had promised.

Unfortunately, Stiles is midway through transferring a freshly-made apple pie into a container when the chime startles him. He fumbles with the dish, biting back a yelp when the cloth in his hand slips and the red-hot ceramic presses against the side of his thumb. The pie clatters to the bottom of the box when he drops it, but thankfully the fall isn’t far enough to cause any damage to the golden-crisp crust.

The same can’t be said for his thumb.

“Fuck,” he hisses, and brings the throbbing digit to his mouth to suck on the burn, fumbling to put the lid on the container one-handed.

The doorbell rings again and he calls out a garbled “Be right there!” around the knuckle of his thumb, pausing to glance down at himself (a cursory check to make sure he hasn’t spilled anything on his shirt) before making his way out into the hallway. He remembers to drop his hand from his mouth just in time, smiling widely at his Dom as he opens the front door.

“Hey,” he greets cheerfully. “Come on in. Sorry, I swear I’m almost ready, I just need to finish boxing up-”

“You’re hurt,” Derek interrupts him, the Alpha’s answering smile slipping as concern seeps into his expression. He presses a flattened hand against the centre of the Sub’s chest, as though this alone will help him diagnose the problem. “Show me.”

Damn. Stiles had forgotten how acute a Werewolf’s senses could be.

“It’s nothing, I just burned my hand a little.” He holds up the appendage to show Derek the red mark that spans the side of his thumb. “No biggy.”

The crease in Derek’s brow doesn’t smooth over – if anything, it deepens. He takes the Sub’s hand gently, lifting it up for closer inspection, careful not to touch the burn itself. The pain immediately vanishes; Stiles can see it snaking up Derek’s arm in narrow, black veins.

“Did you run it under the tap?” his Dom demands, still in that tense, worried tone of voice.

Stiles rolls his eyes. “Dude, it’s fine, seriously. Happens all the time. I’m a serial baker, it’s an occupational hazard.”

Derek gives him a disapproving look, and half a second later Stiles finds himself being steered back through the house and into the kitchen, his hand still held carefully in the Alpha’s grasp. He gives the Dom a fondly exasperated look when Derek turns on the faucet and cradles the Sub’s arm to keep his thumb under the cool, steady flow.

“Derek, don’t. It’s-”

“Next time,” the Alpha interjects, and while his voice is low and calm again, there’s a note of quiet censure there too, “Next time I want you to answer the door after you’ve done basic first-aid, not
before. I don’t care what the situation is – your personal safety and wellbeing should always come first. Clear?”

Stiles sighs softly. Scott and Isaac are ridiculously overprotective like this, too, when it comes to physical injury or illness (even though both of them have only been Werewolves for a small handful of years, whereas the Hale Pack goes back centuries). And he gets that it’s a Lycanthropy thing – being able to sense pain and disease in others must be a hard burden to bear, especially when Werewolves are inclined to heal almost instantaneously. And Stiles would be totally okay with this level of coddling if the situation called for it, but seriously, the burn is tiny. And superficial. The mark will probably be gone in a week or so. If Derek’s going to react like this towards every bruise and paper cut, his patience is going to wear thin real fast.

“It’s nothing,” he reiterates, and gently tugs his hand out of the Alpha’s grasp, wrapping it up in a dishtowel to dry it as he turns back towards the table of cookies. “Stop overreacting.”

“Stiles.”

The stern note of warning in Derek’s tone is enough to make the Sub freeze instinctively, a shard of guilt piercing its way through his chest. He fights the immediate urge to duck his head and apologise, submissive instincts kicking into overdrive in the face of the Alpha’s firm reprimand.

But his Dom’s arms slide around his waist a moment later, pulling him back to lean against the Werewolf’s chest. Derek’s sigh is a warm, tickling puff against his neck as the Alpha nuzzles him there, lips brushing against his skin in a chaste kiss. And now Stiles doesn’t know what to feel. Because the guilt’s still there, niggling at him, but now his Dom’s cuddling him in a way that sort of feels like an apology for the scolding, so maybe he’s not in trouble after all.

“You’re right,” Derek admits quietly. “I was overreacting. I just…” His Dom sighs again, and presses a kiss to the shell of his ear. “It’s been a long day.” He draws Stiles into a tighter hug, rubbing a hand over the Sub’s lower abdomen in slow, soothing circles. “I’m sorry I snapped.”

The ache in his chest dissipates as quickly as it had appeared, and Stiles turns in the Alpha’s arms so that he can settle his hands on Derek’s shoulders, tilting his head up for a proper kiss. The Werewolf’s hands slide around his back to pull him in closer as he dips down, sealing their mouths together, and Stiles is more than happy to lose himself for a few minutes in the taste and smell and feel of his Dom.

And maybe a few minutes more after that.

He whines when Derek finally pulls away, his heart hammering wildly in his chest, head fuzzy, knees feeling weak and shaky.

“Later,” the Alpha promises, and slides a hand down to cup the curve of his buttocks; a teasing preview of what’s to come. (Stiles, hopefully.) “If we start anything now, we’ll be late for dinner.”

Stiles grumbles a quiet complaint, but it’s more for show than anything else, and he leans in again to steal another quick kiss before turning in the Werewolf’s arms to resume boxing up the cookies. Derek’s hands settle on his hips, the Dom’s chin resting on his shoulder as he watches Stiles work.

“I’m assuming nobody in your family’s allergic to anything.” Stiles comments, quickly transferring the baked goods into Tupperware containers. “Y’know, being Werewolves and all.”

“My brother-in-law’s human,” Derek tells him, and sneaks a hand out to break off a piece of the nearest cookie. “So’s my aunt. But they don’t have any allergies that I know of. And hazelnuts don’t
agree with my Dad, but he’s in New York visiting my uncle until Saturday, so never mind him.” He pops the morsel in his mouth and hums appreciatively. “These are amazing. What are they?”

“_toffee-apple crunches,” Stiles replies, and lifts his hand to feed Derek the rest of the cookie (because he can’t box up something that’s already half-eaten, he has standards). Then he points to the remaining containers in turn. “Regular chocolate chip. Peanut butter and double-choc. A couple of apple pies.” He pats a closed tin sitting nearby, the floral pattern faded enough that the silver metal shines through beneath it in places. “And since you mentioned that your brother might like them, I made a batch of popping-brownies too.”

Derek moans against his neck, arms sliding around the Sub’s waist again in a tight hug. “Keep this up and my family’s gonna steal you away from me.”

Stiles grins, settling a hand over one muscular forearm. “Don’t worry, Sir, I’m yours. Trust me, it’s a given thing.”

Derek’s answering kiss tastes like toffee-apple and cinnamon, but Stiles doesn’t mind.

……………………………………………………………………

The Hale house is breathtaking.

Although ‘house’ is a bit of an understatement; the place is probably large enough to be classed as a mansion. But despite its size, it has a distinctly homely feel to it, the wall-creepers adding a gentle splash of green against the lightly-coloured brickwork, dozens hanging-baskets and window boxes filled with multi-coloured flowers giving the place a bright, cheerful look.

Derek hadn’t been lying when he’d told Stiles that the forest was literally his in backyard. Granted, the clearing is huge, large enough that the asphalt path which cuts through the middle of it can house at least six cars comfortably; as it stands, there are already four vehicles parked there, and a couple of
motorbikes tucked between them. The long, winding road leading up to the house had been flanked on either side by vegetation, but the edge of the forest itself lies beyond the homestead, one line of trees blurring into another in an endless wall of dense woodland that stretches out all the way to the rolling hills in the distance.

“We’ll come back for the cookies,” Derek tells him as he slows the Camaro to a halt parallel to a silver-coloured minivan. “Mom’ll only end up blaming me if we spoil the kids’ appetites.”

Stiles acquiesces with an easy smile, sliding his hand into Derek’s again as they stroll up the path towards the front porch. The warm evening air is thick with the sweet-damp woodland smell of the forest, and he wonders if Derek misses it, living all the way across town. Sure, there are plenty of parks and flowerbeds and artistically tailored trees to give the populated areas more colour and life, but it pales in comparison to growing up right on nature’s doorstep.

He can hear the high, carefree giggling of young voices floating down from an open window on the third floor of the house, and he glances sideways at his Dom in time to see Derek shooting a smile upwards, perhaps having caught the tail-end of a joke spoken too softly for human ears to hear.


His comment prompts another peel of laughter from the upstairs window, right before it slams shut abruptly, silencing the giggles. Derek huffs a quiet laugh of his own, leading Stiles by the hand as he ascends the steps to the front porch. Signs of family life are scattered about all over the place; discarded softball rackets and a football so well-loved that the painted fake-stitching has all but worn away; colourful painted handprints that adorn the blooming window boxes, varying from itty-bitty toddler hands to adult-sized prints; an abandoned sneaker – just the one; a pair of Were-Girl action figures sitting together on an upside-down bucket over on the far side of the porch, a crayon-scribbled sign stuck to the side that reads ‘Jail’, the legs of what looks like an Action Man doll sticking out from beneath the rim of the bucket (Stiles can’t even begin to imagine out the story behind that one, but he’s willing to bet it’s awesome).

Derek reaches for the door handle, but before the Dom’s fingers have even brushed against it, the door flies open, revealing the panic-stricken face of a boy whom Stiles can only describe as a shorter, cute-faced, teenage version of Derek.

The kid’s gaze flickers only briefly between the two of them before he darts around to duck behind the Alpha, pressing himself up against Derek’s back.

“Hide me!” he hisses frantically.

“Younger brother,” Derek tells Stiles (as though this alone is supposed to explain away the bizarreness of it all), before arching an amused eyebrow as he peers over his shoulder at the teenager. “Nick, this is Stiles. Stiles, Nick.”

Stiles half-turns to shoot the kid a grin and an awkward finger-wiggling wave. “Hey, man.”

Nick’s answering smile is more of a wince. “Hi,” he greets, then reaches out to grab the rear belt loop on Stiles’ jeans, using it to yank him closer to Derek’s side, thus fortifying his human-werewolf shield. “Hide me.”

Derek sighs, but obligingly wraps his arm back around Stiles to keep them anchored close together.

“Nicholas Anthony Hale!” comes a foreboding female voice from inside the house, and the kid whimpers and cowers a little further behind the Alpha.
“Uh-oh.” The Dom winces sympathetically. “Middle name. You’re toast, kid.” He glances over his shoulder again. “What did you do?”

“Nothing I haven’t done before!” The teen insists. “Except this time it made her go batshit crazy.”

“Language,” Derek chides, but there’s no real heat to it. He reaches behind him to extract the kid, but the younger Hale wraps his arms around Derek’s torso and clings. The Alpha glances heavenwards, but there’s a smile tugging at his mouth even as he sighs, “Nicky.”

“He wasn’t supposed to land on Laura,” the teen laments despairingly.

Derek groans aloud. “Oh god, not the lizard thing again?” Apparently taking the Sub’s answering whimper as verbal confirmation, the Alpha sighs again and pats one of the boy’s arms. “Pup, we’ve talked about this.”

“But I didn’t mean to!” Nick protests. “He was supposed to jump on Malia!”

“Stiles,” Laura greets cheerfully, appearing in the open doorway, her smile warm and welcoming. “Glad you could make it.” She leans in to brush a palm against his temple, kissing the opposite cheek. Then she inhales deeply and pulls back to grin at him. “Oh my god, did you bake?”

Stiles shrugs, cheeks heating a little at the woman’s obvious delight. “Everyone likes dessert.”

“Fuck yeah,” Nick enthuses from behind them.

“Language,” Derek repeats, but it sounds more like an automatic response than genuine scolding.

“Oh, we are so keeping you,” Laura continues as though uninterrupted, ruffling the Sub’s hair with a sort of familial easiness that warms Stiles right down to his toes. “Come on inside, Derek. Why don’t you show him through to the kitchen? Mom’s in there.” Her eyes flicker towards the teenager who’s cautiously peeking over Derek’s shoulder, and she crosses her arms over her chest with an arched brow. “Nicky and I need to have a little discussion.”

Nick blinks at her with wide, fearful eyes for a moment, then abruptly drops his arms from around Derek’s midriff and lifts his chin stubbornly. “You’ll never take me alive.”

The two Dominants watch with identical expressions of amusement and fond exasperation as the kid dashes off towards the forest at a flat-out sprint, disappearing quickly into the tree line.

“Always with the running,” Laura sighs.

“Good to know some things never change,” Derek comments wryly. “You want me to…”

Laura shakes her head, still smiling, and bumps her shoulder against his as she steps past. “No, I’ve got this. Besides, you always go way too soft on him.” She gestures vaguely back towards the house as she hurdles over the porch railing. “Go make introductions before everyone else gets tired of waiting; the kids are about ready to pounce as it is.”

Derek nods and slides his hand into Stiles’ again as Laura jogs off towards the woods, guiding the Sub into the house. Stiles finds himself being led through a wide, well-lit hallway, framed photographs of grinning children and smiling adults hanging from the walls on either side. There’s a huge, wide staircase up ahead that ascends to the first floor and then splits off in two directions, sunlight streaming in through the narrow windows along the wall of the upper landing. Someone’s curled a long, lime-green plushie snake around the banister of the lower staircase and stuck a pair of sunglasses on the head. Stiles is already planning on befriending whichever kid is responsible.
Something smells wonderful, and Stiles can feel hunger pangs stirring in his stomach (despite the number of cookies he’d ‘tested’ over the course of the afternoon). Meat and onions and gravy and freshly baked bread; rich, warm, homey smells. He inhales them all all appreciatively as they step through a polished oak-panelled archway into, holy fuck, the mother of all kitchens.

It’s fucking massive, at least twice the size of Derek’s already-excessively-large kitchen back in the Alpha’s apartment, but without the new, pristine, underused feel to it. This one’s clearly well-loved, from the personalised photo-magnets on the huge double-fridge (and the letter-magnets beneath them spelling out the sort of ‘rude’ phrases that he hasn’t used since he was six…well, not much, anyway) to the two-dozen pencil drawn lines etched into the doorjamb of the larder, clearly used to mark the heights of various Hale children as they’ve grown up over the years.

Talia Hale is stirring a huge, bubbling pot at one of the stoves, but she turns to look at them when they enter, smiling warmly, and Stiles can immediately see which parent his Dom has inherited the eye-crinkling thing from. And while Derek might be the Alpha of his own pack, it’s perfectly clear who the Alpha is now. Talia radiates calm authority in waves.

“Hey, Mom,” Derek greets with audible affection, moving closer and ducking his head so that the petite woman can cup the back of his neck and kiss his brow.

“Hi, baby.” Talia bumps her nose gently against her son’s cheek as she pulls away again, before her gaze shifts to the Sub standing behind him. Her smile broadens. “You must be Stiles. I’m so glad you could join us, I’ve heard so much about you.”

Derek blinks and darts a worried look towards his mother. “Have you?”

“Mm.” Talia’s smile is teasing. “Thankfully your Betas are a lot less secretive than their Alpha.”

It has the desired effect, judging by the touch of pink that creeps into Derek’s cheeks at the comment, and the way Talia’s smile stretches wider. Stiles is torn between finding it hilarious and feeling a sympathetic twinge of second-hand embarrassment, so he clears his throat softly and steps up to Derek’s side.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Ma’am,” he says, offering her his hand palm-upwards, fingers slightly curled, a gesture of submission and respect.

Talia takes it, her fingers warm and sure as they curl around his wrist, before gently pulling him closer until she can cup the side of his neck, leaning in to press a kiss to his forehead. “Please, call me Talia,” she insists. “You’re family now.”

Warmth swells in his chest at the words, and Stiles shares happy smile with Derek when Talia turns away to fiddle with the dials on the stove-top to keep the pot from boiling over. His Dom curls an arm around his waist, dropping a kiss against his hair as Stiles leans into him.

“I hope you like beef stew,” Talia comments, lifting the lid off the huge pot to stir it.

“Absolutely,” Stiles assures, stepping up beside her (but maintaining a respectful chef’s distance of ten inches, because that’s how big his own personal bubble gets when he’s cooking). He inhales deeply. “It smells amazing. Is there anything I can do to help?”

“Thank you, sweetheart, but there isn’t much left to do.” She reaches across to squeeze the back of his neck this time, and Stiles gets the feeling that it’s a habitual touch, an Alpha’s reassurance to her Betas. “Derek, why don’t you give Stiles a tour of the house? I’m sure the others would love to meet him. Dinner will be ready in about half an hour.”
Derek gives an easy hum of agreement, taking Stiles by the hand again and interlocking their fingers even as he sneaks an arm out to swipe some sauce from the wooden spoon that’s resting on the rim of the saucepan, sticking the digit in his mouth and ducking away quickly before his mom can notice. She does, of course, because clearly she’s the sort of Alpha who misses nothing.

“Derek Hale!” she scolds, but there’s laughter in her voice too, even as she aims a swat at his retreating backside.

He grins and calls back a cheerful “love you”, and Stiles thinks he’s seeing a glimpse of what Derek must have been like as a teenager; cheeky and confident, but with an undercurrent of surplus affection. Stiles is pretty sure he would’ve fallen for his Dom at any age. Which is why it’s weird that he can’t remember him from Beacon Hills High. He remembers seeing photos of Laura winning Prom Queen and being voted Student Body Representative, the snapshots pinned to the Corkboard of Achievements in the student council office (basically a large broom cupboard that they’d stuck furniture in and given to the student body for official meeting and planning purposes). He remembers Cora joining the lacrosse team as a Junior when he was a Senior (although he’d never put her first and last name together and made the connection to Laura). But he can’t remember anything about—

“Uncle Derek!”

A boy no older than four or five darts out of a doorway a little further down the hall, bare feet making soft little splat noises against the linoleum flooring as he makes a beeline for the Alpha. He skids to a halt before he can bowl the Dom straight over and raises his arms, bouncing on the balls of his feet as he beams up at the older Werewolf.

“Hey, Tyler.” Derek scoops him up effortlessly, grinning with open affection as he settles the kid on his hip, one arm supporting his weight securely as he uses the other to ruffle the mop of dark hair, rumbling deep in his chest as he nuzzle the boy’s temple.

“Uncle Derek, guess what?” the kid enthuses. “Guess what Uncle Nick did?”

Derek adjusts his hold carefully to compensate for the boy’s excited squirming. “What did Uncle Nick do?”

“He dropped Guacamole on Momma’s head!” Tyler lightly flops his hand against the top of Derek’s head to illustrate his point. “It was s’posed to hit Aunt Malia, but Mom moved in the way and—” He does the ‘splat’ motion against Derek’s hair again and giggles. “An’ now Uncle Nick’s ran away forever.”

“Forever, huh?” Derek echoes, amused.

Tyler nods, fiddling with the collar of the man’s shirt. “At least ‘til dinner, anyway.” His gaze flickers across to Stiles suddenly, as if noticing the presence of a stranger for the first time, his little nose wrinkling in apparent confusion at the unknown scent of him. The boy’s hand curls into a fist as he clutches at the fabric of Derek’s shirt, tucking his head under the Alpha’s chin shyly.

“This is Stiles,” Derek introduces, rubbing the kid’s back soothingly. “He’s somebody very special to me, so he’s part of our Pack now.” He drops his voice to a whisper, although it’s still loud enough for Stiles to hear. “Why don’t you say hello?”

Tyler blinks at him a moment more, then untucks himself from beneath Derek’s chin to peer at Stiles curiously. “Hello.”

“Hi,” Stiles returns, grinning fit to burst, because oh dear God, the cuteness. He wants to give Derek
“all the babies. “It’s Tyler, right?” When the boy nods, he tilts his head to one side, looking thoughtful. “Say, you’re not the same Tyler who plays Little League Lacrosse, are you?”

The kid’s eyes go wide in surprise. “How did you know that?”

“Your coach, Jackson, he’s a good friend of mine,” Stiles explains, and knows he’s hit the jackpot when the little boy’s expression goes from stunned to hero-worshiping awe in about zero-point-four seconds.

“You’re friends with Coach Whittemore?” Tyler breathes.

Stiles smiles. “Sure, bud. We used to play lacrosse together in high school. He and my best buddy, Scott – they were the team captains.”

Tyler is leaning so far out of Derek’s arms that the Alpha’s clearly struggling not to drop him. “Did you play in the big games? Did you win? Do you still have your stick? Can I see it? Can you coach me too? Please?”

“Tyler,” Derek chides, laughing, as the boy tilts further sideways.

Stiles brings his arms up automatically to keep the kid from sliding right out of Derek’s grip, and Tyler takes this as non-verbal permission to flop into them trustingly, little arms winding around the older man’s neck as the boy buries his nose in the front of the Sub’s shirt. Stiles has played babysitter for enough supernatural kids that the action doesn’t make him uncomfortable. He’s a new Pack-member in the kid’s home, and Tyler’s only trying to get a feel for him. He probably smells a lot like other non-family wolves too, since he’d been cuddled half to death by Derek’s other pack that morning and he hadn’t had time to do more than change into a clean shirt while the pies were baking.

“Why do you smell like apples?”

“Because Stiles made us all dessert,” Derek explains, clearly on-board with the ‘make Stiles the favourite uncle’ campaign.

Tyler cheers, throwing his arms in the air, and successfully punching Stiles in the face at the same time.

“I’m fine, guys,” Stiles insists, five minutes and several worried family members later, adjusting his grip on the towel-wrapped icepack he’s cradling carefully against his jaw.

The mark is probably going to be a glorious shade of mottled purple and blue by the morning, but at least it doesn’t hurt anymore, not with Derek’s hand curled around his wrist, constantly leeching the pain before it even has time to register.

It isn’t quite how he’d intended to be introduced to half of Derek’s family – flat on his back in the hallway, clutching at his jaw and blinking floating spots from his vision while Tyler clung to him and wailed “Don’t hate me, I’m sorry, don’t hate me!”, but none of them seem to think any less of him for it. Stiles is insanely grateful that David, Laura’s Bonded Submissive, is as human as they come (and an accountant, at that – Stiles would never have pegged finance to be an area where Laura Hale would find her intended mate), because it seems the Hales have a fully-stocked medical kit for him ‘just in case’, and this gel icepack beats a bag of frozen peas any day.

“M’sorry,” Tyler whimpers, his face buried in his father’s neck as David slowly paces the length of the living room, rubbing his son’s back. At least the boy isn’t sobbing his heart out anymore. Stiles can’t handle crying kids, it makes him feel irrationally guilty over not being equally as upset.
“Hey, no, it’s alright,” he says reassuringly, smiling cheerfully when Tyler lifts his head from David’s shoulder to peer across at him with huge, sad eyes. “I know you didn’t mean to hit me. These things just happen sometimes.”

Tyler scrubs at his eyes with the back of his hand. “You’re not mad?”

“No, dude, it’s cool. Doesn’t even hurt anymore.” He’s not lying, not at the moment, but he knows it’s going to ache something awful when he wakes up. For a five-year-old, the kid has a mean swing. “Your dad’s icepack made it all better, see?”

The kid wriggles down from David’s arms to pad over to the couch, clambering up with ease of familiarity to kneel in Derek’s lap, one arm looped around the Alpha’s neck for balance as he leans forward to peer at the reddening mark on the Sub’s lower jaw when Stiles pulls away the icepack.

Tyler touches it with tentative fingers, wincing, and Stiles can see a few faint black lines trickling up the boy’s small arm. He makes a soft noise of distress, grabbing Tyler’s hand gently and wrapping his own larger one around it.

“Buddy, no, you’ll hurt yourself.” But the kid’s eyes are starting to well up again and oh no, oh shit, Stiles is gonna make a kid cry twice in one day. He scrambles mentally for a suitable distraction. “Hey! Hey Tyler? Did you know I once knocked myself out with my own lacrosse stick?”

Derek fixes him with a look of mild incredulity, and out of the corner of his eye he spots Malia and Joseph (two of Derek’s many cousins, who had come running at Tyler’s first wail) glancing up from the pair of bearded dragons they’re petting to shoot him identical grins. Unfortunately, most of the people who are present in the room can tell that he isn’t lying. But hey, he’ll shoulder the embarrassment happily enough if it keeps Tyler’s tears at bay.

And it seems to have successfully distracted him for now. The boy’s eyes light up in wonderment at the word ‘lacrosse’, and he crawls across from Derek’s lap to tuck himself up against Stiles’ chest.

“Was Coach there too?”

“You bet,” Stiles confirms, as Derek guides his hand up to press the icepack back against his jaw.

He launches into an enthusiastic (and yes, perhaps slightly exaggerated) account of the time back in middle school more than ten years ago when he’d been attacked by a freakin’ huge hornet during practice. It had been the last practice of the season, just before summer term was due to end, and the vindictive little fucker had gone for him without mercy, flying right through the gaps in his faceguard and trying to wriggle its way through his hair towards the back of the helmet. This had all happened during his pre-buzzcut years, of course – to be honest, it’s what had prompted his subsequent buzzcut fixation. Because when he’d yanked off the helmet, the hornet had stayed in his hair, lost in the thick locks right in the middle. And yeah, maybe batting at it with his hands would’ve been the wiser option, but he’d been young and panic-stricken and there’d been a handy-dandy weapon in his grasp, and the prospect of killing the little bastard for its crimes had seemed far too tempting to ignore.

“I didn’t mean to hit myself all that hard,” Stiles explains, letting Tyler fiddle with the buttons on his shirt as the kid watches him with wide eyes. “But I was pretty scrawny for my age, and my crosse was kinda heavy – to cut a long story short, next thing I know I’m on my back in the middle of the field with a really bad headache.”

Tyler makes a sympathetic sort of noise in the back of his throat, reaching up to pat Stiles on the uninjured side of his face. “But you smushed the hornet, right?”
Stiles sighs dramatically and shakes his head. “No. And it stung me, too.” He taps his temple with the index finger of his free hand. “Right here.”

The kid frowns, offended on his behalf. “I don’t like hornets. They’re mean.” He freezes suddenly, head tilted a little to the side, before his face breaks into a sunny smile. “Momma’s back!”

He leans in quickly to give Stiles a too-tight, larynx-crushing hug around his neck, before scrambling from the Sub’s lap and dashing for the door, careening into several objects in his haste but bouncing off them without faltering, undeterred.

David sighs fondly, standing from the armchair he’s been perched on and moving towards the door at a more sedate pace. He shoots Stiles a grateful smile as he pauses in front of the couch, pushing his glasses back up onto the bridge of his nose.

“Thanks for the distraction,” the Sub says. “Tyler isn’t very good at handling human illness and injury just yet. It tends to freak him out a little.”

“No worries.” Stiles squeezes Derek’s hand where it’s still curled loosely around his. “He’s not the only one who needed distracting.”

The older man shares a knowing grin with him, then nods towards the icepack. “You done with that? Bet your face is half-numb by now. I’ll go dump it for you.”

Derek shifts beside him. “Maybe you should keep-”

“Yeah, thanks,” Stiles interrupts, passing the pack to David before Derek can make any further protests. “That’d be awesome.” He stands abruptly, pulling Derek to his feet along with him, working his jaw to test out the numbness – and yep, score, totally can’t feel anything. “C’mon. I was promised a tour.”

“Demanding,” Derek grumbles, but there’s a smile tugging at the corner of his mouth again.

He’s shown around the ground floor of the house (fucking hell, there’s so much space), although Derek has to drag him bodily from the family library when it becomes apparent that he’d be perfectly happy to stand there and gape at the towering bookshelves and cosily cushioned alcoves all evening if given the chance. There’s a smaller room tucked away at the back of the house, overlooking the backyard, where Derek’s nieces (a pair of dark-haired twins who look no older than six) are running around with a gigantic Bernese mountain dog.

“Hey, Grammy,” Derek says, moving over to an armchair near the French doors that open out onto the back porch, stooping down to receive a kiss on the cheek from the elderly lady who’s sitting there.

“You aren’t getting enough sleep,” she comments critically, and pats the Alpha’s cheek. Then she sets aside her needlework and leans forwards so that she can peer around the side of the chair to look at Stiles. “Although I’m sure a portion of the blame can be placed on your young Submissive here. Come closer, dear, I don’t bite. Not anymore.”

Derek cringes (and dear God, it’s wonderful), but Stiles is fighting a smile as he moves to stand beside his Dom, feeling Derek’s hands settle on his hips from behind as he nods politely at the aging Dominant.

“Pleased to meet you, Ma’am. I’m Stiles.”

She beckons him closer still, holding out a hand towards him, palm-downwards. He closes the
distance between them in a few steps and offers her his bared wrist in return, but the height of the chair (and the fact that Derek’s grandmother is even shorter than Talia) means that he’s left towering over the Dom as her fingers curl around his wrist, and that just feels wrong. Because she may have transferred her Alpha title to Talia, but she’s still the same woman who channeled all those funds into Beacon Hills half a century ago and built it back up from the ground. She’s, like, the Alpha. He studied her in modern history, for God’s sake.

So he makes a split-second decision and drops smoothly to his knees at the last moment, compensating for the height difference, and offers her a shy smile when she arches her brow in surprise.

“Well now, aren’t you a polite young man?” she says approvingly, cupping his cheek in one small, weathered hand, wrinkles crinkling as she smiles at him. “Handsome, too. I can see why my grandson’s so taken with you.”

“Grandma,” Derek protests, but it’s not his big-bad-Alpha-Dom voice, it’s the embarrassed whine of a mortified grandson.

“Oh, don’t be so dramatic, Derek,” she chides, smoothing Stiles’ hair back with her free hand. “Your boy doesn’t mind it. Do you, Stiles?”

He shakes his head, grinning. He’s already decided that he and Mrs Hale are going to be best friends. “Not at all, Ma’am.”

She nods approvingly. “Then you’ll do nicely. Now, where did I put...?” She reaches into the quilt bag of knitting supplies tucked in beside her, rummaging around for a moment before pulling out the latest iPhone model and expertly tapping away at the screen. “Just a moment and I’ll add you to my contacts.”

She lets them go after a few minutes, once they’ve exchanged contact details and she’s made Stiles swear up and down that he’ll drop the “Ma’am” and call her ‘Grammy’ instead. Stiles remembers very little of his own paternal grandparents (who had both passed away early on in his childhood), and his maternal grandparents had never approved of his parent’s decision to get married and move to Beacon Hills, so they’d cut themselves off from the family completely. But the memories he does have are filled with warmth and happiness and laughter, and he still misses them even now, fifteen years later. So he’s not about to say no to Miriam Hale, who’s perhaps the most tech-savvy grandma he’s ever come across.

“You didn’t have to kneel,” Derek murmurs, as they’re making their way upstairs, his Dom’s hand resting on the small of his back.

Stiles shrugs, his cheeks heating a little. “I know. But it felt right. Your grandma is seriously badass, dude.”

Derek smiles, then tilts his head a little to the side and chokes out a laugh. “Grammy says ‘thank you’."

Shit. House full of Werewolves. He’s going to have to be careful not to say anything more than PG-rated for the next few hours. And cut down on the expletives, too; Laura seems like the kind of mother who won’t approve of swearing in the vicinity of little Were-baby ears.

“Der, wait up!” Nick calls, bounding up the stairs behind them. He’s got a smudge of dirt on his cheekbone, a couple of leaves sticking out of his rumpled hair, and about half a forest stuck to his shirt – Stiles assumes Laura must have caught up with him.
Derek shakes his head, smiling fondly, and pauses on the landing to tug Nick closer so that he can brush off the excess debris, ignoring the teenager’s grumbling complaints of “dude, stop it, I’m sixteen”.

“I take it Laura won?” he asks, trying to rub the smudge of dirt away with his thumb.

Nick gives him a smug little grin, letting his brother scrub at his cheek. “You haven’t seen the state of her pants yet.”

The Dom barks a laugh and shoves him towards the right-hand corridor. “Brat. Go wash up for dinner before mom catches you trailing mud all over the place.”

“Laura’s fault!” the Sub reminds him glibly, but ducks inside an open doorway halfway down the corridor; presumably a bedroom or bathroom.

“Derek?”

A woman steps out into the corridor to their left, fixing an emerald brooch to the left side of her dark purple hijab. She pauses when she spots the other Sub, but sends him a warm smile.

“You must be Stiles,” she says, the softest hint of an accent rounding her vowels. “Erica told me you might be coming.”

“Stiles, this is my sister-in-law, Yasmin,” Derek introduces, moving closer to brush a kiss against her cheek. “Tell Erica that she needs to spend less time texting and more time working.”

“She was on a coffee break,” Yasmin defends loyally, settling a hand on the swell of her stomach as she carefully makes her way over to the landing rail. She waves away Derek’s offer of assistance. “There’s only one of them to carry this time; I’ll manage. Is Adam home yet?”

Derek nods. “I think I heard his car pull up a few minutes ago. He’s probably trying to drag the girls inside for dinner.”

She shoots him a quiet smile, beginning to make her way downstairs. “I’ll leave him to it, then.”

“Betrayal!” a male voice calls from somewhere on the ground floor of the house, and Yasmin laughs.

Adam, it transpires, is one of Derek’s older brothers; a tall, leanly built, sandy-haired Dominant with an easy smile. He pauses at the foot of the staircase to call up a cheerful “Welcome to the madhouse, bro!”, a giggling dark-haired twin tucked under each arm. Stiles likes him immediately.

“How do you even fit everyone into this place?” Stiles asks incredulously, after he’s met Uncle Paul and Aunt Lucy and another three or four cousins (he’s seriously losing count here).

Derek chuckles, interlocking their fingers together again as they stroll around the outside of the house, the evening breeze pleasantly cool as it teases at their hair.

“All my aunts and uncles live across town,” he explains. “Uncle Peter and Uncle Theo – they’re my mom’s brothers – they actually live in New York and manage the family business. Malia an Joe only come here during the school holidays. And Laura’s got a place of her own just down the road; we passed it on our way here. The house only gets this crowded on Family Nights.”

“Ah.” Stiles reaches down to pet the Bernese mountain dog who’s been trailing after them as they walk, grinning when his hand gets slobbered on in return. “Pet dogs, I get – it’s a companion thing, right? But what’s with all the reptiles?”
Not that he had a problem with them, of course, but he’d counted no less than six lizards during his brief tour of the Hale house, and that, to him, seems a little bit excessive.

“They’re Nick’s,” Derek says. “He’s got a thing about animals. I swear our house felt more like a zoo sometimes, growing up. Not that it was always his fault – often birds and snakes just followed him home from school. It’s a Druid thing; he takes after Grandpa like that.” He cocks his head to the side suddenly, pausing mid-step, and frowns. “Huh.”

Stiles glances at him sideways. “What?”

“Liam’s here,” Derek tells him. “He came on his own.”

“And that’s…bad?” Stiles pries, confused.

Derek’s brow remains slightly furrowed, even as he resumes walking again, albeit at a slightly faster pace this time. They reach the front of the house in time to see the young Sub shut the car door behind him and start jogging towards the house. His gaze flickers towards the Alpha at the last minute and he swerves to cut across the grass towards them instead.

“Hey,” he greets cheerfully, bumping into Derek’s side for a hug. “Sorry I’m late.”

The Alpha wraps an arm around him as they walk at a more sedate pace. “Your folks couldn’t make it tonight?”

Liam’s smile falters, but he recovers quickly, glancing away and giving an easy shrug. “Something came up.”

Derek pauses again, peering down at the kid. “Are they alright?”

The Sub nods, rubbing at his nose in what seems to be a nervous habit. “Yeah, nobody got hurt.”

“Nobody got hurt doing what?” the Alpha asks, and his tone has shifted from casual to concerned. When the silence drags out for a beat too long, he releases Stiles’ hand and gently tilts his Beta’s chin up. “Hey.”

“It doesn’t matter, Sir.”

“Liam,” the Dom warns.

“Derek, it’s nothing-”

“One.”

Liam’s eyes widen fractionally. Then his whole posture sags on a long, shaky exhale and he drops his gaze again. “Somebody broke into the Switch support centre and trashed some equipment. But everything’s fine. It’s just a lot of paperwork, and Mom’s kinda the manager so…you know.”

The Alpha taps the boy’s chin to bring his gaze back up. “Are you alright?”

Liam shrugs again. “It only just happened. I was supposed to be picking them up from the centre after work and coming straight here, but when I drove past there were two patrol cars outside and a huge crowd of people; I didn’t know what to think. Guess it kinda freaked me out for a minute.”

Derek regards him carefully for a moment, before cupping the back of Liam’s neck and tugging the kid against his chest, wrapping him up in a tight hug. The Sub sags against him, his arms coming up to curl around Derek’s midriff as he rubs his forehead back and forth against the Alpha’s collarbone.
“You should’ve called me,” Derek murmurs, stroking his fingers through the kid’s light brown hair.

“But I was fine,” Liam insists, although his voice is wobbly in a way that suggests otherwise. “And I came straight here.”

“I know,” Derek soothes, and drops a kiss against his hair. “You did good.”

The young Beta pulls back after a minute or two and takes a deep, steadying breath. He’s dry-eyed, but there’s a look of fragility about him that gives the impression that it won’t take much to tip him over the edge. Stiles’ heart aches for him – he’s been there often enough himself to know just how awful that sense of instability can be.

“I’m fine,” the Sub repeats, perhaps more for his own benefit than for Derek’s. “I’m not gonna Drop, I’m okay.”

“Alright,” Derek agrees easily, still in that calm, soothing tone. Stiles doubts that the Alpha really believes him, given that all evidence points to the contrary, but he seems willing to give his Beta the space he needs to work things out by himself.

Liam takes another deep breath, then steps back from Derek completely, glancing towards the house instead. “I’m starved. When’s dinner?”

“You missed it,” Derek deadpans.

The look of horror on Liam’s face is priceless, and even Stiles can’t help laughing when it morphs into disgruntled amusement at Derek’s answering grin. The Beta aims a half-hearted kick at his Alpha’s shin, which the Dom dodges effortlessly and counters with a firm shove that makes the Sub stumble a few paces with an easy laugh.

“Mom made stew,” Derek informs him. “Should be ready in a few minutes.” He loops an arm around Stiles, giving him a sideways hug. “And Stiles made dessert.”

“Cookies?” Liam asks hopefully, spinning around to face them again as he walks backwards. Then he stumble to a halt, eyes widening. “Dude, what happened to your face?”

……………………………………………...
By the end of dinner, everyone knows about the origin of the bruise on his jaw, and Stiles has resigned himself to the knowledge that it’s going to become one of those stories – one that’s brought up every once in a while and laughed over, on birthdays and Christmases and at really, really inopportune moments.

Then he realises that he’s already picturing himself as being a member of Derek’s family for the rest of his life, and he has to take a moment to recover from the subsequent brain meltdown.

It’s just so comfortable around the huge, packed table in the dining room, squashed between Derek and Laura, sharing an easy conversation about literature with Adam (as it turns out, he and the Healer share the same passion for Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett), swapping TV show suggestions with Cora and Malia, and enthusing over Marvel’s recent decision to make Thor a Submissive with Nick and David.

The food’s amazing, too. There are baskets of fresh bread rolls and mounds of mashed potato to accompany the stew, alongside half a dozen kinds of steamed vegetables. There’s wine for the adults and huge pitchers of ice-cold lemonade and fruit juices for the kids, and somehow (miraculously) there aren’t any major spillages, despite the close quarters. It probably has something to do with Werewolves’ quick reflexes – Stiles almost knocks his glass over on three separate occasions, but Derek’s hand is always there to steady it before he’s even registered what’s happened.

His jaw starts to ache again halfway through dinner, but only for the briefest moment, because Laura’s hand curls around his wrist before he can even reach up to rub it, and the pain dissipates to nothing again.

He’s full fit to bursting by the end of the meal (how the hell Werewolves manage to eat so much without popping, he’ll never know), and gladly settles down on one of the couches in the living room beside Derek, tucked under the Alpha’s arm and watching with a pleased smile as the Hale family dig into the boxes of dessert.

“Oh muh guh,” Laura moans around a forkful of apple pie.

“Don’t talk with your mouth full,” Miriam chides, although she’s already halfway through her own slice. She sends Derek a wink. “The boy’s a keeper, dear. Maybe that kitchen of yours will finally see some use.”

“I cook,” Derek protests, but it lacks conviction.

As the Alpha predicted, Nick loves the Popping Brownies, turning in his cross-legged position on the floor in front of the couch to kneel up and press his hands together in exaggerated supplication, offering Stiles everything from his eternal, undying love to his firstborn child in exchange for the recipe.

“Dude, you burn water,” Liam reminds him from where he’s seated on the floor between Derek’s legs, one arm curled around the Alpha’s shin as Derek runs his fingers through the Sub’s hair idly.

At least the Beta seems more cheerful now. Stiles hadn’t missed the concerned glances passed between a number of the adults during dinner, or the way Laura and Adam had brushed a hand over his hair or his neck or his arm at every available opportunity from the moment that the young Wolf had arrived at the Hale house; casual, soothing touches that seem to have eased a little of the tension in Liam’s shoulders. The sunny smile on his face when Stiles offers him another cookie seems genuine enough, anyway.
“So does your face,” Nick retorts, shoving at him, sitting back down again and using Stiles’ legs as a backrest as he transfers a small, leafy-green lizard from his shoulder to perch it on his upraised knee, scratching the reptile’s head with the pad of his index finger.

“Boys, be nice,” Talia interjects, although again she sounds more amused than scolding. She’s busy plating up a small selection of desserts for her eldest son, Johnathan, who apparently has dinner plans with his business associates that he couldn’t reschedule. “He’ll be due home in an hour or so,” the Alpha adds, covering the loaded plate with clingfilm to protect it from being victim to wandering hands. “I’m sure he’d love to meet you, Stiles, if you don’t have to dash off home straight away.”

Stiles shrugs, too full and too comfortable to even think about moving just yet. “I’m not in any rush.” Whether he’ll still be awake in an hour is another matter entirely.

“Me next, Uncle Derek, me next!”

Stiles grins, watching from the back porch swing as his Dom obligingly sets one twin down (Josie, if he’s not mistaken) and reaches for Elisa, scooping her up beneath the arms and tossing her high into the air. The six-year-old shrieks, giggling, and clings to Derek as he catches her again. Liam is watching the three of them from his seat on the bridge of the wooden jungle gym (its design too unique to be anything but hand-built), Tyler curled up against his chest, fast asleep, the boy’s nose buried in the Sub's shirt collar.

It’s getting late now, the setting sun casting a dull orange glow against the spacious backyard, the evening wind growing steadily cooler as time passes. A number of Derek’s aunts and uncles and cousins have already left, having travelled in from the other side of the county, so the general hubbub in the house has begun to die down now.

“Keep making cookies this good,” a new voice murmurs from behind him, startling him from his thoughts, “and I might just have to switch Dynamic and marry you myself.”

Stiles turns on the bench to peer towards the French doors, where a tall, broad-shouldered figure is
leaning against the frame in a casual slouch, munching on one of the toffee-apple crunches. He’s dark-haired, like Derek and Nick, and has apparently inherited all of the tall genes, his impressive frame filling up most of the open doorway. He’s got a kind face, though, and the woven leather band circling his wrist marks him as an unbonded Submissive, so Stiles finds himself returning the older man’s smile easily.

“I’m not sure Derek would appreciate that,” he comments wryly.

“You’re right,” the older Sub acknowledges with a sigh, brushing the crumbs from his fingers. “He’d probably sulk. I can’t stand it when he suls, I’m a total pushover. Spoiled the kid rotten growing up.”

He drops down onto the swinging bench beside Stiles and offers his hand. “Johnathan Hale; call me Johnny, everyone does.” Then the Werewolf tilts his head to the side, his palm warm and his grip strong as he regards him closely for a moment. “Have we met somewhere before?”

Stiles has just been wondering that same thing himself. He doesn’t know if it’s just the striking resemblance that Johnny shares to his brothers, but he has the distinct impression that this isn’t the first time they’ve met face-to-face. Not recently, perhaps. But a long while ago, when the man seemed even taller and more muscular than he does now, back when Stiles was short and scrawny and the Submissive would’ve been a total giant in comparison to-

“Shh, you’re okay. It’s alright, you’re safe. You’re safe now. Your dad’s on his way, it’s going to be alright. Nobody’s going to hurt you. I need you to breathe for me, okay? No, no – easy, not so fast. Nice and slow, c’mon, you can do it. That’s it, good boy. Deep breaths, in and out. In and out, that’s good. In…and out, you got it, buddy. You’re doing great.”

Stiles feels like someone’s dumped a bucket of ice-cold water over his head, his muscles tensing up at the sudden flash of memory. He can still smell the cold, coppery scent of blood clinging to him, see the wide, vacant eyes and lax faces of the murdered deputies, scarlet pools spreading out beneath them on the linoleum flooring, trickling towards him to soak into the fabric of his jeans where Matt has him kneeling at his feet, barrel of the gun - still hot from the recent bullet discharge - singing the skin of his neck as the Dom uses it to guide his chin up to meet the teenager's crazed, lust-blown eyes…

“Hey.” Johnathan’s regarding concernedly, one hand resting on his shoulder, the other still grasping his own. “Hey, what’s wrong? Are you alright?”

His heart’s hammering away in his chest frantically, and he takes a deep, steadying breath, forcefully squashing the memories back down again. It’s all in the past. He’s not in any danger. The past can only hurt him if he lets it, and he does not give his consent for that to happen. Everything’s fine.

“Stiles?”

It’s Derek, the Alpha materialising beside him instantly, his brow creased in concern as he reaches for Stiles, curling a hand over the nape of his neck as he drops down into a crouch in front of him, red eyes searching his face.

“I’m fine,” the Sub says aloud, grateful that his voice doesn’t waver. He drags a hand down his face, exhaling a shaky breath, and manages a more convincing sort of smile. “Sorry. Memories. Happens sometimes. I’m good.”

Derek looks like he wants to pry further into the issue, but Johnathan reaches out to squeeze the Dom’s shoulder lightly, and a moment later the Alpha’s expression is smoothing over into something
calmer, easier, the red bleeding from his eyes.

“Maybe you should take Stiles home,” the older Hale suggests gently.

Stiles ought to protest, but actually he’s so fucking grateful he might just cry. Because while he’s no longer on the brink of a flashback-induced panic attack, he’s still feeling shaky and exposed, like the scab’s been knocked off an old wound. He needs time and space to collect himself, to bury those feelings back down again - deep, deep down where they can’t hurt him. What he doesn’t need is two-dozen people fussing and asking questions and making Stiles feel claustrophobic.

Derek nods, gently easing Stiles to his feet and winding an arm around him. “Could you pass on our apologies to the others?” He drops his voice to a low murmur. “And keep an eye on Liam for me, won’t you?”

Johnathan nods, leaning in to stroke a hand up between Derek’s shoulder blades and press a kiss to his hairline. “Will do. Drive safe. And text me later tonight, okay?”

Derek nods, winding his arm tighter around Stiles and guiding him towards the front of the house where the car's parked in the driveway. Stiles’ legs move on autopilot, the semi-nauseous numbness of a recent adrenaline surge making him feel groggy and fuzzy-headed. He lets Derek help him into the car, allows the Alpha to fasten his seatbelt for him, and says nothing when the Alpha switches on the radio to some god-awful western folk station.

To be honest, he doesn’t remember the ride home.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the delay - another busy couple of weeks at work. I have some time off next month, though, so I’m hoping to go back to weekly updates again shortly. :)

I hope you enjoyed the chapter! And a quick heads-up about the next chapter for those who might find it triggering - there is talk of previous abuse, stalking, assault and mild gore (in flashbacks). Don’t want to spoil anything, but I feel it’s important to warn people ahead of time so you’ll know to skip the next chapter if necessary. Although the potential triggers will only make up about 30% of the overall chapter.

Let me know your thoughts! What did you think of the Hale family? I’d love to explore all the cousins and aunts and uncles in more detail, because I'm certain they all have fascinating backgrounds, but I felt it was best to focus on the characters who I feel influence Derek's character in the biggest way. :)
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning: past traumatic experience, stalking behaviour, minor character death and mild gore.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Stiles.”

It’s Cassie, her glazed brown eyes staring at him from across the room, blood still seeping from the gaping bullet wound in her neck to pool beneath her on the linoleum flooring. Stiles wants to reach for her, but he can’t. He never can. He’s frozen in place, as though the deputy’s blood is physically tethering him to the floor where it’s slowly soaking into the knees of his pants, the cooling dampness of it making him shiver. His throat’s tight, the tears hot and stinging as he holds her vacant gaze.

“I’m sorry,” he whispers raggedly. “Cassie, I’m so sorry-”

“You did this.” Her lips are moving, but he knows she’s dead. She’d been the first to go down. “You…you killed me.”

“You killed me, Stiles,” Riley echoes from where he’s slumped against the wall on the far side of the room. There are bullet holes in his chest, his shirt drenched scarlet, his face a deathly grey. He’s dead too. They all are. “You did this.”

Stiles shakes his head, breath hitching on a sob that burns brutally in his chest. “I didn’t mean to. I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to, I just wanted to get away-”

“Shh.” The barrel of a gun strokes down his cheek, hot and unyielding, burning his skin where it comes to rest against his jaw. “Shh, don’t cry, gorgeous. You had this coming to you; running off to tattle on me when I warned you there’d be consequences. I didn’t want to hurt anyone. None of this would’ve happened if you’d listened to me in the first place. I hadn’t intended to punish you so soon, but you forced my hand this time. And you’ve made such a mess.”

There’s a wet sloshing sound as Matt kicks at the congealing pool of blood. Stiles flinches, screwing his eyes tight shut as the cool liquid splashes against his face and torso.

“But look at you now,” Matt purrs, hand tilting his chin up, thumb smearing the droplets of blood across his cheek. “Practically domesticated. You just needed a firm hand, Stiles; someone strong enough to keep you leashed, keep you quiet and obedient. I knew we were a good match.”

The gun slides down his neck as Matt’s lips capture his own in a rough, biting kiss. Stiles wrenches his head to the side and clamps his mouth shut to silence the sob that’s threatening to escape, tears welling in his eyes. He wants his dad. He wants Scott. He wants to go home.

“Look at me.”

Stiles shakes his head stiffly, muscles clenched tight in fear, faint tremors wracking his body as he
stares resolutely at the Dom’s bloodstained converses.

“C’mon now, don’t be a naughty boy,” Matt chides softly, but the hand that curls into Stiles’ short hair is brutal and unforgiving as he yanks the Sub’s head back, the gun pushing firmly against the underside of his jaw to keep his chin up. “I don’t wanna have to punish you again. There’s still a bullet in here with McCall’s name on it.” He smiles knowingly, like it’s an inside joke, like Stiles is enjoying this as much as he is. “But you’re gonna be good for me, right? You’re not gonna force my hand again, are you?”

Matt’s grin when he nods shakily is wide and pleased, and it makes Stiles sick to his stomach. The kiss is worse. Matt’s teeth scrape against his lips, the Dom’s mouth hard and demanding as Stiles fights to breathe through a nose clogged with tears, hot liquid cutting burning paths down his cheeks as he squeezes his eyes tighter shut.

“Stiles!”

It’s Dad.

No, no, what’s Dad doing here? Dad isn’t supposed to be here. This is wrong, wrong, wrong. He can’t come in, Matt’s got a gun, Matt’s going to shoot him!

Stiles feels terror swelling tight in his chest at the furious expression on the Dom’s face as he breaks the kiss and straightens up, fingers curling tighter in the Sub’s hair; a hard, possessive grip. Stiles shoots a panicked look towards the door, crying out in warning when it slams open. His Dad bursts into the room, dressed in casual civilian clothes, his gun nowhere in sight.

Matt’s lips curl into a wide smile as he strokes the gun down the side of Stiles’ face again, before abruptly swinging it up towards the Sheriff and firing.

The bullet hits John right between the eyes and buries itself in the wall behind him.

His dad crumples to the floor, lifeless.

Stiles lurches upright in bed and screams.

It’s dark and hot, and his shadowed surroundings are alarming in their unfamiliarity. A stranger’s hands clutch at him in the darkness, smothering him, pulling him back as he tries to twist away, and a wave of renewed panic and terror rolls through him, wrenching another scream from his throat as he fights against his captor.

“Stiles! Hey, hey, shh, it’s me! It’s Derek!”

The name registers vaguely, but it doesn’t help to dampen the horror of what’s just happened, doesn’t lessen the grip of fear around his heart, even as he stops struggling against the Dom’s hold. His screams dissolve into choked, heaving sobs as he clutches at Derek’s bicep, feeling the Alpha curl around him from behind.

“It’s okay,” the Werewolf says, over and over, although there’s an uneven tremor to his own voice. “You’re okay, baby, I’m here. You’re safe.”

Derek shifts him carefully once the fight’s gone out of him, scooping Stiles up to sit sideways in the Dom’s lap, a hand gently guiding his face down against the Alpha’s chest where it’s warm and safe and familiar as arms close around him firmly. The security of the man’s hold is exactly what he needs to ease the growing panic in his chest, but it does nothing to help his tears.
And it *hurts*. God, it *hurts*.

He cries so hard he thinks he might be sick, but he’s helpless to stop it. As the terror recedes, it leaves in its wake a sense of overwhelming grief that twists at the knife already buried in his heart; grief for the deputies who’d been murdered, certainly, but more than that the crushing anguish of his father’s demise.

It hadn’t happened that way. His dad’s alive, he *knows* that. But factual knowledge has never made the nightmares any less real, and tonight is no exception. He’d seen the bullet pass through his father’s head; seen the blood splatter it had left on the wall behind him. It’s not an image he can easily banish from his mind.

“You’re okay,” Derek repeats, once the wracking sobs have eased a little, one hand settling on the back of his neck, cradling Stiles close as he buries his nose in the Sub’s hair. “Whatever you saw, it’s not happening right now, it’s not real. You’re safe, I’m here.”

Stiles clings to the words like a lifeline. They’re comfortingly familiar, a mantra that both his therapist and his Dad (and, later, Scott and Isaac) had used following the numerous panic attacks and flashbacks and nightmares he’d suffered from when he was sixteen, still fighting off the demons of his recent trauma. And just like they did back then, the words give him the strength he needs to take deeper breaths; to ground himself in the pattern of his own heartbeat, in the feel of the bedsheets beneath his feet, in the warmth of Derek’s skin beneath his cheek.

“That’s it,” Derek murmurs, dropping a kiss against his hair. “Just breathe. You’re okay.”

He’s not okay, not really, but he’s getting there. Little by little, he can feel the fog of the adrenaline-induced drop slowly lifting from him, although with the return of his basic motor functions comes the usual aftershock trembling. It’s nothing new, but it’s still as horrible as always.

His hand is shaking when he lifts it to scrub at his damp, stinging eyes. Derek pauses in his litany of murmured reassurances, sliding his hand from Stiles’ neck to gently brush the Sub’s fringe back from his sweaty forehead. The Alpha peers down at him, his brow creased in concern as their eyes meet.

“M’okay,” Stiles manages, although his voice is strangled and tremulous and his breath hitches mid-word. “Just a nightmare.”

Derek tenderly strokes the backs of his fingers down the Sub’s cheek, his face still pinched. “You were screaming.”

Stiles swallows, his throat tight and sore. He always ends up screaming when he dreams about that night. But it’s been so *long* since he last suffered from nightmares – over eighteen months, at least – that he’d forgotten just how terrifying they could be. How fragile and fractious he always feels in the wake of them.

There had been a time, in the year following the incident with Matt, when nightmares had been a twice-weekly occurrence. They’d eventually prescribed him sleeping pills to tackle his insomnia, and hormone suppressants to control his frequent Sub-drops, but the sedatives had only made it harder for him to wake up from a nightmare and the suppressants had made him moody, so he’d stopped taking them after a few weeks. He and his Dad had argued about it, of course (one of the few *actual* shouting matches that he can recall ever having during his teenage years), but Stiles had refused to budge on the issue.

Gradually, with time and therapy, the Drops had tapered off. And as the school year wore on, his nightmares had grown less regular too.
Things had changed, of course, when he’d gone to college. At least he’d been able to share a room with Scott – thus avoiding the fear and embarrassment of sharing his nocturnal issues with a total stranger. Not that the nightmares had been frequent by the time he was eighteen; maybe once a month or so, only more often than that if something triggered him unexpectedly. And Scott, always a light sleeper, had sometimes managed to wake him up before the nightmare had even escalated to a point where it would force him awake, so the aftershocks and subsequent Sub-drops had been less severe than his previous experiences. So by the time he’d graduated, he’d almost forgotten what it was like to have a Bad Night.

After all, eighteen months in the clear is a long time – definitely a new record. In all fairness, he’s probably overdue for a nightmare. He just hadn’t anticipated that it would be a really rough one.

“You did this. You killed me.”

God, Cassie’s voice. It hurts every time. She’d been Stiles’ hero as a kid – a young, badass Submissive cop with a confident attitude and a friendly smile. She’d been a godsend after his mom had passed away (when his dad was struggling to balance work and childcare and his own reoccurring Dom-drops), frequently stepping in as a last-minute babysitter when Melissa wasn’t able to switch her shift at the hospital. Stiles remembers late bedtimes and Pokémon marathons and sampling spicy food for the first time. He remembers marvelling at Cassie’s long, dark box-braids and begging her every week to braid his hair like hers. Eventually he’d grown too old to need a babysitter, but he’d still visited her at the station as often as he could, slipping a box of cookies into the top drawer of her desk when she wasn’t looking. The peanut-butter-double-chocs had always been her favourite.

Stiles doesn’t blame himself for what happened to her, not anymore. It’s taken years of therapy and a shit-ton of self-reflection to reach that point, but he finally believes it now. Unfortunately, the memory of the guilt still lives on, lingering like a shadow in the back of his mind, rearing its ugly head whenever his subconscious is at its most vulnerable.

He won’t let the sliver of doubt work its way any deeper, though. He knows better than to give it that kind of power. Recovery can be a vicious cycle sometimes.

Derek drops another kiss against his hairline, drawing him from his thoughts. “Do you want to talk about it?”

Stiles squeezes his eyes shut because no, no he doesn’t. But do they need to talk about it? Yes, probably. Derek deserves to know why Stiles occasionally wakes up in the middle of the night screaming. His Dom needs to understand that it’s going to happen again at some point, and that there isn’t anything Derek can do to stop it. It’s not going to be an easy conversation for either of them.

He swallows again, his throat dry, and lifts his head from Derek’s shoulder to peer up at him, eyes hot and stinging, overtired from crying.

“Can I have a glass of water?”

Derek nods, kissing the corner of his mouth quickly before gently lifting Stiles out of his lap. The bed sheets are cold beneath him, and Stiles hugs his knees against his chest as he waits for the Alpha to return. He begins to regret the request almost immediately, the instinctive need to cling to his Dom setting a dull, pulsing ache in his chest and bringing a fresh sheen of miserable tears to his eyes. He blinks them back resolutely, but he can’t do much about the biological urges other than hug his knees tighter while he waits.

He crawls back into Derek’s lap unashamedly when the Alpha slides into bed again, looping his
arms around the Dom’s neck as he buries his face in the man’s chest. A large, warm hand rubs slow, soothing circles between his shoulder blades as he sags into the Alpha’s hold, the ache in his chest slowly beginning to dissipate again.

He feels fragile and vulnerable and he hates it. Hates how scared he is to be alone right now, how quickly he’s been pushed to the brink of tears again simply at the prospect of his Dom being in another room. He hasn’t felt like this in so long and it sucks.

“Shh, you’re okay,” Derek soothes, the Dom clearly having picked up on the renewed spike of emotional distress. Fingers card gently through his hair. “I’m here, I’m right here.”

Stiles rubs his forehead against Derek’s collarbone and just breathes for a moment as his heart rate settles. He’s fine. Everything’s fine. He just needs Derek to stay within reaching distance for the next few hours.

Derek adjusts his position again after a couple of minutes and cracks open the lid on the water bottle. Stiles lets the Dom hold the rim against his lips, allowing Derek to feed him tiny bites of granola bar in between sips, too tired to summon the energy to do it himself. He’s finished half the bottle before he finally turns his head away when it’s offered again, signalling that he’s had enough.

Derek recaps the bottle and sets it to one side, wrapping his arms around the Sub again and leaning back against the pillowed headboard, nuzzling at his temple. Stiles is finally starting to feel human again - his breathing still hitches every minute or so, but the tears have dried up and the crushing sense of grief is slowly fading. He’s exhausted, both physically and emotionally, and the temptation to bury himself closer into Derek and fall asleep is growing increasingly more difficult to resist, but he knows this discussion is already well overdue. Better to talk about it tonight, when past events are still fresh on his mind, rather than reawakening those memories another day and allowing them to hurt him all over again. He needs to get this out of the way with and then put it firmly behind him; bury it deep down like before where the wounds won’t feel so raw.

Stiles takes a deep, calming breath.

“I get nightmares, sometimes,” he begins, his voice hoarse but steady now. “About something that happened to me when I was sixteen.”

Derek must hear the way that his heart’s starting to beat double-time again, because the crease reappears in the Alpha’s forehead.

“We don’t have to talk about it tonight,” Derek murmurs, stroking his cheek tenderly, fingers lingering against the bruise on his jaw to leech the dull ache away. “Not if you don’t want to.”

Stiles curls his hand around the Dom’s wrist, finding comfort in the steady thrum of the Alpha’s pulse beneath his fingers, in the warmth of his skin. It gives him the strength he needs to shake his head resolutely.

“I’d rather not talk about it,” he admits quietly. “But I need to. I don’t want to keep this from you - I didn’t mean to in the first place. It just never seemed like a good time, y’know? It’s not…it’s not an easy topic for me, so I need you not to interrupt, okay? And just,” he grips Derek’s wrist tighter and swallows past the hot ache swelling in his throat, “just don’t let go of me.”

“I’m here,” Derek reassures him again, gentle and calm and exactly what Stiles needs him to be right now. The Dom’s arm tightens around his waist. “I’m not going anywhere.”

Stiles nods and takes another deep, steadying breath. “Okay.”
Six years earlier

“It looks good on you, man,” Scott tells him wheezily, rooting around in his locker for his inhaler. “Leather bands are so much cooler than chain ones.”

Stiles unzips the side pocket of his rucksack and pushes the spare inhaler into Scott’s hands. “Stop talking and breathe, stupid.” But he can’t quite hide the pleased grin as he glances down at the new Sub-band circling his wrist. “I couldn’t decide between brown or black leather, so Dad bought me both. Figured it’s probably a good idea to have a backup anyway, in case I lose it or something.”

Scott nods, shaking the device. “Good thinking.”

“Hey, you’re not gonna go all bossy on me now that it’s official, right?” the Sub enquires, elbowing Scott’s side teasingly. “Because I’m still the same Stiles.”

Scott takes a couple of puffs before handing the inhaler back to him, his breathing easier. “Dude, c’mon, I’m not a total jerk.” He pauses, glancing at him sideways. “I still get to hug you, right?”

Stiles zips up his backpack again and scoffs. “Duh.”

The Dom grins and pulls him into a one-armed side-snuggle, closing the locker with his free hand and turning them in the direction of the science wing.

Someone else is there, though, blocking their path. Stiles recognises Matt Daehler from lacrosse practice – the dude’s always been fairly standoffish, rarely engaging anyone else in conversation unless it’s strictly necessary, but he’s a pretty decent player so he gets away with it. Thankfully he’s also a senior, so they don’t usually have to interact with him outside of practice.

“Hey, Stiles,” the older teenager greets, leaning against the lockers casually as he fixes Stiles with a wide, easy smile.

“Hi,” Stiles replies awkwardly as he and Scott try to skirt around the guy.

“So you’re a Submissive?” Matt comments, eyes trailing down slowly to alight on the plaited leather Sub-band curled around his wrist. “Thought you might be. Congratulations.”

“Thank you,” the Sub says automatically, because his dad instilled manners into him at an early age and he’s at least capable of that much, even if his mouth tends to get him into trouble the rest of the time.

“Is there somebody else you’re interested in?” the Dom asks next.

Stiles just blinks at him because wait, what?

He’s maybe spoken to the dude five times in his entire life, what’s with the sudden best-bud chitchat? He’s never quite been sure how he feels about the Dom at the best of times, and right now the little stranger-danger warning alarm in his head is flashing at yellow alert. The fact that it happens to be his first day back at school as a registered Submissive doesn’t strike him as a coincidence, either.

Thankfully, the bell rings before the silence can drag on for too long.

“Hey, we should probably head to class,” Scott says loudly, clearly for Matt’s benefit. The young
Dom curls a companionable (and somewhat protective) arm around his shoulders again as he turns them away from the older teenager. “C’mon.”

Scott waits until they’re at a safe distance before ducking his head down a little to whisper with amused incredulity, “Dude, what the hell was that all about?”

“Beats me.” Stiles shrugs it off easily. “Hey, so are we still on for Saturday night?”

Over the course of the next week, Matt keeps popping up like that. Outside the school entrance in the mornings while he’s waiting for Melissa to drop Scott off. In the bathroom when he steps out of a stall, making idle chitchat with him while Stiles hurriedly washes his hands and beats a hasty retreat. By the school office when he goes to hand in a permission slip from his dad about a school trip. In line at the cafeteria, even though he’s fairly sure they don’t share the same lunch period.

Usually the Dom just smiles and says hi, but sometimes he tries to start up conversations too. And normally Stiles is the type of person who’d keep talking until the cows came home if someone gave him the opportunity, but there’s something about Matt that genuinely unsettles him. Something deep-rooted and instinctual that makes his heartbeat quicken and his adrenaline spike every time the Dom enters his personal bubble.

He can’t even go and hide out in the library any more like he used to do when the crowded hallways made him claustrophobic, because somehow Matt’s always there, too.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to make you jump,” the teenager apologises, but his smile’s still fixed in place, twisting at the corner of his mouth.

“No worries,” Stiles dismisses, despite the way his heart’s about to jackrabbit right out of his chest. He carefully puts the book he’d been looking at back on the shelf and reaches for his backpack, but Matt’s hand gets there first.

“You come here a lot,” the Dom comments, his hand lingering on the strap of the backpack even as Stiles slowly pulls it closer to himself.

Not anymore, Stiles thinks but doesn’t say. He shrugs and manages another polite smile.

“I like to read.”

The Dom’s smile widens. “I know.”


It bothers him enough that he takes his lacrosse gear from his usual gym locker that same afternoon and stores it in Scott’s instead, simply because it puts him on the opposite side of the locker-room to Matt. His best friend gives him a weird look, but doesn’t question it; Stiles could kiss him.

Unfortunately, he can’t completely avoid the Senior player on the field. Lacrosse practice becomes far less enjoyable when most of his attention is spent on dodging Matt (an activity that proves to be far more difficult than he anticipated). And things only escalate as time passes; now the Dom isn’t just trying to engage him in conversation, he seems set on invading Stiles’ personal space and
brushing up against him. It’s both weird and annoying. He finds himself growing tense every time Finstock calls for them to pair up, latching onto Danny or Scott (whichever is closest at the time) just in case Matt gets any ideas. The Dom still manages to knock against him when the ball’s in play, though, even when he’s supposed to be on the other side of the field running drills. Matt makes a point of clapping Stiles on the shoulder or bumping their helmets together whenever he scores a goal. It should probably feel like friendly teammate contact – nobody else seems bothered by it – but Stiles just can’t shake the feeling of unease that creeps up on him whenever the Dom is nearby.

If he’s being honest, it’s really starting to bother him. Like, the feel-as-though-he’s-being-watched kind of bothering him. He says as much to Scott a few days later, who frowns and settles a hand on his arm, exuding protective Dom vibes as he scoots a little closer along the cafeteria bench. Scott may be newly registered, too, but he’s been a Dom for years now as far as Stiles is concerned. An early developer if ever there was one.

“I knew there was something going on,” his friend tells him grimly. “You’ve been acting weird all week.” He munches on a green bean, frowning. “He’s totally hitting on you, man. In a fucking creepy way, too.”

“But he’s gotta know I’m not interested,” Stiles protests, propping up his chin in his hand. “I’ve gone from cutting our conversations short to flat-out ignoring him, but he still keeps popping up all over the place. Hell, the guy knows my class schedule better than I do.”

“So tell him you’re not looking for a relationship,” Scott reasons.

Stiles groans and scrubs a hand down his face. “But that’s just it, he hasn’t said anything about a relationship. He hasn’t mentioned going out on a date, he hasn’t asked for my number, he hasn’t made romantic advances of any kind. He’s just being weirdly talkative and keeps smiling at me. What if I tell him I’m not interested in dating and it turns out he was only looking for friendship?”

Scott shakes his head. “He’s being way too persistent for it to be a friendship thing.”

“But are you a hundred percent certain it’s a romance thing?” Stiles probes, because he’s kept himself awake for nights on end debating the same issue – whether he should tell Matt to back the fuck off or wait for the whole thing blow over on its own. Scott pulls a face. “Exactly. It’d be humiliating for both of us if it turns out I’m just reading the signals wrong. I can’t-”

A flash of movement catches his eye, a familiar jacket that he’s learned to identify from a safe distance, and he cuts off mid-sentence as he ducks down a little, hiding himself partially behind Scott, his eyes tracking the figure. But then the kid turns around and thank fuck, it’s not Matt, just a tall Sophomore with a similar taste in jackets.

He exhales a relieved sigh and straightens up again, sending Scott an apologetic grin when the Dom looks at him worriedly.

“Sorry. False alarm.”

“Stiles, if it’s gotten to the point where you’re actively trying to hide from the guy, maybe you need to tell someone about it,” his friend urges quietly, leaning in close to be heard above the background din of the cafeteria. “What about your dad? He’d take you seriously.”

Stiles shakes his head quickly. “Scotty, my dad would arrest him. You know what he’s like.”

“Well, maybe arresting him wouldn’t be a bad idea,” Scott reasons, spearing a piece of potato on his fork. “Since it sounds like the guy’s basically stalking you.”
“Who’s stalking Stiles?”

It’s Lydia, red hair twisted up in an elegant bun today, her kill-you-with-my-brains-if-you-make-a-pass-at-me-again smile sweetly in place as she slides into the seat across from them, setting down her tray in front of her. Stiles has never once regretted the day that he threw away the perfect-Dom spectacles he’d once viewed her with and decided to be her friend rather than continuing to compete to be her love interest. Now they’re thick as thieves, sharing an insatiable fascination in all the weird and wonderful crap that goes on in Beacon Hills, emailing each other links to news feeds and journal articles, spending their weekend nights sifting through library books on ancient mythology. She’s already told him that she wants to be a journalist, and Stiles knows she’s going to kick ass - the only person who can rival Lydia when it comes to research is Danny, and only then because the guy’s got some kind of sixth sense when it comes to technology. And, you know, the whole magic-sensitive thing too.

Lydia picks up her cutlery and glances expectantly at Stiles. “Well?”

“Nobody’s stalking me,” he sighs, inching further along the bench as Danny (fully absorbed in the book he’s reading) sits down next to him. He takes the opportunity to steal a fry from the Druid’s plate. “I’m just seeing him a lot lately, that’s all.”


“Maybe he likes the bathroom,” the Sub tries, but he’s not convincing himself, either.

“Who?” Lydia asks again, twirling up some pasta on her fork.

“Who cares?” Jackson moodily drops into the empty seat at the end of the table and spears a piece of chicken viciously. He’s been unusually abrasive these past couple of weeks, like his new registration as a Dom has somehow made him even more of a douchebag than before.

Stiles tolerates him for Danny and Lydia’s sake, but only just.

“Matt Daehler,” he finally admits, poking at his meatball half-heartedly. They’re particularly rubbery today. He should’ve made sandwiches. “We keep ending up in the same place at the same time, and it’s gone from being awkward and annoying to kinda uncomfortable and creepy - but it’s nothing I can’t handle,” he adds hastily, because Lydia looks like she’s ready to eviscerate the guy with her perfectly manicured nails. “I think I’m just reading into it too much.”

“Daehler?” Danny echoes, lowering his book to glance at him sideways. At Stiles’ nod, a faint frown creases the Dominant’s brow. “He cornered me the other day in the locker room, started asking me a bunch of weird questions about you and Scott. He asked if I was going to claim you, but I thought he was just jerking around; he laughed it off afterwards.”

“Claim me?” Stiles feels his insides twist at the words. That kind of phrasing is considered fairly prejudiced these days, along with the idea that Submissives should be ‘domesticated’ or ‘tamed’ by Dominants, like their independence is something to be discouraged.

Danny closes his book, his expression pure worried-Dom now. “Stiles, if the guy’s giving you trouble, you need to talk to someone about it.”

“That’s exactly what I’ve been telling him,” Scott agrees, clearly relieved to have someone else fighting on his side of the court. His expression brightens suddenly. “Hey, what about Coach? I’m sure he’d listen to you.”
Stiles winces – bad idea. He loves Coach, he really does – the dude’s crazily passionate about lacrosse and he seems like a genuinely nice guy – but Finstock’s one of those really, really protective Doms who tends to mollycoddle his submissive players (off the pitch, of course – he doesn’t allow his instincts to interfere with the game), and Stiles knows for a fact that he’d kick Matt off the team without a moment’s hesitation if Stiles were to raise the issue with him. And that seems a little excessive. Because it’s not like Matt’s been following him home or anything, and they do go to the same school, so it’s not totally impossible to bump into the guy a couple of times a day. Right? Or, you know, around every corner. And in the bathroom.

“Relax, guys, it’s no big deal,” he dismisses around a mouthful of pasta. At Scott’s frown, he rolls his eyes. “Look, I promise I’ll go talk to Coach if things get any weirder, okay?”

That seems to satisfy the Dominants at the table; Danny opens his book again, Lydia shifts her attention to her cell phone and Scott sends him a sunny smile. Stiles returns to his own meal and pushes all thoughts of Matt Daehler out of his mind.

He’s overreacting. It’ll all blow over in a few days.

.

The handwritten notes start showing up in his locker a week later.

They’re harmless at first. Witty one-liners and comments about the school faculty, song recommendations and random trivia facts. He spends the first few days convinced they’re from Scott or Danny or Lydia, because they’re harmless and genuinely funny, but his friends continue to deny any knowledge of their existence.

As the weeks goes on, however, the comments become less generic, the song recommendations turn into song lyrics that hit a little too close to home, and the unknown sender starts to compliment him on what he’s wearing that day; on the mark he got in his algebra test; on what option he went for at lunch. Witty one-liners become double entendres that step just a little too far over the line for Stiles’ comfort. The notes become more frequent, too – now there’s a new one after every class, and if he doesn’t have time to check between lessons, there’s usually a little stack of them waiting for him in his locker, fluttering out onto the floor when he yanks it open.

It quickly starts to piss him off.

A Submissive he may be, yes, but he’s always been stubborn and hot-headed once his fuse has worn down far enough (something he’s inherited from his father), and as the uneasy feeling grows, so do his pent-up frustrations. Why can’t the guy just take a fucking hint?

He doesn’t have any hard evidence to point him directly towards Matt Daehler, of course, but he’s pretty fucking convinced. The guy’s still popping up a few times a day, hovering on the periphery of his vision as Stiles purposefully ignores him, lingering a little too close in the locker-room until Scott and Danny (and sometimes even Jackson) take notice and form a shirtless, attractive Dominant box around him.

Keep playing hard to get and I’ll have to up my game, a note reads one morning, a few weeks into October. Stiles makes a point of crumpling it up and throwing it in the trash on his way to class.

He’s halfway through lunch when his phone buzzes. Thinking it’s probably his Dad texting him to
let him know what time he’s due home that evening, Stiles barely pauses in his conversation with
Danny about the new Captain America movie that’s just been announced by Marvel (he and the
Druid are both hard-core comic book fans), fishing his cell from his pocket and giving it a cursory
glance as he munches on a handful of chips.

*Coffee after school? My treat.*

Stiles feels his brow creasing at the message. He doesn’t recognise the sender’s cell number, but
there’s a chance his Dad’s texting from an old handset – he always keeps a spare one in his office at
the station in case the battery goes. Stiles takes a gulp of his soda as he sends back a quick reply.

*Hey sorry, who is this? Don’t have you in my contacts. :/*

His phone buzzes again less than a minute later.

*I think you know who it is, gorgeous. The notes weren’t really working for you, I could see that. Too
impersonal, right? You’re a hard boy to please, Stiles, but you’re so worth the effort.*

Stomach souring, Stiles glances around at the nearby tables, then scans along the walls of the
cafeteria hall where people are lingering in smalls groups or queuing up at the vending machines. He
can’t see Matt in the near vicinity, but that doesn’t mean anything. The guy’s a chameleon.

Danny nudges him “Hey. What’s wrong?”

Stiles passes him the phone discreetly, cleaning his greasy fingers on a napkin simply to give his
hands something to do. He’s definitely lost his appetite now.

“You gave him your contact details?” Danny asks, brow furrowed.

“Dude, no,” Stiles denies, keeping his voice low. “The guy creeps me the fuck out. How the hell did
he get my number?”

Danny’s thumbs are moving against the keypad before Stiles has a chance to snatch the device back.
He makes a noise of alarmed protest, clutching the cell against his chest once he’s managed to
recapture it, before peering cautiously down at the screen.

*Where did you get this number?*

“You didn’t have to ask him!” the Sub hisses, glaring daggers at the Danny. The Dom looks
completely unapologetic. To be fair, the Druid’s too busy looking pissed on his behalf to be sorry.

*You really ought to tell McCall not to leave his locker open during practice,* the following reply
reads.

“Okay, whoa, that goes beyond creepy,” Stiles comments, the feeling of unease in his chest spiking
to critical levels, his anger growing with it. Danny makes as though to grab his cell again, so Stiles
yanks it away. “Nuh-uh, not this time. I got this.”

*Taking data from another person’s tech device without prior permission is a criminal offence, just
FYI,* he types, jaw set and eyes narrowed. *And in case you’ve somehow totally missed the way that
I’ve been trying to avoid you these past two months, let me make something clear – I’m not
interested in going out with you. Period. Please stop following me around school. Stop sending me
notes. And STOP watching me get changed in the locker-room, it’s weird. I don’t want to involve my
dad in this, but I will if you keep stalking me.*
Sometimes it pays to be the son of the town’s Sheriff. He can use phrases like “involve my dad” without it sounding like he’s a scared kid running to Daddy for help – instead, it’s a neat way of saying “I’ll get my dad to arrest your sorry ass if you don’t back off”.

Danny whistles, impressed, when Stiles angles the screen towards him for the Dom’s approval. “Nice. Remind me never to piss you off, Stilinski.”

Stiles grins and grabs another handful of chips, feeling his nerves begin to settle. That wasn’t so hard.

It’s a full five minute before his cell buzzes again.

*You don’t want to go to the police about this. Trust me.*

The Sub scoffs and sends back a quick reply, thumbs jabbing angrily at the keypad. *Then leave me alone. I’m not gonna tell you again, clear?*

*Crystal.*

“I swear the queue for the bathroom gets longer every day,” Scott complains, appearing beside them. He sets down his tray and takes a seat at the table, taking a quick slurp of his milk before pausing, eyebrows ascending as he glances from Danny to Stiles. “What? What happened, did I miss something?”

“Where the hell is Daehler?” Finstock demands, once he’s made them run enough laps to successfully bench Scott with his inhaler.

The teenager’s coughing loudly between wheezing breaths, hunched forwards with his arms braced on his knees as Stiles and Danny hover beside him worriedly. Scott’s asthma is always at its worst this time of year, when the weather’s getting cooler and damper and everyone’s coming down with colds.

“He must’ve called in sick again, Coach,” one of the Senior players pipes up, leaning on his lacrosse stick for support as he tries to catch his breath. “He hasn’t been in class for a couple of days now.”

“Well he’d better be dying of pneumonia,” the older Dom grouches. “We’ve got a big game coming up next month; and I want every single one of you to be eating, sleeping, and breathing lacrosse until then, you understand? Except you, McCall,” Finstock adds, and points a finger towards the wheezing teenager, “I just want you *breathing*, Stilinski, stay there make sure he keeps breathing. Everyone else,” he blows his whistle sharply, the shrill noise cutting through the cold air, “team up!”

“You heard the guy,” Stiles says with false cheer, guiding Scott’s hand back up to take another puff of his inhaler. “Keep breathing.”

He doesn’t mind being benched alongside the Dom – he’s kinda grateful for the distraction, actually. Matt’s ongoing absence from school this past week has left a sickly sort of feeling in his gut. It’s not guilt – he doesn’t regret turning the guy down, because it needed to be done, and everything that he’d said in the text had been justified by the Dom’s previous actions. But he doesn’t feel totally happy about how abruptly things had ended, either. Like, he’d asked Matt not to bother him anymore, but he hadn’t expected him to leave school.
“Hey.” Scott bumps their knees together gently, his breathing settling. “Quit worrying about Matt. It’s not your fault he can’t handle rejection. I’m sure he’ll be back on Monday, and totally over you.”

Stiles hums absently, picking at a loose thread on his lacrosse stick. “Yeah, you’re probably right.”

Except Matt isn’t back on Monday. Or the day after that. And during practice on Wednesday, one of the Senior players reports that Matt’s apparently been marked down as sick for the whole week.

Stiles cringes guiltily over how relieved he feels when they hear the news. In truth, he’s dreading the moment they inevitably bump into each other, either on the lacrosse field or elsewhere. He’ll end up saying something stupid or insensitive and it’ll make the whole situation ten times worse. So being granted another few days to get his head screwed on straight is a blessing.

On Thursday morning, however, he finds a yellow post-it note stuck to the front of his locker, the number ‘10’ written on it in black marker pen. Dismissing it as a random happenstance, he opens his locker, only to find another post-it sitting on top of his notepad, apparently slipped in through the vent slats like all the previous notes had been. This one’s sporting a curvy ‘9’. He frowns and scrunches them both up, tossing them in the trash on the way to class.

Clearly Matt’s feeling better today.

It’s biology first – they’re discussing the physiological adaptability of humans and Werewolves compared to other, rarer supernatural species such as Faeries and Nymphs (a topic Stiles has researched in great detail on his own, so he finds the basic overview fairly boring). He’s sharing his usual lab bench with Scott and Lydia, doodling on the corner of his notebook, when a blur of yellow catches his eye. He turns his head, feeling his insides constrict when his eyes alight on the post-it note stuck to the outside of the fish tank; ‘8’.

So it’s a countdown. For him? And counting down to what? Whatever it is, he’s officially weirded out. And so are his friends when he tells them about at lunch.

“I thought he was still off sick,” Danny remarks, glancing at the small selection of notes now stuck to the table between them. Stiles found ‘7’ on the door to his history class, ‘6’ in chemistry and ‘5’ stuck to the front of his locker when he’d gone to drop off his books on his way to the cafeteria.

“Apparently not,” Jackson points out, digging into his third pudding cup. “What’s his obsession with you anyway, Stilinski? You’re probably the worst Sub in school.”

“Shut up, Jax,” Danny rebukes, in a stern tone of voice he only ever seems to use around the other Dom. “This is serious.” He turns to look at Stiles again when Jackson drops his gaze moodily to his pudding. “You need to tell someone about it.”

“Is that an I’m-sensing-something-with-my-Druid-powers kind of feeling?” Stiles asks, because that instinct he knows better than to ignore. “Or is it because I’m a Sub?”

“It’s because you’re my friend,” Danny corrects firmly, “and I have a problem with this guy trying to mess with your head.”

Stiles sighs, but nods in defeat. “Alright, fine. I’ll talk to my dad after school, okay?”

Danny’s worried frown lessens fractionally, but doesn’t disappear entirely. He squeezes Stiles’ shoulder as the bell sounds, signalling the end of lunch period.

“Don’t go anywhere alone for the rest of the day, either,” the Dom tells him, and it’s probably one of the first times Stiles has seen Danny use his Dynamic authority outside of scolding Jackson for being
a dickhead. “Not even to the bathroom, okay? Maybe I’m just being overly cautious, but it’s only for one afternoon, just until you’ve had time to talk to your dad. Promise me?”

He sighs again and rolls his eyes, but gives in under the duel glares of Lydia and Scott. “Okay, fine. We’ve got DSS together anyway, so it’s not like I could go anywhere on my own even if I wanted to.”

Dynamic Social Studies is one of the few subjects outside of English Lit that Stiles really, really enjoys, and he manages to forget about the whole Matt situation for an hour or so as he listens avidly to Miss Blake talk about the birth of the Werewolf Pan-Dynamic Services across the westernised world thirty years ago; about how Alpha Miriam Hale had been the one to lead the movement towards separating the service from the police force in the early 1980s, building the WPDS centre from the ground up and helping it to become one of the largest autonomous Dynamic centres in the US, now managed by her successor, Alpha Talia Hale.

Scott’s sitting beside him, scribbling down notes so fast that it’s a miracle his pen doesn’t snap under the strain. Stiles knows his friend’s working hard towards getting one of the few WPDS scholarships to UCLA with the intention of becoming a support worker – a position that would totally suit him, since he’s one of the most kind-hearted and level-headed Doms that Stiles has ever met. And while Scott doesn’t need to be a Werewolf to work for the service (it stopped being a species-specific unit after Alpha Hale had separated it from the police force), the Bite is offered to those who are approved for the scholarship, providing their blood results prove that they’re a compatible recipient. And Stiles knows that Scott will probably say yes, if he’s given the opportunity. The Dom’s learned to live with his asthma, but it’s still problematic, and it’d get in the way if he wanted to work with an emergency response team at the centre.

The bell rings soon enough, though, and Stiles finds himself boxed in between Lydia and Scott as they head out into the crowded hallway.

“Guys, relax,” he sighs, even though the uneasy feeling in his chest hasn’t settled yet. “He’s not dumb enough to try anything in school, not with so many people around.”

They don’t relax, though. And neither does he, when his friends walk him out to the parking lot after school and he find another post-it note pinned beneath the windscreen wiper on his Jeep. He’s only been driving her for a couple of weeks (a set of driving lessons and his license had been the second half of his birthday present – the Jeep is technically still his dad’s), and he feels oddly offended that Matt’s dragged his new baby into this mess too.

“Don’t wait until your dad gets home,” Lydia instructs firmly, carefully adding the new number ‘4’ post-it to the plastic bag she’s been collecting them in, before passing the bag to Stiles. “Drive straight to the station and give him these.”

“And if he’s not there, tell someone else,” Danny insists, peering through the windows of the vehicle as though to make sure Matt hasn’t stowed away in the backseat.

“And text us once you get there,” Scott adds, his hand lingering on the Sub’s lower back. He looks at Stiles uneasily. “Are you sure you don’t want me to come with you?”

“Dude, I’ll be fine,” Stiles promises, masking his own nerves with an edge of feigned annoyance. At Scott’s worried pout, he rolls his eyes again. “But yes, I’ll text you, God. Quit worrying, okay? You’re freaking me out.”

Danny squeezes his shoulder again. “Sorry. We just want to make sure you’re safe.”
“Ungrateful bastard,” Jackson mutters, but it lacks its usual heat. Apparently the notes are even enough to ruffle Sir Douchebag’s feathers.

Danny smacks his friend gently upside the head. “Stop it, Jax.”

Jackson rolls his eyes, but obligingly shuts up. Stiles musters up a cheerful, confident smile as he slides into the Jeep and waves them off, but his stomach doesn’t stop churning the whole time he’s driving, fear and dread gnawing at him every time he’s forced to stop at a red light, fingers tightening on the steering wheel as he glances left and right, as though Matt might suddenly jump out from a side-street and attack him unawares.

It’s stupid. But that’s often the nature of fear, so he can’t really do anything to stop it.

After what feels like an age, he finally arrives at the station, parking a little ways down the street (he knows better than to try and sneak into the cruiser parking lot – his dad’s already warned him about wilful obstruction on more than one occasion) and zipping his jacket up against a cold gust of wind that bats at him as he jumps down from the vehicle, fishing his phone from his pocket when it buzzes. He assumes its Scott or Lydia fussing over him, and he ends up gripping the cell hard enough to make the plastic creak when Matt’s number flashes up instead.

*Time’s running out,* the text says, and beneath it the Dom’s attached a photo, clearly taken with the phone’s fuzzy camera.

It’s a gun. And there’s a yellow post-it note stuck to the silencer on the barrel that reads ‘3’.

Stiles sprints the rest of the way to the station.

He recognises the Dom who’s manning the front desk when he stumbles inside – it’s Greg, a friendly, easy-going officer who’s been working with his dad as long as Stiles can remember. The deputy glances up at him from the paperwork he’s filling out, brow creasing first in concern, then in alarm at the look of abject terror that Stiles knows he’s wearing. The Dom’s on his feet and striding around the reception desk towards him in a split second.

“Stiles? What’s wrong?”

“Matt Daehler,” Stiles tells him frantically, as the Dom grips him gently by the arms. “He’s got a gun, I think he wants to shoot me.” He fumbles to hold up his cell phone. “Greg, he’s crazy, he’s been stalking me for *weeks,* please, you gotta help me.”

Greg’s expression hardens as he studies the screen briefly, before wrapping a protective arm around his shoulders and steering Stiles towards the rear of the station. “Cassie!”

The back corridor’s cold – colder than it ought to be, and Stiles feels a wave of uncertainty shiver down his spine when a faint breeze meets them as they turn the corner towards the communal office area. “The fire exit’s locked from the inside, right?”

“It’s probably just an open window, buddy,” Greg reassures him, although Stiles notices that the Dom’s hand has shifted to the holster at his hip. “Cass?” he calls, louder this time. “Riley?”

The silence that greets them turns Stiles’ blood to ice in his veins. His legs freeze of their own accord, pulse quickening as he reaches up to grip onto the Dom’s shirtfront. “Greg, where’s my dad? Where is he?”

“Out on patrol,” the Dom replies, his voice low. Then he pushes Stiles back gently to flatten him against the wall, his countenance grim. “Stay here. Keep quiet.”
Stiles obediently clamps his mouth shut, hugging his arms against his chest to keep his hands from trembling as he watches Greg tread carefully along the corridor, towards the office door. The deputy reaches for the handle, then pauses and lifts his hand to peel something off the frosted glass panel, holding it up to study it.

It’s another post-it note. Stiles can see the backwards silhouette of the number ‘2’ even from his angle, and the bottom drops out of his stomach.

“Wait, don’t! Get away from the-”

The glass panel shatters and the Dom twists away with a sharp cry, toppling backwards to impact against the wall as he falls, cracking his head against the skirting board sharply. Stiles is frozen in place, fear and shock and horror rendering him immobile as he stares at the fallen deputy. A dark red patch grows rapidly before his eyes, spreading across the back of the man’s uniform shirt.

Then another figure steps out into the corridor, his posture calm and relaxed as he lifts his arm to aim the gun at Stiles.

Matt smiles, pleased.

“One.”

Oh God, they’re all dead.

Cassie and Joe and Riley and Greg. The office floor is flooded scarlet, the wet, coppery stench of it clinging to his nostrils every time he takes a breath.

“Messy boy,” Matt chides in a fond tone, thumb smearing at the blood splatters on his cheeks. His smile curls wider. “Although red’s a good colour on you. I know you don’t like it right now, Stiles, but you’re not supposed to. This is a punishment. I’ll make it feel good next time, I promise. I’ll make it good for both of us.”

Stiles keeps his lips clamped shut. They’re tingling and sore from the Dom’s biting kisses, his scalp aching where Matt had curled his fingers into his short hair and pulled hard enough to make him see stars. There’s still a hot sheen of tears in his eyes, but he won’t let them fall. He won’t give Matt the satisfaction of seeing him crumble.

“You’ve caused a lot of problems for me, you know,” the Dom continues, stroking his hair as Stiles tries not to shiver. “It’s gonna be a lot harder to keep you a secret now that people have died.” Matt heaves a sigh. “I really wish you hadn’t made me do that, Stiles.” He uses the barrel of the gun to tip the Sub’s chin up. “All these people are dead because of you. Remember that.”

A renewed wave of anguish threatens to shatter him. Cassie’s dead. He’s covered in her blood – and fuck, there’s so much blood, why is there so much blood? He hasn’t looked back towards her since that first glance, but one look had been sufficient; the bullet hole in her neck had been hard to miss. She must’ve bled out in seconds. Oh God, she’s dead.

“Shh.” Matt traces the tear-trails with the tip of his index finger. “Don’t cry, gorgeous. You had this coming to you; running off to tattle on me when I warned you there’d be consequences. But you’re
gonna be good for me now, right? You’re not going to force my hand again.” He taps the gun against the Sub’s cheek. “Because there’s still a bullet in here with McCall’s name on it. Am I gonna need to use it?”

He shakes his head quickly. Nobody else is going to die. Even if he has to play the perfect Submissive that Matt’s clearly trying to change him into, he’s not going to let the bastard hurt anybody else.

“Much better,” the Dom praises, and strokes his hair again. Stiles shudders. “I always knew we’d be a good match, Stiles. You know, half the school were convinced you were a Dom before you registered, but I’ve known your real Dynamic this whole time. You were always the mouthiest Sub in school, just begging for a Dominant to put you in your place. McCall and Mahealani weren’t enough, were they? You needed a stronger master. Someone to keep you leashed; someone to put you on your knees and collar you. And look at you now, boy.” Matt rubs a thumb over the Sub’s bruised bottom lip. “Practically domesticated.”

Stiles wants to cry.

“Your dad’s gonna be back soon,” Matt comments absently, stroking the gun down his cheek again. “Let’s hope he’s a little smarter than his deputies.”

Heart constricting, Stiles sucks in a sharp breath and shakes his head. “No, please,” he begs, his voice hoarse and tremulous. “Matt, don’t, just leave him out of this. I’ll do anything you want, I promise!”

Matt’s smile turns into a sneer. “You were the one who wanted to get him involved,” the Dom reminds him, his hand closing around Stiles’ throat and squeezing tightly. “And while we’re on the subject – if you ever threaten me again, I’m going to buy a penknife and carve my name into your back so that everyone knows who you belong to. Do you understand me?”

The tears are brimming so thick that Stiles can barely see, air whistling through his constricted trachea as spots dance in his vision. He can’t breathe. He can’t breathe.

“Stiles!”

The deafening bang of a gunshot cuts through the silence between them. One moment Matt’s looming over him, slowly squeezing the life out of him, a pistil pressed roughly against his temple, and a second later the Dominant’s on the floor, choking on his own blood.

It’s Greg, his hair matted with blood at his temple, shirt saturated scarlet from the bullet wound to his shoulder as he slumps in the doorway, chest heaving. But his good arm’s still holding the gun, his grip steady as he keeps it trained on the wounded teenager.

Matt doesn’t seem to be getting back up anytime soon, though. As Stiles watches, eyes wide, the young Dom coughs, blood spurting from his mouth and staining his teeth red as he fumbles to press a hand against the bullet hole near his collarbone.

By the time the WPDS officers get to them, the teenager’s unconscious. By the time the EMT crews arrive, he’s dead.

Stiles is too busy having a trauma-induced Sub Drop to even notice.

~ ~ Present Day ~ ~
“Which is why I recognised your brother earlier,” Stiles concludes, his voice hoarse from crying again as he hugs Derek’s hand to his chest. “Johnny was one of the first-responders on the WPDS team that Greg called in. I never knew his name; I’d dropped down so far that night, it’s a miracle that I even remember his face.”

Everything after Matt’s death is pretty hazy. Most of his ‘memories’ are actually bits of second-hand information pieced together from other people’s accounts of the events that had followed. He knows Greg had stayed conscious long enough to call for backup and sound out a rapid-response bleep to the nearby WPDS centre. Stiles vaguely remembers crawling across the bloodstained office floor to get to the Dom, his limbs too weak and shaky to support him when he’d tried to stand, huddling under Greg’s good arm while the deputy murmured reassurances, speech slurring as the blood-loss began to affect him.

He remembers the beige-uniformed officer who’d swooped in to rescue him. The response team had made it to the station before the backup police officers had even arrived; Greg had been unconscious by that point, his breathing shallow while Stiles pressed his bunched-up hoody against the deputy’s bullet wound with shaking hands, hyperventilating to the point where his ears had been ringing as his vision swam with silver dots.

The hands that had covered his own had been large and warm and gentle, the Sub-band curled around the man’s wrist settling his immediate spike of fear.

“It’s okay,” the voice murmurs, calm and soothing, as he gently pulls Stiles’ hands away from Greg’s shirt. There’s a blur of movement as another WPDS officer crouches down to assess the deputy, but Stiles is being turned away, an arm slipping beneath his knees to haul him up into the Werewolf’s hold. “You’re okay. It’s over.”

And then the stranger’s standing, lifting him easily, carrying him back through the station, away from the office and the dead, glassy eyes of the murdered deputies. The older Sub keeps murmuring to him, but the ringing in his ears is worsening, his head spinning as he drops it against the man’s shoulder, clutching at him as panic surges anew.

“Shh, you’re okay. It’s alright, you’re safe. You’re safe now.” The Sub takes a seat on the back of the open ambulance, waving away the EMT’s that reach for Stiles when the teenager clutches at him tighter. “Your dad’s on his way, it’s going to be alright. Nobody’s going to hurt you. I need you to breathe for me, okay?”

Stiles shakes his head – he can’t breathe, he can’t, he’s trying – and burrows deeper into the security of the Sub’s hold.

“No, no – easy, not so fast,” the officer soothes, rubbing his back. “Nice and slow, c’mon, you can do it.” Stiles forces himself to exhale harder this time, pausing for a split second before allowing himself to suck in the next lungful of air. The fingers settle on the back of his neck and squeeze rewardingly. “That’s it, good boy. Keep breathing like that for me, okay?”

“Stiles?” Derek prompts gently, and the Sub stirs from his thoughts, realising he’s fallen silent for a few minutes too long.

“Sorry.” He scrubs at his eyes, at his tearstained cheeks. “It’s the first time I’ve remembered what happened afterwards in years. So much stuff happened that night; I’d almost forgotten about that last part.”
Derek brushes his fringe back gently, studying his face. “Until you met Johnny again last night?”

Stiles nods. “Seeing him brought it all back again. I don’t get triggered easily, not anymore, but it’s not like I’d anticipated bumping into a ghost from the past like that.” He shakes his head. “And I shouldn’t have gone to bed without talking about it first. No wonder I had a nightmare.”

Derek’s quiet for a moment, before tilting his chin up for a gentle kiss. “Thank you,” he murmurs. “For telling me. I know it wasn’t easy.” He presses their foreheads together. “And I’m so sorry about what happened to you.”

Closing his eyes, Stiles takes a deep, shuddering breath and winds his arms around Derek’s neck, feeling his heartbeat begin to settle at last, a weight lifting from his shoulders now that he’s not keeping his past a secret anymore.

The Alpha holds him close for a long time, until the ache of that age-old wound in his chest has faded into nothing, until he’s calm and boneless and exhausted, slumped against his Dom sleepily. He feels Derek move, the warm hand leaving his hair briefly to switch off the bedside lamp, plunging the room into darkness again. Stiles tenses, because he’s not quite ready to put an end the hugging just yet, but Derek shushes him softly, inching down from his propped-up position against the headboard until they’re laid flat, Stiles cuddled close to his chest.

Relaxing again, the Sub gently bumps his nose against the underside of Derek’s jaw. The Dom makes a soothing sort of rumbling sound in his chest, hand cupping the back of his neck as he hugs him tighter, and Stiles could almost cry from the renewed surge of affection that builds up inside him, if his tears weren’t already well and truly spent.

“I love you,” he whispers, his voice cracking mid-sentence.

Derek’s fingers slide into his hair, rubbing gently against his scalp as he echoes the sentiment and drops a kiss against his brow.

He’s asleep in a matter of minutes. This time he dreams of warm hands and eye-crinkling smiles and a house full of laughing, playing kids.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry about the belated update! I wasn't going to write Stiles' past experiences in a flashback, but then I decided you might like to see how the gang used to interact back when they were kids, before Scott got the Bite and Jackson became a Sub. :)

Hope you enjoyed! xxxx
Derek looks stressed, and the fact that Stiles can identify the signs so easily gives testament to how calm and controlled the Alpha usually is.

His Dom’s sitting in one of the armchairs in the living room, hunched forwards over a short stack of paperwork in his lap, cell phone pressed to his ear as he taps his pen against the margin of the topmost document, apparently unaware of the sizeable inkblot he’s already left there. Derek’s brow is creased fractionally in an almost-but-not-quite frown, and his shoulders are tensed, his upper body held stiffly as though coiled for attack. It’s a far cry from the casual half-slouch that Stiles is used to, or the professional-but-easy manner in which he holds himself when he’s in uniform at the Centre.

The Werewolf hasn’t even noticed him yet, which in itself is proof enough of Derek’s state of unrest. Isaac gets like that too, when he’s worried about something or wallowing in his own guilt; narrowing down his senses to the point where he’s focused on his own personal bubble and external stimuli become muted. Stiles wound up nursing more than his fair share of bruises after startling the Sub from his gloomy thoughts while they were at college together, so he knows better than to simply waltz across the room and plonk himself in the Alpha’s lap, regardless of what his instincts are urging him to do.

“I realise that,” Derek says to whoever’s on the other end of the line, and his voice sounds strained, like he wants to get cross but he’s trying really, really hard not to. “And I’m not asking you to cancel it, Kali. I’m asking you to call the administrator and try to rearrange the meeting for another—”

The Dom closes his eyes momentarily and takes a deep, calming breath, shaking his head slowly.

“No. It’s not the same as cancelling,” Derek replies diplomatically, an edge of annoyance slipping into his carefully controlled tone. “It’s called postponing.”

Stiles wants to take the phone out of Derek’s hand and hang up the douchebag who’s upsetting his Dom; he wants to crawl into Derek’s lap and distract him with nuzzles and kisses until the Alpha forgets about whatever’s stressing him out.

He wants it so bad that his chest aches when he looks at the growing frown on Derek’s face. And while it’s due, in part, to the lingering sense of fragility from the events of last night that have left him feeling needy and tactile and loose-kneed this morning (waking up alone in Derek’s bed had been a wholly unpleasant experience, but discovering that the Alpha had not, in fact, gone to work without saying goodbye had cheered him up again), he’s fairly sure that Submissive hormones are coming into play, too. He’s biologically driven to want to please Derek and keep him happy, so seeing the Dom all tense and frown-y-faced is seriously messing with him.

Unable to ignore his instincts a moment longer, he closes the distance between them, his tread near-silent on the floor, bare feet cushioned by the thick carpet. Derek glances up at him when he’s
halfway there, the Alpha's expression shuttering momentarily as he tries to get rid of the frown, but Stiles can still see the lines of stress despite the warm half-smile that his Dom manages to conjure up for him.

Stiles reaches the armchair and finds himself sinking carefully to his knees, warmth swelling beneath his breastbone when Derek immediately drops his pen and reaches out to cup his cheek. The touch of his skin goes a long way towards easing the growing tightness in his chest.

He smiles, tilting his cheek into the Alpha's palm.

“Then leave a message with the secretary,” Derek says into the phone, his voice noticeably calmer as he keeps his gaze focused on Stiles, thumb brushing over the Sub’s bottom lip. “I know, Kali; I know it’s last-minute, but there’s no harm in trying.”

The Dom’s thumb moves to stroke lightly against the bruise on his jawline, and the dull ache that had been pulsing there from the moment he awoke vanishes instantly. Stiles sends him a grateful look and inches closer on his knees until he can curl an arm around Derek’s lower leg, sagging against him with a happy sigh, cheek resting on the Dom’s thigh.

“No, that won’t work. Deuc’s overseeing the afternoon rotation at The Hub,” the Alpha continues, his tone softer now as he settles a hand in Stiles’ hair, fingertips rubbing at the Sub’s scalp gently. “See if you can get through to Danvers, okay? I know it’s his day off, but he’s usually willing to work overtime if it’s needed.”

Stiles gives a low, sleepy hum of satisfaction when the Alpha’s fingers rub over a particularly sensitive spot, eyes drooping to half-mast. Derek’s so fucking good at this.

The Dom carefully rubs that same spot again. “That’d be great, thank you. Keep me updated, okay? Hm? Yeah, I will.” His hand pauses in Stiles’ hair and he heaves another sigh, sounding more tired than frustrated this time. “It’s nothing. I’m fine, Kali. No, don’t call Laura. Don’t. Just- okay, thank you. Yep. Bye.”

Then he disconnects the call and drops his phone down the side of the armchair, shifting his full attention to Stiles. The smile that curls at his mouth is a little more genuine this time.

“Morning, sleepyhead.”

Stiles tilts his head fractionally to push up into the man’s touch. “Hi. Trouble in paradise?”

“Work stuff,” Derek dismisses calmly, his voice soft as he cards his fingers through the Sub’s hair, all evidence of his previous stress gone. “Don’t worry about it.”

Closing his eyes with another contented sigh, Stiles curls his arm a little tighter around Derek’s lower leg, anchoring himself to the Dom’s warmth. “Aren’t you supposed to be at the Centre, though?”

“Mm.” Lips brush against his forehead, Derek’s breath a warm puff against his skin as the Alpha leans in close. “I’m trying to cancel my afternoon appointments.”

“Why?”

Derek pulls back, and Stiles misses his warmth enough to open his eyes and peer up at him. The Werewolf’s regarding him carefully, that almost-but-not-quite frown ploughing shallow grooves into his brow again as he strokes the backs of his fingers down Stiles’ cheek.

“Rough night,” the Alpha murmurs.
Stiles tries to shrug it off, but the way he’s half-slumped over the Alpha’s lap and clinging to him like a limpet belies the half-hearted dismissal. Hell, the fact that he’s kneeling is probably a big enough giveaway. Stiles rarely kneels – he doesn’t have the patience for it. Unless there’s a dick in his mouth, in which case kneeling is totally fine. Actually, sexual inclinations and oral fixations aside, the only time he’d ever knelt for his Alpha was the night Derek had fastened a collar around his throat.

So the kneeling thing? Not exactly a point in his favour if he’s trying to persuade Derek to leave him behind and go to work.

Not that he’s trying very hard, to be fair. Stiles still doesn’t feel like he’s regained his previous sense of equilibrium, and cuddling up with his Dom all afternoon sounds fucking perfect.

“M’okay,” he says anyway, because he’s stubborn (and stupid) like that.

Derek regards him fondly. Then, shifting the stack of paperwork from his lap and dumping it on the coffee table beside him instead, the Alpha reaches for Stiles with both hands.

“Come here.”

Mmm, yes, Stiles loves that phrase. He crawls into Derek’s lap eagerly, curling up against the Alpha’s chest and tucking his cold toes into the skin-warmed fabric of the armchair’s cushion, relaxing into his Dom’s hold as familiar fingers grip the back of his neck with a reassuring confidence.

Prolonged physical contact does the trick, and soon Stiles feels the world righting itself again, that sickly feeling of unease vanishing as he basks in the warmth and strength and security of Derek’s arms. He’s fine. As he’d suspected, his previous jitters were symptomatic of a morning-after Drop; nothing a cuddle or two won’t cure.

“You don’t have to cancel any meetings,” he says at last, and Derek’s thumb pauses where it’s been rubbing against his hipbone. “I’m not gonna Drop again.”

Derek squeezes the back of his neck gently. “I know. But I’d rather not leave you on your own.”

Stiles grimaces into the Dom’s shirt at the thought of being alone with his thoughts all day, and runs through a quick mental list of his friends to try and work out whose couch is available for him to sleep on this afternoon. Unfortunately, he ends up drawing blanks at every turn.

Scott and Isaac are both working at the Hub, keeping the peace and kicking ass; Lydia’s got a press conference with the DRA party executives from two ‘til four (Stiles is avidly looking forward to reading her article on the subject tomorrow morning); Allison’s got baby classes until three, and then she’s chairing the weekly Neighbourhood Watch meeting alongside her father at the community hall near Beacon Hills High; Jackson’s busy running his Little League Lacrosse summer camp, and while Stiles enjoys his company, there’s no way in hell he’s spending the afternoon shepherding around hordes of violent, crosse-wielding children; and Kira’s self-defence classes are fully booked from now until the end of the school holidays, so she’s probably more in need of a couch than he is.

His Dad’s working today, too. Deputy Parrish isn’t, but he’ll be at the station all day anyway because he has no life, doing “paperwork” at his desk and sneaking coffee and donuts through to the Sheriff’s office whenever his Dad takes a bathroom break, and then denying all knowledge of their origin when questioned. It’s disgusting. They seriously need to get married.

“What time does your first meeting start?” he persists, rubbing his cheek against the Alpha’s shoulder
as he tries to drag himself up out of his mental slump.

Derek peers down at him, confused. “I told you, I’m not-”

“Derek.”

His Dom sighs; a short, reluctant huff. “One-thirty.”

Stiles glances towards the nearby clock and hums in approval. “We’ve got time.” He closes his eyes tiredly. “M’gonna go back to sleep for a bit, ’kay? Wake me when you need to get ready.”

“I’m not going anywhere, Stiles,” Derek reiterates patiently. “Kali’s rescheduling the appointments for another day, and getting someone to cover for me if they can’t be postponed.”

“Didn’t sound like she was having a lot of success with that,” Stiles quips, the words mumbled into the Alpha’s shirt.

As if on cue, Derek’s cell phone buzzes against Stiles’ toes. The Sub lurches up and swipes it, sleep momentarily forgotten as he peers down at the screen, only to drop it with a yelp of surprise when Derek smacks the back of his hand. The Dom catches the device neatly, angling it away from Stiles as he thumbs through the text.

Stiles makes a wounded, sulking noise in the back of his throat and rubs at his hand, pouting, until Derek gives an amused sort of huff and presses a kiss against his forehead, hand squeezing gently where it rests on his hip. The Sub settles, appeased.

“Is it from Kali?” Well, not appeased for long. “It’s from Kali, right? What did she say?”

“Mm,” Derek acknowledges unhelpfully.

“Derek,” Stiles protests impatiently, and reaches for the cell phone again. The hand on his hip slides down to land the lightest of taps against his backside, and Stiles withdraws his arm again quickly, pouting but amused. “Okay, okay, I get it. Grumble-wolf likes his privacy.”

Oh, hey, the attitude’s back. That’s a good sign.

Pausing, Derek glances down at him, an eyebrow raised. His expression is carefully schooled, but there’s amusement dancing in his eyes, and Stiles can’t quite manage to suppress his shit-eating grin.

“What did you just call me?”

“Grumble-wolf,” Stiles repeats, and leans in an inch to peck a kiss against the Alpha’s cheek. “Sir.”

The corners of Derek’s eyes crinkle as he gives into his smile, shaking his head even as he draws Stiles in closer to bump his nose against the Sub’s temple.

“You’re such a brat,” he mutters, soft and affectionate, and warmth blooms in Stiles’ chest again at the words.

But he can’t help but notice the slight pinch that has reasserted itself in Derek’s brow, and finds he doesn’t really need to see the text to know what it says.

“Too late to reschedule the meeting, huh?” he guesses quietly.

Derek exhales a short, resigned sigh, the joviality slipping from his expression as he dips his head in a brief nod. “If it was an internal thing, I could just cancel it, but I’m supposed to be meeting with
business associates from across-state to talk about expansion. It’s been in the books for over two
months.”

Jesus, that sounds fucking important. What the hell is Derek doing trying to cancel it?

“Der, I’m fine,” he says again, more firmly now, and whacks the Dom lightly in the chest. “Don’t
you even think about not going because of me.”

Derek levels him with another quiet, concerned look. “I’m not happy about leaving you on your
own.”

Stiles rolls his eyes, but he’s smiling. “I’m not planning on moping around here all day. I do have a
couple of acquaintances outside of Scott and Isaac, you know.”

“Never doubted it,” Derek replies smoothly. “You’ll invite a friend over, then?”

“I’ll go out,” Stiles assures him, because that way the Dom won’t actually need to have proof of said
non-existent friend’s non-existent scent. “Meet up with the guys for coffee or something. You don’t
need to worry about me.”

He doesn’t expand on who ‘the guys’ are, because it’s a blank he’s yet to fill. It’s a blank he knows
won’t be filled, because weekdays aren’t the easiest time to socialise now that they’re all adults. But
Derek seems to know that things aren’t quite adding up, because he doesn’t let the subject matter
slide.

“Might be a good idea to text your friends first before you go back to sleep,” the Dom suggests,
tapping him lightly under the chin so that the younger man’s eyes startle open again. “Just in case
they can’t make it.”

Stiles feels a squirmy, guilty feeling start brewing inside of him. He’s a terrible liar. And he doesn’t
want to lie to his Dom, even if it’s for the man’s benefit – Stiles wouldn’t have entertained the notion
at all if it hadn’t been for the pinched look on Derek’s face. He knows the Alpha’s at war with
himself, torn between his sense of duty as a senior manager at the Centre and the basic Dominant
instincts that are urging him to care for Stiles in the wake of last night’s trauma and this morning’s
aftershocks.

After the way Stiles woke up screaming and wound up having a full-blown panic-Drop in the
Alpha’s arms last night, it’s no surprise that Derek’s feeling understandably protective today. And
Stiles knows it’s difficult for the Werewolf to push those feelings aside, especially since their bond is
still fairly new and both their instincts are heightened by continuing hormonal changes, but Derek
has a really important job and a whole heap of responsibilities outside of their relationship. Stiles
doesn’t want to get in the way of that.

But still, lying. It’s one of the Big Rules, and he only got punished for breaking that particular rule
the other day. The memory of being held down firmly over Derek’s lap as his Dom’s usually-gentle
hand lit a fierce fire in his rear end is still fresh enough to make him cringe away from the idea of
repeating that same mistake, even if he can half-convince himself that it’s for Derek’s benefit.

“Stiles?” his Dom prompts quietly.

Internal squirming becomes external squirming and he bites his lip guiltily, turning his face to hide it
in Derek’s shoulder.

“M’gonna sleep now,” he mumbles. No harm in trying, after all. “Can we talk about this later?”
“Stiles.” Derek’s tone is still soft and calm, but there’s the faintest hint of a warning there too, and the Sub cringes. “Are you trying to avoid giving me a straight answer because nobody’s available to meet you this afternoon?”

He turns his head enough to send the Alpha a wincing sort of apologetic look.

“Maybe?”

Derek exhales a short sigh through his noise, his expression one of reproof as he gently pinches Stiles’ chin to keep him from hiding his face back in the Werewolf’s shoulder.

“You remember that little talk we had about lying by omission?”

Stiles cringes again, nodding; he remembers it all too vividly, thank you. “Yes, Sir.”

“Do we need to have another one?”

The Sub shakes his head quickly, eyes wide. “No, Sir.” When Derek arches an eyebrow and regards him steadily, he feels a familiar heat begin to build behind his eyes, a lump forming in his throat.

“No, don’t, I’m sorry. I’m really, really sorry, please don’t be mad, I didn’t mean to-”

“Shh,” Derek soothes, and stops his mouth with a kiss. “Hey, hey. I’m not mad, sweetheart. I know you were just trying to make things easier for me. But we need to be sensible about this, okay?” He strokes his thumb against the Sub’s cheekbone tenderly. “You had a bad Drop last night. And I know you’re feeling better this morning, but you’re not totally back on form, are you? Aftershocks can happen to anyone. I’d rather somebody else was with you in case you needed help.”

It’s not like Stiles wants to be alone. He’s used to having Scott and Isaac fussing over him the day after a bad nightmare; they would always cancel any pre-existing plans and have a movie marathon instead, Stiles snuggled between them on the tiny couch of their shared apartment, surrounded by bags of candy and potato chips. He knows being on his own for the first time is going to suck. But it’s better than the alternative; Derek can’t just ignore his managerial responsibilities because Stiles is feeling clingy.

Derek stands suddenly with Stiles in his arms, and the Sub makes a noise of surprise, gripping onto his Dom’s shoulders. The Alpha shushes him, heading back towards the master bedroom.

“I need to make a few phone calls,” the Dom murmurs, bracing a knee on the bed for balance as he lowers Stiles back down against the mattress. “I’ll wake you in a couple of hours, okay?”

Stiles can’t deny that he’s still exhausted – nightmare aside, the emotional upheaval of his subsequent discussion with Derek concerning that particular incident from his past had left him drained, and he could certainly use some shut-eye, especially if he’s going to drag himself to work later on. He’s still considering phoning in sick; he’s already worked overtime this month to cover various colleagues’ last-minute holidays, and he’s never taken a sick day in his life (he puts it down to eating through shitloads of vitamin gummies when he was a teenager), so it’s high time he reaped the rewards of eighteen months’ hard work, right?

He curls his legs up beneath the duvet, feeling the cool fabric warming up a little against his skin, and closes his eyes with a sleepy half-smile when Derek dips down to press a kiss against Stiles’ forehead.

“You won’t cancel your meetings, right?” Stiles mumbles into his pillow, and cracks an eyelid open to peer at the Dom. “Promise me?”
Derek sighs, but nods, and kisses him again. “Promise. Get some sleep.”

Satisfied, Stiles does.

“You’re being all aloof and secretive,” Stiles criticises around a mouthful of Nutella and banana pancakes, sleep-heavy eyes narrowed as he watches Derek fix himself a fruit smoothie. “Are you planning something?”

“Mm-hm,” the Dom confirms cheerfully, and flicks the switch on the blender.

It’s one of those super expensive Lunar Life products – a company famous for tailoring everyday household items to suit a Werewolf’s specific needs and comforts. In this case it means the blender is better soundproofed, the whir of the motor a low, pulsing hum rather than the high-pitched, grinding squeal of the one Stiles and his Dad own. He’s seen commercials on TV advertising Lunar Life products, but it’s the first time he’s witnessed one in action. Stiles is suitably impressed.

Derek crosses over to the breakfast bar to refill the Sub’s half-empty glass of juice, stealing a slice of chocolate-coated banana as he leans in close to bump his nose against Stiles’ hairline.

“It’s a surprise,” his Dom tells him, grinning when the Sub tugs his plate of pancakes closer to himself protectively.

Stiles narrows his eyes suspiciously at the Alpha’s altered demeanour; a few short hours ago, Derek had looked stressed and worried and frustrated (although he’d hidden it well), but now he’s back to being his usual cheerful self, his movements easy and his posture casual, lacking the coiled tension that had been present earlier on. Stiles is thrilled to see his Dom so calm again, of course he is, but he’s also curious as to what prompted the sudden change.

“You didn’t cancel your meetings, right?” he asks, because it’s the only significant variable he can come up with. “You’re still going to work?”

“Mm,” Derek acknowledges, swiping another slice of banana and easily ducking the half-hearted swipe that Stiles aims at him in retaliation. “I need to go and get changed.” He leans in again to press a Nutella-sticky kiss against the Sub’s cheek. “Finish your breakfast.”

Stiles rubs at his cheek, losing the battle to hide his smile as Derek reaches out to smooth down his hair. “You’re not even gonna give me a hint?”
The Dom nuzzles his temple again distractedly. “Hm?”

“I don’t like surprises,” Stiles tries to insist, but it doesn’t sound very convincing even to his own ears. Derek huffs a quiet laugh and kisses him again before turning towards the door. Stiles pouts. “’Mon, gimme a little clue. Just one?”

Glancing back over his shoulder, Derek smirks. “No.”

Stiles stuffs half a pancake in his mouth in childish retribution, then frowns when a thought occurs to him. “So am I staying here when you go?” he asks around his mouthful. “Or are you taking me with you?”

Maybe that’s the surprise. He can work with that. Sure, he’s not really in the mood to mingle with strangers right now (especially if those strangers have the Supernatural ability to smell his recent Drop), and maybe waltzing into the WPDS Centre less than twelve hours after having a traumatising nightmare about the horrifying events that drove him to take up regular clinic appointments with the therapists who used to work there (and probably still do) isn’t such a great idea anyway. Okay, actually, on second thoughts he really, really doesn’t want to go to the Centre. Not unless he can hole himself away in the library and lose himself in literature for a few hours. But that also brings him back to the being-alone-without-cuddles issue.

Ugh. Instincts. He hates this post-Drop clingy phase.

“No,” Derek says from the hallway, much to his relief. “I’m not telling, Stiles.”

The Sub heaves a sigh and reaches for his glass. “Fine. Keep your secrets.”

“Stop sulking,” the Dom calls back to him, amused. “You’ll find out soon enough.”

“Ominous bastard,” Stiles grumbles into his juice, and grins despite himself when he hears Derek’s answering laugh echo back through the apartment.

He’s finished breakfast and is curled up on the couch in the living room checking his emails on his phone (another three reminders from his editor that he needs to send the final copy of his collection of short stories to her rather than sitting on them and hoping they might suddenly turn into a published book) by the time Derek emerges from the bedroom, hair still damp from the shower and looking his usual, practically-edible self in the light beige shirt and form-fitting black pants that make up his WPDS uniform. He leaves a brown leather briefcase on the armchair nearest the door and pats down his pockets briefly as he sends a cursory look around the room.

“Have you seen my cell phone?”

Stiles blinks, tearing his gaze away from the way Derek’s dark pants are hugging his slim waist. “Hm?”

“My cell,” Derek repeats, and leans over the arm of the couch to kiss the corner of his mouth, fingers sliding into Stiles’ hair. “You mind ringing it for me?”

There’s a pause right after he hits ‘call’, then Derek’s head tilts slightly to the left and he veers away back towards the door. Stiles can’t hear anything at all, but that’s not surprising. Most Werewolves generally have their audio devices on minimal volume and the lowest vibration setting, for obvious reasons. Scott and Isaac used to grouch constantly about his alarm clock when they shared an apartment together, despite the (surprisingly) thick wall that separated their rooms.

He’s about to go back to scrolling through his emails when there’s a knock at the front door. Well,
maybe knock is too generous a term; it’s really more like a half-assed tap.

“It’s open,” Derek calls from the other side of the apartment, only just loud enough for Stiles to make out. He hears the front door open and close as the visitor lets himself in, and glances down at himself in a moment of horror when he realises that he’s still only wearing boxer shorts and one of Derek’s t-shirts. He briefly entertains the thought of hiding behind the couch and pretending he’s not there, but given the evidence so far, he’s fairly sure that their unexpected guest is a Werewolf and will therefore already know he’s there.

“Stiles?” a familiar voice calls, and the Sub perks up instantly.

“Isaac?”

The Werewolf appears in the doorway to the living room, still dressed in his WPDS uniform, face splitting into a huge grin as he makes a beeline for the couch and tackles Stiles against the cushions. The human gives a laughing yelp of surprise but returns the hug enthusiastically, grinning fit to burst.

“Dude, what are you doing here?” he asks, as Isaac nosed at his throat. “I thought you had work.”

“Derek gave me the afternoon off,” the other Sub tells him, nuzzling along his jaw with a happy rumble. “Asked me if I could come over for a few hours, told me not to tell you.”

“Surprise,” Derek says from the doorway, and Stiles glances across to see him leaning with his shoulder braced against the frame, arms crossed over his chest as he watches them with a fond grin.

“Hey, Derek!”

Isaac levers them both upright before jumping to his feet and throwing himself at his Alpha. The Dom takes this in his stride, his feet braced so that he only rocks back an inch or so with the force of the Sub’s hug (he’s clearly an experienced Isaac-hugger), one hand coming up to bury itself in the Beta’s curly hair as he brushes a kiss against Isaac’s forehead.

“Hey,” the Dom replies with audible affection, tightening his arms around the Sub briefly before letting go. “How’s the pack?”

Shrugging, Isaac sends him a tired smile. “So-so. It’s been a busy morning. The open-stage public debates don’t start ‘til next week, but that doesn’t stop people from standing on boxes and yelling at each other. And the DRA supporters brought a few more friends along today. Friends with loudspeakers.”

Stiles winces sympathetically. Scott had once described loudspeakers as the equivalent to using air-horns as headphones, and given how close some of the WPDS officers have to stand to the supporters in order to keep the peace, he assumes there’ll be more than one Werewolf going home with earache after the speeches are done for the day.

Derek’s clearly thinking the same thing, because there’s a slight crease in his brow as he cups the side of Isaac’s neck. “Was everyone okay?”

“Yeah, we’re fine,” Isaac dismisses easily. “Laura did that rotating-surveillance thing, so we were never in the same spot for long. She sent Liam home, though.”

“Liam?” The crease in Derek’s brow deepens. “Why?”

“Poor guy was asleep on his feet,” the Sub elaborates, a note of sympathy in his voice. “Don’t think he slept all that great after the break-in at the Switch Support centre yesterday. And Deuc’s team
were due to arrive after lunch anyway, so we weren’t short-staffed. His Dad came and picked him up, but he’s fine. He wasn’t Dropping or anything.”

Derek still looks worried for a brief moment, before nodding and taking a deep breath, his expression smoothing over again as he smiles at the Sub.

“Thanks for stopping by on such short notice.”

“Hey, no worries.” Isaac beams at him before crossing back over to the couch and plonking himself down next to Stiles, slinging an arm around the other Sub’s shoulders. “A Friday afternoon off work and a chance hang out with Stiles for a few hours? What’s the catch?”

“Netflix marathons,” Stiles tells him, shooting the Beta a wincing sort of smile. “And cuddles.”

He’s grateful that Isaac catches on so quickly, because at least that saves him from needing to say “so last night I had a nightmare and it was a really bad one and now I feel fragile as fuck but I’m putting on a brave face for my Dom”. Because Isaac gets it. They have a bro-code.

“Dude,” the other Sub murmurs, smile slipping as he crushes Stiles against him in a tight hug. “God, you should’ve called me earlier. Are you okay?”

Stiles nods.

“Do you wanna talk about it?”

He shakes his head against the Beta’s shoulder, grateful when his friend doesn’t press the issue further but simply hugs him tighter instead, one hand resting against the back of his neck. It doesn’t have the same effect as a Dominant’s touch, but it’s familiar and soothing and Isaac’s got a gift for easing peoples suffering (both physical and emotions) through physical contact, more so than most Werewolves, and Stiles can feel himself sagging further into him with every passing moment.

Another hand settles in his hair, and Stiles can tell even without looking that it’s Derek’s. The Dom strokes his fingers though the dark locks for a few moments, then drops a kiss against the crown of his head.

“I’ll be back around five,” the Alpha informs him quietly. “Text me if you need me, okay? I mean it.”

Stiles turns his head a little, enough to meet Derek’s gaze and send him a reassuring smile. The Dom reaches out to stroke his cheek briefly, before lifting his hand to mess up Isaac’s curls.

“Be good, you two.”

Isaac sends his Alpha a cheeky grin. “No promises, Sir.”

It lightens the mood considerably, and Stiles could seriously kiss Isaac right now. So he does. Not like kiss kiss him, obviously, but there’s nothing weird about platonically smooching your Sub-bro on the cheek when he’s being awesome. And adorable. Adorably awesome.

“Right, here’s the plan,” Isaac announces, once Stiles feels suitably hugged to the extent that he’s gotten over his momentary disappointment in the face of Derek’s departure. “I’m gonna fix us some snacks, you’re gonna fix us some drinks, and then we’re gonna watch Disney. Sound good?”

It does. Although Stiles can’t help but marvel at how at-home Isaac seems to be in Derek’s apartment, kicking off his shoes and socks and stripping down to his boxers and undershirt before
padding though the kitchen, Stiles trailing at his heels with a bemused look on his face.

“Have you been here before?” he asks suspiciously, when the Sub makes a beeline for the walk-in pantry and comes out with his arms laden down with junk food that Stiles didn’t even know Derek owned.

“Sure,” Isaac dismisses casually, dumping his armload on the breakfast bar and fishing out one of the microwave popcorn sachets from the jumbo box. “Derek always hosts a sleepover or something the night before the full moon, even if we’re working the next day. And if we’ve got the day off, he’ll take us out running too, in the forest near his birth-pack’s Den. Erica always beats the rest of us hands-down, she’s a natural sprinter.”

Isaac grins suddenly. “Hey, you’ll come over for Harvest Moon, right? You’re part of the pack now, you totally have to come. Derek says his mom wants us to join the rest of the Hale pack next month, before the evenings start getting darker and the moons last too long for the little kids.”

Stiles can’t think of anything he’d like to do more, but he’s not about to butt his human self into the midst of Werewolf tradition without a proper invitation. He kinds hopes Talia will ask him to join them, because being with both Derek’s pack and the Hale family at the same time would be pretty cool, especially considering the fact that Derek’s family might one day become his family, and because Scott and Isaac are already his adoptive bros. He’d love to see the two packs begin to merge.

“You’re skipping work tonight, aren’t you?” Isaac enquires as they settle comfortably against each other on the couch, a bowl of popcorn in the Beta’s lap and various snack packages scattered around them within easy reach. “Last thing you need is to mess with your head by making yourself stay awake. Plus you need to get laid; that always helps me sleep better.”

Stiles chokes on a cheesy puff and shoots the other Sub a scandalised look. Isaac shrugs unapologetically.

“What? It’s true,” the Beta insists calmly. “Especially while you’re still in your honeymoon phase. Nothing settles irregular hormone levels like a good, healthy f-”

“I’m not calling in sick because I need some bed-action,” Stiles interrupts firmly. “That’s ridiculous.”

Isaac levels him with an assessing look. “Did you Drop last night?”

“Well, yes, but-”

“Was it a bad one?” the Sub persists.

“I guess so, yeah, but I’m fine n-”

“Were you still shocky this morning?”

Stiles thinks back to his immediate, instinctive reaction of intermingled panic and misery when he’d woken up alone and convinced himself, in the ten seconds it took to locate Derek in the living room, that his Dom had left for work without saying goodbye. Left him alone. And how the relief had been so crushing when he’d found his Dom that his knees had turned to liquid, so that his first instinct had been to sink to his knees beside the Alpha; something he’d never pictured himself doing outside of formal occasions (and sex).

“Yeah,” he admits quietly. “A little bit shocky.”

“Then that’s reason enough to call in sick,” Isaac concludes with a small, satisfied nod, and holds out
his hand expectantly. “Gimme."

He means to protest the matter further, he genuinely does, but he’s never been able to say no to Isaac. And ten minutes later the deed is done. Isaac tosses the cell phone towards the far end of the couch and wraps himself around Stiles again as the human scrolls through the list of movies available.

“Lilo and Stitch?” he suggests, feeling blindly for the bowl of popcorn and grabbing a handful.

“Single-parent families for the win,” Isaac enthuses. Likely, Stiles muses, because he himself had been adopted by a single Dominant relative after being taken from his shitty excuse for a Dad by child services when he was a teenager.

“Amen to that,” he agrees, and presses play.

Isaac inserts two Peanut Butter Cups into his mouth at once, chewing loudly in Stiles’ ear.

“You should see Boyd’s Mr Bubbles impression,” the Beta says thickly around his sugary mouthful. “Scott called him Bubbles for months. We’re still trying to convince him to get those tattoos on his knuckles…”

Dinner’s not the only thing waiting for Derek when he gets home.

Stiles peers up at the Alpha through his lashes, lifting his hands to run them up Derek’s thighs as his Dom stares down at him, lips parted and pupils blown as his briefcase falls from his lax grip to land on the floor next to where Stiles is kneeling. The Sub grins, tilting his head to the side and arching it back to expose his throat obscenely.

“Welcome home, Sir.”

Derek’s hand moves to cup his face, a thumb brushing over his bottom lip. Stiles swipes his tongue against the digit before sucking it into his mouth, keeping their eyes locked as he moves his lips all the way down to the base, flattening his tongue compliantly when Derek presses the pad of his thumb against it inside.

“Amazing,” the Dom breathes, seemingly enraptured by the sight of his thumb disappearing into his Sub’s mouth. “God, you’re amazing, just look at you.”

Stiles shivers pleasantly at the praise, eyes drifting half-closed as he strokes his hands up higher still,
until he can fumble with the buckle on Derek’s belt, pulling the strip of leather from the loops of his pants. Dexterity fails him somewhat thereafter, since the closer he gets to his goal the further he slips into a warmer, cosier headspace, but thankfully Derek seems to notice before he vexes himself too much, and the Dom has his uniform slacks unbuttoned, unzipped and halfway down before Stiles can even muster up a frown.

He manages the underwear on his own.

And the moment he has the familiar taste and girth and texture of Derek’s cock on his tongue again, he loses himself in the sensations immediately, feeling the weight of the world fall away as he sucks and licks and nuzzles. Isaac was right, this is definitely the pick-me-up he was needing. Why the hell hadn’t he done this earlier?

He drops his hands to his own thighs eventually, his arms too leaden to hold them up a moment longer. It’s not like he was using them anyway. And ohh, fuck, yeesss, Derek’s hand is stroking up from his neck to palm the back of his head, fingers curling into his hair just-so as he feeds Stiles his cock in steady, shallow thrusts, just the way he likes it. Ever since that first night, he’s had a thing for Derek taking control of blowjobs like this; not harshly or hurriedly or with any degree of force, but with a gentle yet unyielding hand guiding him to take the Alpha in deeper.

“That’s it,” Derek murmurs, his usual litany of breathless praise, as he urges Stiles to bob his head in deeper strokes. “Such a good boy for me. So fucking good. Waiting for me on your knees like that, God, you’re perfect. And just look at you, taking my cock so well. You like that, baby? You like sucking my cock?”

Stiles makes a needy, desperate whine around the warm flesh in his mouth, his own cock hard and throbbing in the confines of his underwear. He’s so far out in Subspace that there are twinkling dots behind his eyes every time his eyelids droop fully closed, a buzzing sort of warmth encompassing his body, full sensation limited to his lips and mouth and tongue and the familiar salty-tang taste of Derek’s pre-ejaculate that’s accumulating there. He sucks harder on the next thrust, swallowing the moisture down eagerly, and hears Derek swear hoarsely above him.

“Fuck, Stiles. I’m gonna come.” The Alpha’s hips roll in an irrepresible thrust before he gently grips the Sub’s chin and pulls out until the tip is resting against Stiles’ bottom lip.

He whines at the loss, opening his Subspace-heavy eyelids to blink up at Derek dazedly, lust zapping through him like a bolt of electricity when his gaze falls on the Dom’s red-tinted eyes. Derek keeps stroking himself slowly with his other hand, beads of pre-ejaculate smearing over the Sub’s lip as the Alpha holds him still.

“You want me to come in your mouth?” Derek asks raggedly, like it’s a question that still needs to be asked. Stiles does his best to nod with his chin still in the Dom’s grasp, eyelids drooping in another slow blink. “Yeah? Gonna swallow it, baby?”

Derek’s hand moves faster for a moment, the slick slide of skin-on-skin almost as loud as the Dom’s heavy, uneven breathing, and then he’s coming with a low moan, short jets of hot, sticky come landing in Stiles’ open mouth, coating his tongue and hitting the back of his throat. Stiles keeps his mouth open as long as he can, breathing through his nose, until he’s sure that Derek’s done. Then he swallows it down in one go and opens his mouth again to clean the lingering moisture off the head of Derek’s cock as the Dom trembles and pants for breath.

“Shit,” Derek breathes, running a hand through Stiles’ hair as the Sub nuzzles at the softening cock. “Fuck, Stiles, that was…oh my God. You’re incredible. And you were so good, so fucking good.”
Stiles keens at the praise, leaning up into the touch, eyelids drooping closed again as satisfaction thrums inside of him. He’s still rock-hard and leaking in his underwear, but he’s so fucking happy right now, he doesn’t even care.

“Hey,” Derek murmurs, closer now, and Stiles realises distantly that the Dom must’ve dropped to his knees in front of him. Because suddenly he’s being pulled to slump forwards into a warm, muscular chest, and Derek’s hand is on the back of his neck, resting over his collar as the Dom’s voice murmurs in his ear. “Easy, I’ve got you. Looks like you’re feeling pretty good right now, huh?”

The Sub snuggles into his hold with a happy, needy moan, body still buzzing with electricity, pleasure burning hot and fierce and bright in his chest, pulsing out to his furthest extremities with every beat of his heart.

Things get a little fuzzy after that, but that’s okay, there’s time.

Dinner will keep.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed the chapter! You all seemed to be in agreement with me that Stiles needed some serious cuddle time this chapter. Let me know what you thought! As always, I welcome all questions and requests. :)

xxxxx
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

For those of you who have been demanding more Scisaac/Stiles fluff for the past ten chapters - at last your patience is rewarded! Here's a nice, long, Scisaac-heavy chapter just for you. :)

Ye sensitive folk beware - there be a spanking or two at the end of this chapter. Scotty is a diligent Dom.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Are you sure you’re okay to work tonight?”

Stiles sighs internally, and barely manages to refrain from rolling his eyes. He knew this would happen; his Dad’s usually a fairly rational and level-headed Dom, but he’s as overprotective as they come when certain instincts are triggered. The man’s kept him close by all day, ever since Stiles arrived home from Derek’s apartment after breakfast and admitted that he hadn’t gone to work the previous evening because he’d still been suffering from the aftershocks of a nightmare-induced Drop. And even though the world’s righted itself now and that sense of fragility is little more than a memory, the Sheriff remains less than convinced that he’s capable of maintaining an equilibrium without a familiar Dominant presence.

“I’m fine, Dad,” he says for the umpteenth time, carefully smoothing out the final crease in his work shirt and switching off the iron.

The line in his father’s brow doesn’t disappear. “There’s nothing wrong with calling in sick if you need to, kiddo. You had a bad Drop; I’m sure your boss would understand.”

Stiles carefully slips his shirt onto a hanger and hooks it over the back of the nearest kitchen chair. “I’m sure she would, if I needed to call in sick. Which I don’t.” He glances down at his watch, arches an eyebrow, and sends his father an amused look. “Besides, you don’t want me hanging around here all night; you’ve got a hot date in half an hour.”

“It’s not a date,” the elder Stilinski immediately denies, although the way his neck reddens suggests otherwise. He frowns at his son’s answering grin and aims a half-hearted swat at the boy’s saunters past him with an air of smugness. “Get outta here.”

“You invited him over for dinner and a movie,” the Sub remarks, dancing out of his father’s reach with practiced ease. “How is that not a date?”

The older man heaves a sigh. “Because Jordan and I are just friends-”

“The first friend you’ve invited over in ten years,” Stiles mumbles.

“-and he’s never seen Jurassic Park,” the Sheriff finishes firmly.

The younger man sends his dad an incredulous look. “You’re kidding me?”

“That’s exactly what I said.” John moves to fix himself another cup of coffee. “We both had the
weekend off, and neither of us had anything planned, so I invited him over. You weren’t going to be here, so I figured you wouldn’t mind the intrusion.”


The Dom glances sideways at him suspiciously as he stirs sugar into his coffee, the corner of his mouth kicking up. “Thank you for your permission.”

Stiles grins, watching the older man for a moment before skipping over to hug his Dad around the waist from behind. John makes a surprised noise into his coffee mug, but closes one hand over the Sub’s where they’ve settled on his midriff.

“Love you,” Stiles murmurs, resting his cheek against his Dad’s shoulder with a happy sigh. Then he pauses and adds, “And if you need condoms, there’s a spare box-”

“Stiles!” the Dom chokes, spilling his coffee all over the counter as he slams the mug down.

The Sub laughs and grabs his freshly ironed shirt, making a run for it before his Dad can recover enough to swat him for his sass. He knows how far he can push his luck without actually getting into trouble (fortunately, his father possesses both a decent sense of humour and an impressive level of patience), and besides, he figures he’s earned the right to a few teasing jabs after the strain his Dad’s put him through these past few months, what with the man’s total inability to take a fucking hint. If Deputy Parrish hadn’t been such a blatantly perfect match for his father, Stiles probably would’ve given up long ago. But what can he say? He still secretly loves those classic romantic Subflicks that air on TV every holiday, and seeing how happy the pair made each other whenever they were together at the station had planted a seed of determination deep inside his heart only days after Jordan had transferred in from across-State.

It’s taken fourteen weeks of spy-work and eavesdropping and painfully unsubtle hints on his part, but finally all that effort seems to have paid off. And sure, maybe it’s not officially labelled as a ‘date’, but it’ll be the first time his Dad’s invited a work colleague over for dinner since Cassie, so it’s gotta be something more significant than ‘just friends’, right?

He keeps half an ear out for the familiar rumble of Jordan’s motorbike as he gets ready for work, cell phone pressed against his other ear with his shoulder as he drops down onto the bed to tie his laces, listening to Isaac rave on about a new computer game he just downloaded.

“And get this – it lets you decide the Dynamic of your first-person shooter,” the Sub enthuses.

“For real?”

“I know, right? They even let you play as a Switch. But you know what’s even better? The actual story doesn’t change! Well, I’ve noticed a couple of alterations when you interact with other people, but your character’s still super-strong and agile kicks zombie ass. It’s awesome!”

“Dude, we’re so playing that on Monday,” Stiles decides, glancing around for his cell phone instinctively before remembering that it’s still pressed against his ear. “Can I crash at your place for the night?”

“You know you don’t need to ask; we gave you a key for a reason. Although I was kinda hoping you might be interested in going out somewhere.”

“Sure.” Stiles moves to stand in front of the mirror attached to the door of his closet, checking to make sure the lapels of his shirt aren’t askew. He runs the tips of his fingers over the woven leather
of his collar and smiles at his reflection. “Movies or bowling?”

“Why don’t we go out for drinks or something? It’s been a while since we hit the clubs,” the Beta suggests, a little too casually, and Stiles is immediately suspicious. Isaac’s normally the stay-at-home-and-watch-a-movie type these days.

“I thought Scott was supposed to be working Monday night?”

“He is,” Isaac confirms. “But that doesn’t mean we can’t go out.”

Stiles frowns a little. He’s all for being independent, but he’s pretty sure he and Isaac are still supposed to abide by the same rules that his Dad and Scott put in place during their college years, and both Doms had always been adamant about the necessity of having a familiar guardian nearby in case something happened on a night out. Alcohol fucks with your emotions at the best of times, and the ambient pheromones of a packed nightclub can screw with a Submissive’s hormonal balance if they don’t have someone to keep them anchored. Not necessarily a Dominant, but that’s what most of the Student Safety talks at college had recommended.

The programme had tried to encourage students to ‘party safely’, offering a Buddy Guardian service for groups of Submissives who didn’t have any Dominant friends they could rely on, ensuring that Subs therefore had a ‘designated anchor’ when heading out for the night; someone already Bonded, or in a stable relationship (and who therefore would be mostly unaffected by external hormonal triggers) and who wouldn’t get totally drunk, who could therefore keep a group of friends in check and make sure nobody did anything they’d regret the following morning.

It’s not a legal requirement, of course, and there are certainly plenty of Submissives who are confident and level-headed enough to keep themselves in balance without the need for an anchor, and yeah, maybe Stiles can that person some of the time. But he’s not about to pretend that a club pulsing with pheromones wouldn’t knock him off-kilter, especially with alcohol already in his system. His hormonal balance has a freakin’ hair trigger.

Scott had always been their anchor during college parties. Not because he felt it was his duty as a Dominant, but because he was a sappy, doting mother-hen who’d always enjoyed looking after them. Stiles and Isaac had teased him about it mercilessly (all in good humour, of course), but it had been a comfort during nights out; when Stiles inevitably wound up feeling a little too tipsy, wavering uncertainly on that precarious brink between ‘I need to stop before I do something stupid’ and ‘to hell with dignity, let’s go hump a bollard’. Scott had always been there to wrap a companionable arm around his shoulders and shove a glass of soda into his hands, steering him away from any Dominants who might’ve been eyeing him up, keeping him focused and centred with casual touches and friendly banter so that he wouldn’t feel the urge to go and soothe those instincts in the arms of a total stranger.

“On our own?” Stiles reiterates, doubtfully.

“Dude, no, I’m not crazy,” Isaac scoffs. “Danny and Jackson are coming too.”

He relaxes immediately. “Awesome. Hey, I get paid this weekend. How’s about I treat you to dinner, and we meet the guys for drinks afterwards?”

“I love you.”

Stiles grins. “Save it for the wedding, cupcake.”

The low rumble of an approaching motorbike captures his attention, and he darts over to the window
to peer out, grinning when a familiar vehicle slows to a halt at the foot of their driveway. He says a quickly goodbye to Isaac and grabs his jacket before thundering downstairs, reaching the bottom just as the doorbell rings and yelling a cheerful “I’ll get it!” over his shoulder as he lurches towards the door and yanks it open.

“Well hey there, Deputy,” he says brightly, his grin wide enough to hurt his cheeks. “Fancy seeing you here.”

Jordan Parrish grins at him, motorbike helmet tucked under his arm and a bag of Chinese takeout in his hand.

“Hey, kid,” the officer greets, reaching out to mess up the younger Sub’s hair as he eyes Stiles’ outfit. “You heading off to work?”

“Yup,” Stiles answers blithely, stepping aside so that Jordan can enter. “It’s just you and Dad tonight. All alone. All night.”

Parrish shrugs easily, undeterred. “I think I’ll manage.”

Taking the bag of Chinese food from the other Sub so that Jordan can remove his biking gear, Stiles eyes the sealed containers critically. “What’s the damage?”

“I got a few veggie options, don’t worry,” the deputy replies with an amused look, kicking off his boots before bending down to pair them together neatly and tuck them closer to the wall. Then he glances up at something behind Stiles and winks. “Although I could hardly turn down a free portion of sweet and sour chicken, could I, Sir?”

“Heaven forbid.” John claps a hand down on his son’s shoulder. “Does dinner pass inspection, or are you planning on staying behind to poison me with organic spinach and tofu?”

“Allright, alright.” Stiles relinquishes his hold on the takeout bag and wrinkles his nose at his father, fighting a smile. “I know when I’m not wanted.” He grabs his keys from the dish on the shelf by the door and shrugs on his jacket. “I’ll leave the two of you alone.”

“Hey.” His father’s hand settles on the back of his neck lightly, and Stiles glances sideways at him. “Remember, if you need to come home early, all you have to do is call me.”

Stiles supresses another sigh. “I know, Dad.” But he leans across to hug the man briefly. “Don’t worry about me, okay? I’ll be fine.”

The Sheriff still has a faint crease in his brow despite the reassurance, and Stiles sends Jordan a pleading glance. The deputy winks conspiratorially and reaches out to ruffle his hair again before smoothly stepping up to John’s side, looping a companionable arm around the Dom’s shoulders with his usual confidence. The older man’s posture relaxes immediately, his frown slipping as his gaze cuts to Parrish.

“C’mon, Sir, I’m starved,” Jordan wheedles, and waves a hand at Stiles dismissively. “Have fun at work, bud.”

Stiles wisely scarpers while his Dad’s still distracted.

He’s mildly disappointed to discover that Jordan’s motorbike is gone the following morning, but he supposes these things take time. The couple can’t jump from oblivious to Bonded in one night, after all. And besides, they’ve made satisfactory progress. Regardless of his Dad’s continuing insistence that he and Jordan are ‘just friends’, the stupid, lovesick grin that tugs at his father’s lips for the rest
of the weekend whenever the deputy’s name is mentioned suggests otherwise.

Mission accomplished.

Stiles only allows himself to sleep until midday on Monday following his final thirteen-hour nightshift, dragging himself out of bed with a groan and stumbling his way into the shower. Fifteen minutes later he’s on the road, slurping too-hot coffee from a travel mug every time he stops at a red light, blinking sleep-heavy eyes open and willing the caffeine to kick in before he ends up dozing at the wheel and crashing into another driver. Again.

“Hey, bro,” Scott greets cheerfully, opening the apartment door before Stiles even has time to start fumbling for his keys. “We remembered to buy coffee this week.”

Stiles slumps against the Dom in a tired, grateful hug. “Oh my god. I love you both so much right now.”

The Beta chuckles, arms closing around Stiles securely as he nudges the door closed behind them, half-steering, half-carrying the Sub through to the living room and depositing him on the couch.

“Did you get any sleep at all?” the Dom queries, eyeing him critically as he crouches down to untie Stiles’ shoelaces and work the converses off his feet carefully.

“Couple hours,” Stiles replies around a yawn, watching Scott’s ministrations with sleepy detachment. He’s used to it by now. Scott’s always been a fussy Dom, very hands-on when it comes to caring for his friends, particularly if said friends are sick, upset or sleepy.

Woe betide the poor bastard who ticks all three boxes at once.

“I wish you wouldn’t come over so early,” Scott grumbles, setting the shoes to one side and moving to perch on the arm of the couch, dropping a hand into his best friend’s hair to play idly with the dark strands. “You’re gonna wear yourself down, man.”

Stiles huffs a quiet laugh, canting sideways until he’s slumped partially against the Dom. “You say that every week.”

“And you never listen,” Scott chides, but without any real heat, rubbing at Sub’s scalp with talented
“Nope.” Stiles cracks open an eyelid to peer at the Werewolf. “If I recall correctly, I was promised coffee. And Isaac. I see neither. The customer service in this place is appalling.”

Scott grins and shoves at him playfully, standing up and heading towards the archway that connects the living room to the adjoining kitchen. “Quit whining. Isaac ran to the store to buy you pizza bagels.”

“And that’s why he’s my favourite,” the Sub announces, flopping back down against the couch cushions with a contented sigh. His packmates know him so well and it’s awesome.

Although it’s no surprise, really – they’ve been doing this for over a year now. It’s become somewhat of a tradition, since they all graduated from UCLA, that he’ll come and crash on their couch after he’s finished his Sunday nightshift; Isaac has Mondays off, an established shift pattern to make up for all the extra hours he clocks in at the weekend Drop clinic, so there’s always one of his bros around to keep him company even if Scott can’t be there every week.

It’s nice to spend some quality time with both of them, though. After practically living in each other’s pockets for the duration of their higher education, he misses the couple fiercely sometimes, and knows it’s even harder for the two wolves; during their college years, they had essentially become a Beta-unit of three, with all the Werewolf instincts and sensory complexities that tend to come with such a specific bond. They’d grown to know him inside out; every secret, every fear, every aspiration. And he knows them just as intimately. The level of trust that exists between them? That isn’t something he’s going to find elsewhere. Except maybe Derek. But with his Dom, those bonds and connections have only just begun to form; he and Scott, on the other hand, have known each other since kindergarten. The longest they’ve ever been separated is two weeks, when Scott’s uncle had taken him to Rome during the summer when they were teenagers, but aside from that they’ve pretty much seen each other on a daily basis since they were old enough to have playdates.

Unfortunately, they don’t have anything like the kind of free time they used to. Being adults with stupid shift patterns and cumbersome responsibilities seriously sucks sometimes.

After Scott and Isaac’s Bonding ceremony last year, the couple had moved out of Melissa’s house and bought a place of their own. They’d even found an apartment with a spare bedroom so that Stiles had the option of moving back in with them permanently if he wanted to. But he’d declined the offer. One day – a few years from now maybe, but one day – the two Betas would want to have children. Scott was amazing with kids, and Isaac’s love of anything small and cute was hardly a secret, so it seemed only natural that they’d want Cubs of their own eventually. So Stiles had stayed with his Dad instead.

And if he dropped large hints about being a godfather someday, well, who could blame him? Isaac and Scott would make awesome parents.

“Hey, Stiles!” a voice calls from the hallway, and a moment later Isaac’s skipping through into the living room, unceremoniously dumping his bag of groceries on the coffee table before making a valiant effort to squish Stiles into the couch cushions.

“Hi,” the other Sub wheezes, patting the Beta on the back with the hand that isn’t pinned to his chest by Isaac’s weight. “Dude. Can’t breathe.”

“Ah well,” Isaac sighs, settling his head down on Stiles’ shoulder comfortably. “More pizza bagels for me.”
Stiles squawks an indignant laugh and tries to shove him away, but the Werewolf barely moves an inch. “Scott, get him off!” he whines, only to pull a face when he feels Isaac’s answering laugh shudder through him. “Dude, gross! Scott, you married a total pervert!”

“I know,” the Dom acknowledges fondly from where he’s leaning in the archway, watching them with a warm grin, arms crossed over his chest. “He’s perfect.”

Isaac preens, and finally rolls off Stiles so that he can tackle-hug Scott instead, nuzzling the Dom like he’s been away at the grocery store for ten days rather than ten minutes. Stiles would find it nauseatingly sappy if they weren’t so cute together. And if he didn’t feel exactly the same way whenever he was around Derek.

“You can stay for a little while, right?” Isaac wheedles, fixing Scott with a pleading, wide-eyed look, executing just the right amount of head-tilt to make his tactic effective. It’s little wonder that Dominants usually have a difficult time saying ‘no’ to Isaac.

Scott smiles fondly, tugging on his Sub’s light-brown curls. “Stop it. You know that look doesn’t work on me anymore.”

Stiles laughs.

Scott throws him a wounded look; Stiles laughs harder.

“Sorry,” he says with false sincerity, then shakes his head, smiling. “Doesn’t work on you. That’s hilarious.”

“You’re both disrespectful brats,” Scott tells them plainly, shaking a finger in Isaac’s face. It does nothing to lessen the Sub’s grin. “I don’t know why I put up with the two of you.”

Stiles raises a hand. “I bake.”

“I’m really good in bed,” Isaac tacks on, pecking a chaste kiss against the Dom’s cheek before heading back towards the coffee table to retrieve his bag of groceries. “And I bought you pizza bagels.”

“Liar,” Scott huffs, but he’s smirking. “You bought those for Stiles and you know it.”

Isaac shrugs and doesn’t deny it, flashing Stiles a quiet grin as saunters towards the kitchen, only to give a laughing yelp of protest when Scott lands a light-handed smack against his rump as he scoots past. Stiles fixes the Dom with a mock-glare and is about to defend Isaac’s honour when Scott reaches back inside the kitchen and produces a huge, steaming carafe of coffee. He beams at the Dom instead and makes grabby-hands towards the flask.

“What can you stay long?” he asks, once he’s cuddled up beside the couple on the couch, adequately caffeinated and munching on hot pizza bagels.

“Afraid not.” Scott gives Isaac a gentle squeeze when the Sub whines and slumps further in his lap. “My shift starts at three.”

“Bummer,” Stiles sympathises. “And you don’t finish ‘til midnight?”

“Twilight shifts are the worst,” Isaac grouches, but allows Scott to feed him another bite of bagel.

The Dom shrugs, rubbing his thumb back and forth where it rests on Isaac’s hip. “Depends how quiet things are at the Centre. Technically me, Boyd and Erica are down as extras tonight.”
Apparently they’ve needed all hands on deck these past few shifts, so it’s more of a precautionary thing. Aiden said they got called out to four separate emergencies last night, though. This week’s debates are a pretty touchy subject with a helluva lot of people.”

“Bar fights?” Stiles guesses, sucking tomato sauce off his thumb.

The Dom nods grimly. “Alcohol and politics rarely mix. And speaking of…” He gently tips Isaac’s chin up to get his attention, then shifts his glance to Stiles to make sure he’s still listening. “I know the two of you are planning to go out for drinks before you hit the clubs. Just promise me you’ll avoid Karf’s, Henchman’s, Bamboo—”

“Basically all the seedy bars this side of the county,” Isaac surmises.

“Yeah, because we were totally planning on going to Karf’s,” Stiles comments, his tone dripping with sarcasm. “I love getting roofied.”

Scott levels him with a disapproving look, tapping into his rarely-used Dominant authority, and Stiles raises a placating hand.

“Enough with the glare, Papa Bear. We won’t go anywhere with a bad rep,” he promises. “We’ll avoid the bars altogether and have drinks at the restaurant, if it’ll make you feel better.” He nudges Scott in the side. “And Danny knows all the best nightclubs; he won’t take us anywhere sleazy. We’ll be fine.”

The Dom seems satisfied with the answer and doesn’t raise the issue again. At least not until an hour or so later when he’s getting ready to leave for work, perched on the arm of the couch in just his uniform pants as he ties the laces on his boots, a towel slung around his neck, wet hair sticking up at odd angles.

“You’ll keep me in the loop, right?” he presses, and it’s not really a question, more like a carefully worded expectation.

“Yes,” Stiles sighs, and takes his hand off the Wii controller long enough to throw a popcorn kernel at the Dom. “Go to work already.”

Scott sends him another disapproving look, but the effect is somewhat ruined by the smile that’s tugging at the corner of his mouth. He hops up and heads for the door, dragging his fingers gently through Isaac’s curls as he moves around the couch. The Sub makes a happy sort of rumble in the back of his throat, unconcerned that the Dom’s distraction just cost him first place in the Mario Kart race. Stiles grins as his Mach Bike zooms past the other Sub’s Nostalgia.

They’re halfway through the next race when Scott’s voice filters through from the bedroom, barely audible above the cheery music of Rainbow Road.

“Baby, have you seen my shirt?”

“Try the closet,” Isaac suggests, attention fixed on the screen as he cruelly deposits bananas in a fatal arc where the track curves sharply to the left.

“Those are your shirts, honey,” the Dom calls back.

Isaac’s answering huff is one of pure marital exasperation. “Try the other side of the closet, Scott.” There’s a short pause then, chagrined: “Oh. Found ‘em!”
Scott reappears a few minutes later, fully dressed, and Isaac pauses the game so that he can scramble up to hug the Dominant goodbye, melting into Scott’s kiss as the other Beta rubs a hand down his spine.

“Is your phone charged?” the Dom asks softly, one hand gently cradling Isaac’s cheek. When the Sub nods, he smiles and kisses him again. “Good boy. Hourly updates until Danny arrives, you know the drill. I’ll keep checking for messages as often as I can. And you never know,” he taps the Sub’s nose and grins, “if it’s quiet at the Centre, maybe I’ll be able to join you guys for a drink later.”

He gives the boy a final kiss before stepping back and crossing over to Stiles, dropping a hand into the Sub’s hair to mess it up. Stiles makes a noise of protest and bats at him, but he’s smiling.

“Say hi to the guys for me,” Scott requests, with a final swipe at Stiles’ spiky fringe. “And try to stay out of trouble, okay?”


The call comes through an hour or so after they’ve finished dinner.

Stiles is comfortably full, having treated himself to a huge bowl of pasta and a gigantic slice of chocolate fudge cake, recalling from experience that a full stomach helps to keep him sober a little while longer – both because the food absorbs the alcohol, and because he tends to be less inclined to guzzle cocktails like fruit juice if he isn’t half-starved all night.

They’re both sitting at the restaurant’s bar, nursing ice-cold drinks; a complex-looking, multi-coloured Infusion cocktail for Isaac, and a ruby-red Cherry Bomb for Stiles. He never would’ve figured that vodka, chocolate and grenadine would blend together so seamlessly to create some kind of liquid tastebud sex, but there it is. He’s already on his second glass. He should probably switch to soft drinks once he’s finished this one, though. Lightweight is an understatement when it comes to Stiles.

“Right, bathroom break,” Isaac announces, taking a quick gulp of his blue-green-orange tinted Infusion before hopping down from the bar stool. He shoots Stiles a grin and taps the side of his glass. “Feel free to try some if you like.”
Stiles wrinkles his nose at the offer. *Infusion* drinks are most certainly a Were-only thing; a specially brewed alcohol-alternative for those with enhanced senses, spiked with either nightshade or hemlock to induce a metabolic response similar to that of alcohol intoxication, although on a much milder level. Humans can’t drink the stuff, of course – aside from tasting seriously weird to non-Were tastebuds, the liquor’s technically poisonous. A single glass wouldn’t be enough to cause any long-term damage, the drinks aren’t *that* strong, but the side-effects would certainly be unpleasant enough to deter any curious tasters from sampling the stuff.

Besides, it’s illegal for *Infusions* to be sold to non-Weres. There’s a pretty hefty fine for establishments that fail to ask for a customer’s ID when serving spiked liquor.

“I’ll stick to my Cherry Bomb, thanks,” Stiles declines, swirling the plastic stirrer through the cranberry-red liquid, ice clinking against the sides of the glass.

Isaac’s phone starts buzzing softly where it’s resting beside his drink and Stiles leans over to glance at the screen. “Dude, it’s Danny. You want me to get it?”

“Thanks,” Isaac calls back, heading towards the archway that leads to the restaurant’s bathrooms. “I won’t be long.”

Stiles wipes the condensation from his hands on his dark skinny-jeans and takes the call. “Yo, Danny-boy. You guys almost ready?”

The short, heavy sigh on the other end of the line doesn’t bode well.

“I’m really sorry to have to cancel last minute,” the Dom apologises, his voice low and serious. “But Jackson’s come down with something out of the blue - he’s spent the past hour puking on the bathroom floor, so he’s not really up for going anywhere tonight.”

“No, geez, of course not,” Stiles sympathises, concern seeping into his voice. “Is he okay?”

“It’s probably just a stomach bug he’s picked up from one of the kids,” Danny assures him, but the worry’s still there in his voice. And for a good reason – Stiles can’t remember the last time that Jackson got sick. “It was bound to happen eventually; he’s worn himself out these past few weeks juggling summer camp with his regular coaching schedule. I’m sure it’s just a twenty-four hour thing.”

“Well, make sure he takes it easy,” Stiles insists. “And tell him I’ll fix him up a batch of popping brownies once he’s feeling better.”

“Thanks, Stiles,” the Dom replies; his tone is softer now, an easy warmth returning to it. “And I’m sorry for ruining our plans.”

Stiles shakes his head, even though Danny can’t see him. “Dude, no, don’t be stupid. People get sick, it happens. Me and Isaac’ll be fine.”

“So it just the two of you?” Danny asks, ever the responsible Dom. When Stiles replies to the affirmative, the Druid’s tone grows a little more authoritative. “Buddy, forget about going clubbing tonight, okay? I’ll take the four of us out next week, my treat – Scott too, if he can get the time off. It’s not worth the risk with only two of you and no anchor, especially if you’ve both got liquor in your system already.”

The Sub sighs, but he knows Danny’s right. A lot of decent nightclubs would think twice before granting admission to two slightly tipsy Submissives, especially if they were unescorted. Larger groups of friends were safe enough, but two? Not so much. ‘Three is key’ and all that jazz.
“Will you be alright getting home?” Danny continues, his tone gentling.

“Sure, we’ll get a cab or something,” Stiles assures him. “Right now we’re still at the restaurant. Might head to the cocktail bar down the road before we call it a night, though.”

“Bellana’s?” Danny asks.

Stiles takes another sip of his drink. “Yeah, I’ve been there before. It’s pretty tame. And it shouldn’t be too busy, it’s only just gone nine-thirty.”

“Fair enough,” Danny acquiesces, the note of concern slipping. “But be careful, okay? Call me if you need picking up, I don’t mind playing chauffeur for the night.”

Stiles has absolutely no intention of dragging Danny away from Jackson, not when the other Sub needs him, but he doesn’t say as much. It isn’t wise to ruffle Danny’s Dominant feathers, not when his protective instincts have already been triggered.

“Will do,” he promises. “And don’t worry about us, dude, we’ll be fine. Scott finishes his shift in a couple of hours anyway. Now go give Jackson a hug from me, alright?”

By the time Isaac emerges from the bathroom, catching the eye of every Dominant he passes in his form-fitting white shirt (unbuttoned a little too far to show off his collar, as usual) and hip-hugging black pants, Stiles has already ended the call. The Beta seems to realise that something’s up the moment he settles back down in his bar stool, brow creasing a little as heTips his head to one side.

“What? Is Danny running late?”

“Danny’s not coming,” Stiles replies, and quickly summarises their phone conversation, watching as Isaac’s concerned frown grows more pronounced and his posture slumps a little.

“Dude, that sucks,” he mumbles, propping an elbow on the edge of the marble bar and resting his chin in his hand. “Poor Jackson. He’d been looking forward to hitting the ‘clubs, too.”

Stiles hums in agreement as he downs the last of his cocktail. “I told Danny we’d head home after Bellana’s. He’s right, it’s probably not a good idea to go traipsing halfway across town without—” He breaks off as Isaac’s expression forms what can only be described as a pout.

“Serenity’s way better. Hell, even Eclipse?”

Isaac shrugs, staring at his Infusion sulkily, looking decidedly put-out and undeniably cute. “Nothing. It doesn’t matter.”

Fuck. Stiles isn’t strong enough to endure an Isaac Sulk.

“Buddy, c’mon,” he coaxes, nudging the Beta gently in the side. “What is it?”

“It’s just…” The other Sub sighs and deflates a little more. “I’d kinda hoped we’d be able to visit Eclipse later tonight.”

“Eclipse?” Stiles echoes, forming the word slowly, wondering where he’s heard that name recently. And then it clicks. He sends Isaac an incredulous look. “Wait a minute. Isn’t that the club you were complaining about the other day? The one with the idiot bouncers who keep accidentally force-dropping Subs?”

Isaac flushes a little and fiddles with the plastic stirrer in his drink. “Maybe?”

“Then what’s with the sudden, burning desire to go visit the place? Serenity’s way better. Hell, even
Mile High sounds like a cooler option, and the music there’s shit.”

“There’s nothing wrong with the club,” Isaac insists quietly. “Just the security staff. Danny’s been there before; aside from the bouncers, it’s got a pretty good reputation.”

“But?” Stiles prompts. He knows there’s a ‘but’ there. The Beta’s definitely up to something.

“But it came under new management six weeks ago, and since then we’ve been called out to five separate incidents,” Isaac continues, dropping his voice even lower as he leans in closer to Stiles, his countenance growing more serious. “All involving different security personnel. Which means it’s not just an accidental thing – it’s a persistent behavioural issue. What if it’s happened more than those five times we know about – what if it’s an ongoing attitude problem with these guys and people just aren’t reporting it?”

Stiles arches an eyebrow. “You think maybe they’re pulling the Dom-card on people just for the thrill of it?”

Isaac shrugs. “Some Dominants enjoy that kind of power. And if that’s an opinion all of the security personnel share, then it becomes a habit, and people don’t notice when someone crosses the line. Or they notice it, but they keep quiet because nobody else seems bothered by it.”

Chewing on the end of his straw, Stiles regards his friend silently for a moment, his brow still furrowed. He knows how passionate Isaac gets about Submissive rights – hell, he’s right there with Beta on that one – and he has to admit that his own concerns have awoken at the notion of security guards routinely abusing their power as Dominants by intimidating club patrons.

“Isn’t that something you should be mentioning to the community patrol team?” he suggests, rubbing at the condensation on his glass. “Or maybe even my Dad?”

Isaac sighs quietly. “They already know about the issue. Problem is, every time they’ve gone and done a check-up on the place, the reports have come back squeaky-clean across the board.” He shakes his head and heaves another frustrated sigh. “Of course they’re gonna behave themselves if someone in a uniform shows up.”

The penny drops. “Which is why you want to do it off the books,” he surmises slowly. “See how they treat people when they don’t think they’re being watched.”

Isaac shoots him a sideways grin. “Precisely.”

It’s a good idea. Scrap that, it’s a cunning idea. And Stiles has always been easily swayed by cunning plans, especially if they’re for a good cause. It’s the same weakness that led to him and Scott being grounded for two weeks back when they were fourteen, after they’d spent half the night running all over town and making alterations to the DRA advertisements that had been stuck up all over the place, so that the posters proudly read ‘Dominants Rights Assholes’. Needless to say, neither his Dad nor Melissa had been greatly impressed.

He finds himself returning the Beta’s grin, excitement growing at the prospect of catching some Dominant douchebags in the act.

“Dude, I’m in,” he says, and downs the rest of his Cherry Bomb in one large gulp. “What’s the plan?”
“You were gone for ages,” Stiles complains when Isaac slides back into their little side-booth along the upper walkway of the nightclub. “She didn’t recognise you, did she?”

Isaac shakes his head, handing Stiles a fresh drink and taking a sip from his own – the concoctions are only soda and syrup mixers, given that spy-work and alcohol don’t go well together. Actually, they haven’t had another proper drink since leaving the restaurant; after queuing up outside Bellana’s for half an hour, they’d decided to head straight to Eclipse instead, since it seemed like the cocktail bar was hosting three separate Hen Nights and a couple of large birthday parties. They would have wasted half the night waiting in line to buy their first cocktail if they’d stuck around there.

“What are you gonna tell Scott?” Stiles had asked, thumb hovering over the message icon on his own screen. He’d sent a text to Derek twenty minutes ago to tell him they were heading to Bellana’s; the Alpha had replied with a short list of cocktail recommendations and a reminder not to stay out too late.

The Beta looked conflicted for a moment, before shoving his own cell phone back into his pocket. “We won’t be staying long,” Isaac reasoned with forced confidence. “And we’ll head home straight after. No need to worry him unnecessarily.”

Stiles had readily agreed, although the Cherry Bombs in his stomach had turned sour after that.

His stomach’s still churning now, as a matter of fact; a faint, persistent background nausea that doesn’t seem to want to settle, regardless of what Stiles drinks. Maybe he’s coming down with whatever Jackson’s got.

“Dude, relax. We only spoke to the manager when our team did the follow-up,” Isaac tells him. “Nobody’s going to recognise me.”

Stiles glances across the busy nightclub floor towards the pink-haired Dom stationed behind the nearest bar, watching as she tosses a bottle neatly in the air and catches it with her other hand, grinning at the customer she’s serving.

“And what did she say? Anything interesting?”

“She was nice enough,” Isaac comments, stealing Stiles’ glass to take a sip of his soda. Then he hums approvingly and swaps their glasses around. “Although she told me I might want to reconsider my job application. Didn’t think I was what the boss was looking for in a barmen.”
The Sub tilts his head curiously. “I’m guessing this boss of hers wants someone a little more…?”

“Dominant?” Isaac finishes, nodding. “Sure came across that way.”

“Haven’t they heard of standard Dynamic diversity laws?” Stiles queries, fishing the umbrella out of his drink.

“Apparently not.” The Beta glances around the busy nightclub briefly, before leaning in closer so that he can be heard above the pulsing, electric beat of the DJ’s music. “I haven’t seen one non-Dominant staff member since we arrived. Not even a Switch.” He shakes his head, eyes cutting back out across the dance floor down below. “Last time I came, the manager told us he always put an equal number of Doms and Subs together on shift so that they could keep each other in check.”

“He lied to you?” Stiles arches an eyebrow. “Dude’s got skills if he managed to fool a bunch of Werewolves.”

“Isaac?”

A girl materialises on the walkway beside their booth, dark curls framing her face, her painted lips spreading into a wide, sunny smile as she leans down to smooch a loud kiss against the Beta’s cheek.

“I thought I could smell you!” she crows, clearly a little tipsy, and plonks herself down in Isaac’s lap, looping an arm around his neck and pressing their cheeks together as she angles her phone towards them. “Smile!”

Isaac grins obligingly for the photo, then glances cheerfully towards the other occupant of the table. “Stiles, this is Lisa. She’s doing work experience at the clinic this summer.” He gives the dark-haired girl a friendly nuzzle. “Where’s Vicky?”

“Arguing with my sister about who gets to buy the next round of drinks,” Lisa grousches, and huffs an exasperated sigh. “Doms. Anyway!” She jumps up suddenly, leaning down long enough to give Isaac another kiss. “I’d better go find them before they notice I’m missing. See you at work!”

She flounces away cheerfully, and Stiles returns his attention to their current investigation, glancing back towards the lone Dominant bouncer who’s standing guard on the far side of the club near the leather couches, feet shoulder-width apart and hands clasped loosely behind his back as he diligently surveys the dance floor. The bouncers who’d let them into the club had been pleasant enough, and suitably professional when asking them to confirm the details on their ID cards, but this guy…Stiles can’t pinpoint why, but he just seems a little too friendly. Chatting to single patrons over by the bar and flashing winks at uncollared Subs; it just rubs Stiles up the wrong way.

Of course, if he’d fully understood the significance of what had just taken place between Isaac and Lisa, he would’ve forgotten about the bouncer in a heartbeat and chased after the retreating Werewolf to confiscate her phone.

But he’s always been too easily distracted. It’s a weakness.
An hour or so later, long after they’ve had their fill of spy-work and Stiles’ feet have started to ache from all the dancing (because the music here is seriously awesome, and they are in a nightclub after all), Isaac suddenly sits bolt-upright from his casual slouch on the padded booth bench, eyes going wide, posture growing tense.

Stiles sends him a startled look, almost knocking over his glass of coke. “Dude, what?”

Isaac’s gaze remains distant for a moment, before flickering up to meet the other Sub’s, panic and dread stirring in their depths. “Uh-oh.”

“Oh-oh?” Stiles echoes, alarmed. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“It means,” says an all-too-familiar voice from a few inches to his right, “that the two of you are in serious trouble.”

Stiles drags his eyes up slowly to meet the Dom’s stone-hard glare. “Hey, Scotty,” he says weakly. “Let me buy you a drink?”

Scott settles a hand on the back of Stiles’ neck, squeezing just hard enough to keep a firm grip without actually hurting the Sub, and extends his other hand towards Isaac expectantly. The Beta offers Scott his wrist without resistance, ducking his head, and the Dom tugs them both up out of the booth.

“We’re leaving,” he informs them flatly. “Right now.”

‘Uh-oh’ is definitely an accurate sentiment. Scott is pissed. Well, pissed in Scott-terms anyway, which basically means worried and disappointed and cross all intermingled into one. Stiles frantically runs through a mental list of plausible excuses as he and Isaac are steered towards the nearest exit, but his Submissive instincts are already kicking into gear in the face of Scott’s unusually stern persona. Like, he has the craziest urge to just blurt out an apology and confess to everything which, no, is totally not allowed to happen. They came here for a good reason, goddammit. He’s just having a hard time remembering how he’d managed to convince himself that the consequences would be worth it.

To be fair, he’d kinda refused to acknowledge the fact that there would be consequences, too swept up in the thrill of the mission. There’s a reason he writes fantasy novels.

And yeah, okay, maybe he and Isaac had let a couple of rules slip along the way. They’d gone to Eclipse after texting Scott to tell him they’d be visiting Bellana’s. They might’ve, maybe, sort of forgotten to mention the fact that Danny wasn’t going to be joining them. But still. Their intentions had been good. That had to stand for something, right?

Except the more Stiles thinks about it, the more apparent his numerous failings become. And that
sickly, acid-like ball of nauseating uncomfortableness inside of him suddenly presents itself as an entirely different entity: guilt. The urge to duck his head and blurt out apologies increases exponentially.

“Hop in the front,” Scott instructs quietly, but his tone is still authoritative as he nudges Isaac towards the car.

He opens the back door for Stiles and guides him inside, his hand only slipping from its position on the back of the Sub’s neck once he’s properly seated. Stiles eyes him warily, stomach leaden with guilt and dread, breathing laboured by the growing tightness in his chest.

“Scotty?” he probes, tentatively.

“Don’t.” Scott busies himself fastening the Sub’s seatbelt, reverting to familiar hands-on, fussy habits to compensate for how worried he’s clearly been. “You do not wanna have this discussion with me right now, dude. We’re going home, and we’ll talk about it then; but right now I really need you to be quiet. Okay?”

Stiles blinks, that burning-achy-sick-wrong feeling worsening as he watches the twitch in Scott’s jaw when the Dom clenches his teeth together; the flare of his nostrils as he takes a steadying breath; the way he closes his eyes briefly to keep himself in check.

Holy shit. Scott’s furious.

The sudden uptick of his heartbeat must be fairly audible, because Scott’s eyes flicker back up to meet his gaze, and something in his expression softens as a result. The Dom curls a hand gently around the nape of Stiles’ neck again and leans in to lightly bump their foreheads together.

“We’ll talk about it when we get home,” he promises again, before ducking back out of the car and closing the door.

The drive back to the apartment is torturous. Stiles dislikes awkward silences at the best of times, but the tension is unbearable now, the air thick with anxiety and anger and frustration, and a dozen other emotions that the Werewolves must surely be registering at ten times the volume. It’s a wonder they can still breathe, the air’s that stifling.

But all too soon he and Isaac are parked side by side on the couch, fidgeting guiltily as Scott calls Danny to tell him they made it home safely. Then the Dom’s lowering himself down to perch on the edge of the coffee table directly in front of them, pulling off the hoody he’d used to cover his uniform jacket. Stiles spares a relieved thought for the Dom’s quick-thinking; a WPDS officer wading through a packed nightclub would definitely have turned a few heads, and the shame of being dragged out of there in front of all those people by a member of law enforcement would’ve been too much to bear. Scott’s angry, that much is clear, but he’d taken steps to minimise the public humiliation factor, and Stiles is insanely grateful for that small measure of mercy.

He doubts that same mercy will extend far tonight; not after what they’ve done.

“You’ve both had time to think,” Scott begins, his tone carefully measured, although the look he fixes them both with is steely. “Wanna take a stab at guessing where things went wrong?”

Isaac shifts beside him, knees tucked up to his chest, sock-clad toes clenching and unclenching against the couch cushions. “We…Danny had to cancel last minute.”

“And?” Scott prompts.
“And I forgot to tell you,” Isaac mumbles in an uneven voice.

The Dom regards him steadily. “You forgot?”

Stiles cringes, his insides squirming. Cool-and-collected Scott is even deadlier than visibly-upset Scott in these kind of situations. It’s only been a couple of months since he last landed himself in trouble with the Dom; how could he have so easily forgotten how awful it felt to be scolded by his best friend? Scott’s barely even said anything, and he already wants to cry.

“You forgot” to tell me that Danny had called to cancel,” the Dom reiterates calmly. “And that you and Stiles wanted to go out clubbing on your own instead. Is that what you’re telling me?”

Isaac sucks in a sharp breath, eyes cutting up to Scott briefly before lowering again as he shakes his head. “No, Sir.”

Scott leans in closer, elbows braced on his thighs. “Do you think maybe you decided not to tell me because you knew I’d say no?”

The Sub’s head jerks in a shaky nod, his blue eyes glassy with unshed tears. “Yes, Sir.”

The Dom’s focus shifts to pin Stiles with a firm look. “And I’m guessing you didn’t tell Derek about the change in plans, either?”

That churning ball of guilt-sick-wrong-hurt inside his chest pulses hotter and he swallows, picking at a loose thread on his sleeve and dropping his gaze. After a moment, he reluctantly shakes his head.

“I want you to text him,” Scott instructs, his tone clipped. “Tell him you’re home safe, and that I’ll be calling him later.”

Stiles pauses, phone in hand, and shoots the Dom a worried look. “Why?”

“Because I asked you to,” the Beta replies.

“No, I get that,” Stiles acknowledges nervously. “I mean why do you need to call him later?”

Scott just gives him a look. Stiles shuts up and sends the text, and hands his phone over to Scott when the Dom holds his hand out expectantly.

“How did you know?” Isaac asks after a beat of silence, his voice wobbly with restrained emotion. “I never told Danny about wanting to go to Eclipse.”

Scott’s eyes narrow at the reminder of where he’d found the pair, but after a steadying breath, his expression relaxes again. He produces his own cell phone from his back pocket, tapping at the touchscreen for a moment before angling the device towards them so that they can both see the picture. It’s a photograph of Isaac, grinning handsomely at the camera, cheek-to-cheek with a very familiar dark-haired Sub. The automated caption beside it reads: ‘Lisa Coleman has tagged Isaac Lahey and 9 others in her album, Eclipse baby!!’

“Lisa tagged you on facebook,” Scott elaborates, apparently misinterpreting the blank look of shock on his Sub’s face for a lack of comprehension. “And the alert went to my inbox.”

Isaac shrinks back into the couch cushions, shamefaced. “Oh.”

“You know, I even managed to duck out of work early tonight,” Scott continues, his tone worryingly blithe. “I’d planned on driving into town and surprising you both. Except when I sent Danny a text
to ask if you guys were still at Bellana’s, he told me he hadn’t been able to make it out at all tonight because Jackson was sick.”

“We were gonna go to Bellana’s,” Stiles insists, because they hadn’t intentionally lied about that part. “But the queue was taking ages and the place was packed, so we just…skipped it.”

“So you decided to go to a nightclub instead?” Scott asks with a mild note of incredulity. Then his gaze cuts to his own Sub. “And Eclipse, Isaac? After all the trouble they’ve gotten themselves into this past month? What the hell were you thinking?”

The Sub draws in a hitching breath, hugging his knees tighter. “I just wanted to see how the bouncers treated Subs when they didn’t think anyone was watching.”

A short beat of silence follows. Scott stares at Isaac unblinkingly, the muscles of his jaw working for a moment as the crease in his brow deepens significantly. “You went in there deliberately,” he reiterates in a low, foreboding voice. “To spy on the bouncers. Because you thought they might be abusing Submissives.”

Isaac nods, his renewed passion for the cause giving him enough confidence to meet Scott’s gaze again. “The follow-up reports are a load of bull, Scott,” he insists. “You know that. The manager’s been lying his ass off, and the employee schedule’s a total farce. Everyone who works at that club is a Dom.”

“And you went in there,” Scott continues, clearly unmoved by Isaac’s motive. “Just the two of you. Alone. With no anchor. And no backup. When you’d already been drinking.”

Isaac slumps again, his lips turning down in a miserable pout as he drops his gaze.

“We switched to sodas,” the Beta tries weakly.

Scott pinches the bridge of his nose and closes his eyes briefly, shoulders rising and falling with the force of his long, heavy sigh. Stiles hates himself for being the cause of it. Hates that he’s put Scott in this position. Again.

The Dom straightens again after a moment, resting his hands on his knees as he regards them quietly, before tipping his head towards the door that leads out into the hallway.

“Go pick a corner in our room, pup. I’ll be there in a minute; I need to have a chat with Stiles first.”

The curly-haired Sub glances nervously between the two of them, worrying his bottom lip between his teeth, eyes still huge and wet. “It wasn’t his idea,” the Wolf insists, his voice tremulous again. “I was the one who-”

“Isaac,” Scott interrupts, and while it’s still softly spoken, that note of authority’s noticeably more pronounced. “Now’s really not a good time to be arguing with me.” He jerks his head towards the door again. “Go on.”

“But Sir,” the Sub protests. “Stiles had nothing to do with-”

“One.”

Isaac’s expression shutters, shock giving way to fear before solidifying into an annoyed frown.

Ah. Here’s a scene Stiles is all too familiar with. Unknown to most, Isaac possesses a truly impressive level of stubbornness, which tends to reassert itself at the most inopportune moments; like,
for example, when guilt and self-deprecation have chased away the last vestiges of common sense, leaving behind an upset, moody Sub who feels driven to push and push and push until he gets the disciplinary response he needs.

The curly-haired Sub huffs in frustration. “You’re not even letting me explain-”

“Two,” Scott warns, hands hanging loosely between his knees and posture relaxed, his gaze fixed steadily on the Sub. “Last chance, baby.”

“Fine!” the Beta snaps tearfully and shoots to his feet, kicking the leg of the coffee table as he storms past on his way towards the hallway. He doesn’t stomp his feet, but it’s a close thing. And it probably would’ve been cute, had Stiles not been fully aware of what was going to happen as a result of that little show of petulance.

Scott sighs and closes his eyes again briefly.

“Three.”

Over by the door, Isaac freezes, his stubbornness having utterly fled him in the wake of his sudden outburst. The Sub sends a nervous glance back over his shoulder, eyes widening when he sees his Dom rising slowly.

“I’m sorry!” he blurts, his previous confidence gone. “I’m going, I’ll go, I’m sorry!”

But the time has clearly passed for apologies – Scott’s already on his feet and closing the gap between them with long, measured strides. Isaac barely has the chance to whimper and duck his head before Scott clamps a hand around the boy’s wrist, steering him over to the nearest item of furniture – in this case, the loveseat pushed against the far wall – and perching on the arm of it, yanking his Sub down across his lap unceremoniously.

Isaac promptly bursts into tears.

The Sub’s crying only increases in volume and fervour during the subsequent volley of heavy-handed, rapid-fire swats against his clothed rear. Stiles cringes anew and sinks down a little further on the couch, feeling a sympathetic tingling in his own backside. He’s only seen Scott reach ‘three’ on a handful of previous occasions, and certainly not since their time together at college. Isaac’s must be feeling just as horribly guilty as Stiles is to have been compelled to push all the way.

The whole thing’s over almost as soon as it’s begun, and in the blink of an eye Scott has the weeping Sub righted in his lap, fingers sinking into the boy’s curly hair to guide Isaac’s head down against his shoulder as he shushes him gently.

“Hey, hey,” Scott murmurs as Isaac clings to him and sobs. “Shhh. You’re okay, baby. I’m here.”

Stiles, while relieved that it’s over so fast, is more than a little puzzled. The Dom’s doled out a disconcertingly mild spanking, all things considered. Isaac’s not like Stiles; he takes much longer to let go of all that pent-up guilt and shame and frustration, and Scott’s never shied away from giving the Sub what he needs before. After suffering years of neglect at his father’s hands, Isaac’s always been quick to seek atonement after breaking a rule, needing to push against the safe parameters of his relationship with Scott to reassure himself (as any Sub would need to) that there was someone there to look after him.

Isaac seems equally as puzzled by the unusually brief trip over his Dom’s knee. He stops crying after a moment or two and pulls away a little, brow furrowed, flushed cheeks damp with tears as he regards Scott in confusion.
“Are w-we done?” the Sub queries, breath hitching mid-word. “You’re not mad anymore?”

Scott’s expression softens as he strokes the backs of his fingers down Isaac’s cheek. “I was never mad, Isaac. I’m not happy about the risks you took and the rules you broke tonight, but we’ll talk about that more in a few minutes.”

Isaac slumps a bit in Scott’s hold, but Stiles can tell it’s from relief as well as resignation. The Beta’s clearly still struggling with a few inner demons.

Scott kisses his Sub again. “Now, are you gonna do as I asked and find a corner for me?” When Isaac nods, curls bouncing a little, the Dom rewards him with a gentle smile and another kiss. “Good boy. Go on.”

Isaac doesn’t voice any protests this time, scrubbing at his cheeks before scampering out of the room quickly.

Scott watches him go, eyes lingering on the door for a moment, head tilted, apparently listening out to make sure Isaac’s followed his instructions. Then he stands up and returns to his previous perch on the edge of the coffee table, now directly in front of Stiles, and leans forwards to settle his hands on the Sub’s knees.

“Alright. You know how this works, buddy,” he says, and his voice is soothing now, that previous note of authority gone. Stiles is grateful. He’s close enough to tears already, he wouldn’t have been able to withstand another scolding. “We can either deal with this now, or we can call your Dad.”

Stiles already knows that he’ll never, ever go for that second option. His Dad’s going to be furious when he finds out about this; better to face him when he’s already been disciplined and that churning ball of guilt in his stomach has dissipated somewhat.

Issue is, though, that those aren’t his only options anymore – he has a boyfriend now. And Scott’s already planning on ratting him out to Derek as soon as they’re done, right?

“But,” he starts, brow crinkling. “But you said you were gonna call Derek later...”

Scott nods calmly. “He’s your Dom, he’ll want to know about this. And maybe what you did tonight broke a few rules between you and Derek, too, but I’m not here to talk about that. You’re in trouble with me because we’re family and tonight you broke our rules, and put yourself in danger.” He gently squeezes his hands where they’re still resting on the Sub’s knees. “And it’s obvious you’re pretty cut up about it, which is why we’re discussing it tonight instead of waiting until the morning. So you’ve got two options, buddy - either you can let me take care of things here and now, or we give your Dad a call.”

Stiles feels his insides squirm with renewed vigour. He doesn’t want his Dad to hear about this, not yet. But he doesn’t want Scott to discipline him, either. And he really, really doesn’t want Derek to know about all the rules he’s broken. But he’s also on the verge of drowning in his own guilt and shame, and he knows a trip over Scott’s knee, however unpleasant, will help to alleviate that pain. It won’t eliminate it entirely, because he’s majorly fucked up tonight and Derek’s going to hate him (oh god, he’s the worst Sub ever), but he’s already about ten seconds away from bursting into tears, so a small measure of release, however temporary, would be greatly appreciated.

A sudden blast of noise startles him, and he blinks towards the television set that’s suddenly turned itself on. It’s some crappy, low-budget, CSI-type show, and he sends Scott a confused glance as the Dom turns up the volume and sets down the TV remote, leaning in again briefly to bump his nose against the Sub’s temple.
“I’m gonna go take care of Isaac, okay?” he murmurs, fingers carding through Stiles’ hair. “I’ll be back in a little while.”

Then he’s gone, closing the living room door behind him, and Stiles is left alone with his aching throat and stinging eyes and churning stomach, and a poorly-scripted cop show with wooden acting. He appreciates the background noise, though; listening to Isaac getting punished would only make him feel even crappier. He can still hear the muffled, rapid *thwap-thwap-thwap* of Scott’s hand, but the Sub’s tearful reaction is mercifully muted by the overly Toppy Doms arguing on the screen.

He already knows which option he’s going to go for. Scott already knows, too. It’s the same option he goes for every time; the one he’s chosen without fail since Scott first crouched down in front of him in their shared dorm room at UCLA and explained, calmly and patiently, why leaving campus on his own and picking a fight with an intoxicated Dom wasn’t acceptable behaviour.

He *dreads* it, of course. How could he not? Being disciplined is horrible, and he hates every well-earned smack, regardless of whose lap he’s bent over. But he’d also be lost without it, and is forever grateful to have a friend like Scott who’s willing to drag him up out of the mire of his own self-deprecation and paddle the guilt out of him when he needs it.

“Hey.”

Stiles blinks, startled from his inner musings, surprised to find Scott crouching down in front of him. He can’t tell how long he’s been lost in his own thoughts, but he feels shocky and claustrophobic, the weight of his internal anguish pressing down on him mercilessly.

Scott regards him with concern and sympathy, reaching out to cup his cheek; a rare, intimate sort of tenderness that he only gives into at times like these, when Stiles needs it most.

“Do you want me to call your Dad?”

Stiles closes his eyes, breath hitching as he shakes his head, tears pressing against the back of his eyelids.

“Okay,” Scott murmurs, and leans up to press their foreheads together again briefly. “Hey, it's okay.”

The Sub grinds the heels of his hands against his eyes, willing the tears to stop, body trembling with the force of his restraint. He feels the couch dip as Scott takes a seat beside him and leans gratefully into the firm sideways hug, one hand clinging to the Dom’s uniform shirt as Scott holds him close.

“You made a few mistakes tonight,” the Wolf tells him, not without sympathy. “You put yourself at risk by ignoring rules that me and your Dad put in place for your own safety. And you deliberately kept the truth from me because you *knew* what you were doing was wrong.”

Stiles nods miserably, the knife in his gut twisting. “I’m sorry.”

Scott brushes a kiss against his temple. “I know, buddy. C’mon; it’ll be alright, I’ll take care of it. We’re almost done.”

The Dom’s grip shifts, another arm sliding across his front as Scott makes to ready to draw him facedown over his knees. Stiles automatically puts the brakes on, the way he always does when he knows he’s about to be spanked, regardless of who’s doing the punishing. Unfortunately his strength’s pretty depleted by this point anyway, hormone-driven instincts sapping the fight right out of him, triggered by his growing inner torment; his weak struggles wouldn’t have been effective against his middle-aged father, let alone a Werewolf.
“No,” he protests, a tearful whine, as he’s effortlessly pulled across Scott’s lap, a sob bursting from his throat as the Dom adjusts him quickly and settles a restraining hand on the small of his back. “Scotty, no, I’m so-”

The first solid, heavy swat lands against the seat of his jeans, cutting him off mid-word, and before he’s even had time to draw breath, another three have landed. The rapid volley of sharp, stinging spanks is utterly *devastating*, and Stiles is crying before he even starts to properly feel the fierce heat that’s building up in his hind quarters, choking on tearful whimpers as Scott’s hand falls in a random, unpredictable pattern.

He’s not sure if it’s because it’s *Scott* who’s punishing him, or simply because the Beta’s method of spanking is so effective, but either way that hot, painful ball of guilt in his chest gives way to repentant anguish embarrassingly quickly, leaving him squirming over the Dom’s lap, choking out remoroseful sobs into the couch cushions, drumming his toes against the carpet as the barrage of rapid swats continues.

He wishes he’d never even *heard* of the name *Eclipse*. He’s sorry he ever set foot in that place. He’s sorry he and Isaac are in trouble and that he worried Danny and disobeyed Scott and…and he’s sorry, he’s sorry, he’s *sorry!*

And all of a sudden, Scott’s flipping him upright to cuddle him in his lap, strong arms closing around him in a tight embrace.

“Shhh,” the Dom soothes, as Stiles cries brokenly into the crook of his neck, clinging to the Beta like his life depends on it. “I’m done, it’s over. You did so good.”

Stiles swipes a sleeve across his eyes and tries to stop crying, but it’s a struggle; his ass hurts and Scott just *spanked* him and it *hurts* and he got *spanked* and he didn’t *like* it and it *hurts-*

“I know,” Scott murmurs, one hand sliding up to cup the back of his neck, warm fingers resting securely against his skin. “Shhh, it’s okay. I know it hurts, buddy. I’ll take care of it, shhh.”

And Scott’s as good as his word – the skin on the back of his neck tingles, pulsing hot for a moment as Scott draws the lingering pain of the spanking from him. He takes a few hitching, gulping breaths and buries himself further in the Dom’s arms before settling, his tears slowing. The ache in his chest is all but gone, and now that he’s not distracted by the burn in his rear end, he can appreciate it more. The achy-sick-wrong feeling is gone too, and although he still feels upset, it’s the usual post-discipline tearfulness rather than the horrible, cloying melancholy that had been there before.

Scott rubs his thumb back and forth where it’s resting on his neck. “Better?”

Stiles nods, sniffing, and tightens his hold on the Dom. It takes a couple more minutes for his breathing to settle, body shuddering every so often on hiccuping sobs that he can't quite suppress. Scott doesn't rush him though, arms still wrapped around the Sub securely, a hand resting on the nape of his neck to give Stiles the physical contact he needs. That little (or maybe not so little) Submissive voice inside of him that had been clamouring for affection in the wake of his spanking settles soon enough, the tension seeping from his body as his breathing eases, leaving him tired and boneless and a little bit sore, but free of the inner turmoil that had afflicted him previously.

“What’s Isaac okay?” he asks at last, his voice in hoarse and uneven.

“He’s fine,” Scott promises soothingly. “I put him to bed. We'll go join him when you're ready; it’s been a long night for both of you.”
The Sub nods again, then pulls back a couple of inches so that he can scrub at his eyes to dash away the remaining tears. He finds Scott regarding him quietly when he drops his hand; a familiar expression of warmth and concern and fondness that’s uniquely Scott. Stiles manages to dredge up a tremulous smile.

“I’m okay,” he murmurs, then reconsiders and winces a bit. “Well, no; my ass hurts, you heavy-handed jerk, but the rest of me is fine.” Then he drops his gaze, and leans in closer to thunk his forehead against Scott’s temple. “Thanks, bud.”

The Dom smiles, arms tightening around him, and they remain that way for a long while, curled up together on the couch. Eventually Isaac comes looking for them, brown curls bed-rumpled and eyes drooping with fatigue, grumpily demanding cuddles like the tactile puppy he always is after a spanking. Needless to say, Stiles ends up sandwiched snugly between two adult Werewolves, warm and comfortable and very much loved.

There are certainly worse ways to fall asleep.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed the chapter! Took me a tad bit longer than I'd intended, but work was being particularly bothersome this week. Plus this chapter turned out to be the lengthiest one yet. Did I mention how much I love writing Scisaac/Stiles? Because I do.

Let me know your thoughts, folks! <3 xxx
Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

Same warnings as the previous chapter, folks. And a mild sexy-sexy scene at the end, but nothing too graphic. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

There’s a hand in his hair, fingertips rubbing soothingly against his scalp as Stiles stirs with a sleepy hum, eyelids too heavy to pry open.

“Derek?” he mumbles, although his mouth doesn’t quite cooperate and it ends up sounding a little more like ‘Dergh’.

“Shhh.” The fingers smooth back his fringe, warm lips pressing against his skin in a gentle, lingering kiss. “Go back to sleep.”

Exhausted and far too cosy to fight against the weightlessness that’s pulling him back under, Stiles does just that.

When he later awakens to find himself in Scott and Isaac’s bed, Stiles dismisses the memory of his Dom’s touch as nothing more than a fuzzy snippet of a pleasant dream. Besides, more pressing matters demand his immediate attention – like the loud, persistent grumbling of his stomach.

He’s super comfortable, though, and warm – perhaps a little too warm – so the notion of peeling himself away from the curly-haired Werewolf furnace who’s serving as his bedfellow is an abhorrent one. He lifts his head from the pillow to peer blearily over Isaac’s shoulder towards the opposite side of the bed, the empty space of mattress confirming his suspicions that Scott’s still one of those weirdos who enjoys getting up at the screech of dawn to work out. Crazy.

Although to be fair, it’s already mid-morning according to his watch. He must’ve been exhausted last night. Stiles vaguely recalls stumbling into the bedroom with his eyes half-closed, moving his limbs pliantly when prompted so that Scott could strip him out of his button-down shirt and jeans. He doesn’t even remember his head hitting the pillow, which probably means he fell asleep sitting up. Wouldn’t be the first time. He works fourteen-hour nightshifts for a living, it’s an occupational hazard.

Isaac’s still out for the count, long limbs wrapped around Stiles to keep him cuddled in close, and the sensation is comforting in its familiarity; a morning scene he remembers fondly from their years together at college, when panic attacks and flashbacks had driven him into the Beta’s bed for the night. Sandwiched between two extremely tactile Werewolves, the nightmares hadn’t stood a chance.

The heat of Isaac’s skin seeps through the thin material of Stiles’ borrowed t-shirt, rendering the
duvet entirely unnecessary. Good thing, too; the other Sub seems to have kicked it down to the bottom of the bed in his sleep. Stiles contemplates forcing himself to drift off for another half hour or so, but he really is hungry. And he put Scott through a whole load of stress last night, it seems only fair that he cooks the Dom a half-decent breakfast by way of recompense. Scott’ll end up eating cereal straight from the box or leftover takeout from the fridge if he doesn’t intervene; the Dom’s still eats like they’re sharing a tiny two-bedroom apartment together at college.

It takes a few minutes, but eventually he manages to successfully wriggle out of Isaac’s hold without waking the Werewolf up. Scott (bless his mother-henning instincts) has left them both a glass of water on the bedside table, and he gulps down the cool liquid gratefully to soothe his parched throat as he retrieves his cell phone from the pocket of his discarded jeans and thumbs through the messages.

There are a couple of texts from Danny; one from last night, “Dude, where are you? Scott’s freaking out. I thought you were going straight home after Bellana’s?”, and another sent about half an hour ago that reads:

Jax wants toffee-apple cookies instead of brownies. I think it’s safe to say he’s feeling better this morning. Oh, and I hope you have a truly horrible hangover, you idiot. x

Stiles sends back a quick reply, grinning.

Love you too. ;)

There’s a text from his Dad, saying that he’ll be out for dinner after work and telling Stiles not to wait up for him (Stiles immediately fires off an earnest prayer to any deity who’s listening in the hope that the reason for his father’s suddenly-busy social calendar lies in a certain Submissive deputy), and one from Allison inviting him out to lunch on Wednesday after her morning clinic appointment. But none from Derek, which is…weird. And slightly concerning.

Unless the Dom’s too angry to send a text? After all, Stiles had broken a whole heap of rules last night; and it’s not like Derek had listed a lot of rules to begin with, so it’s entirely understandable that the man’s pissed. Stiles would be, too.

He tosses his phone back towards his rumpled pile of clothing next to the bed, sighing glumly. The twinge in his chest isn’t anything like the weighty, crushing guilt he’d felt last night before Scott had taken care of things, but it’s still there, niggling at him. And it’s not going to go away, either; not until he’s apologised to Derek and faced the inevitable consequences of his actions. Then maybe he’ll be able to breathe easy again.

His stomach grumbles loudly, a much-needed distraction, and he muffs a yawn behind his hand as he opens the bedroom door and steps out into the hallway. The smell of freshly brewed coffee hits him and he feels a smile tugging at his lips – God bless Scott and his propensity to spoil Stiles after a discipline session. His mood improving significantly, he drags a hand through his hair and flings the other skywards in a glorious, joint-popping stretch.

“Dude, did you make me coffee?” he asks, voice sleep-slurred as he moves through the living room towards the adjoining kitchen. “Because I may have to kiss you.”

“No complaints here.”

Stiles freezes in the doorway, dropping his hand from where he’d been scrubbing the sleep from his eyes to stare at Derek, feeling his heart flutter and his stomach twist nervously at the Dom’s sudden appearance.
But after the initial second of shock has passed, warmth swells in his chest instead. Derek looks...pleased to see him. Not angry. Not disappointed. Just his usual calm, unruffled self, with a quiet little smile tugging at the corner of his mouth, like it’s totally normal for him to be whisking up pancake batter in Scott and Isaac’s kitchen on a Tuesday morning.

“Uh. Hey,” the Sub greets falteringly. “Where’s Scott?”

“Sulking in the shower,” the Dom replies, amused. “I wouldn’t let him make you pizza bagels for breakfast.”

The mental image is enough to startle a surprised breath of laughter out of him, because it’s just so Scott. Derek glances up at the sound, his answering smile warm and fond, and something in Stiles just aches to see it; he has the biggest urge to just press himself up close against the Dom and bury himself in the man’s chest. And maybe it shows on his face, or perhaps something changes in his scent, because the next moment Derek’s setting aside the mixing bowl and wiping his hands off on a towel, leaning back against the counter behind him and opening his arms towards Stiles invitingly.

The Sub may or may not break the sound barrier closing the distance between them.

Derek holds him close for a long moment, the fingers of one hand buried in his hair as Stiles presses his face into his Dom’s neck, arms looped tightly around the Alpha’s waist and ohh, that’s more like it. This is what he’d been missing last night. While pack-bro cuddles had been awesome, they hadn’t been Derek, and Stiles is only now beginning to realise just how much he’d been needing this.

“Rough night?” the Dom asks quietly, his hand sliding down from the Sub’s hair to cup the back of his neck instead.

Stomach clenching, Stiles tenses in the Alpha’s hold, a shiver of uncertainty running through him. Perhaps that’s why Derek’s so calm. What if he doesn’t realise how badly Stiles fucked up last night? Maybe Scott only gave him a brief overview and Derek thinks Stiles didn’t actually break any rules, and he’s gonna flip the fuck out when Stiles inevitably ends up confessing to the whole sordid affair and-

“Hey,” Derek soothes, before his inner turmoil can escalate any further, arms tightening around him. “Easy. It’s okay; Scott told me about what happened last night.”

Stiles relaxes marginally, emerging from the safety of Derek’s neck to cup the back of his neck instead.

Stomach clenching, Stiles tenses in the Alpha’s hold, a shiver of uncertainty running through him. Perhaps that’s why Derek’s so calm. What if he doesn’t realise how badly Stiles fucked up last night? Maybe Scott only gave him a brief overview and Derek thinks Stiles didn’t actually break any rules, and he’s gonna flip the fuck out when Stiles inevitably ends up confessing to the whole sordid affair and-

“Hey,” Derek soothes, before his inner turmoil can escalate any further, arms tightening around him. “Easy. It’s okay; Scott told me about what happened last night.”

Stiles relaxes marginally, emerging from the safety of Derek’s neck to sneak a hesitant glance at the Alpha’s expression. “You’re not mad?”

“I’m not thrilled,” the Dom admits softly, his hand sliding from the Sub’s neck to rub between his shoulder blades. “You and Isaac took a few unnecessary risks last night, and on top of that you lied about where you were headed. I promised you I wouldn’t put restrictions on the places you went and the things you did in your own time, but we agreed you’d avoid putting yourself in potentially dangerous situations. Both you and Isaac knew that nightclub had a reputation; going in there without an anchor wasn’t a smart idea.”

Stiles nods and ducks his head again, cheeks heating up as his insides begin to squirm with renewed vigour. And not just from shame and guilt, either - he’s fucking annoyed with himself for being so stupid; spying on Eclipse employees had seemed like such a cunning plan last night, but looking back on it, it’s a miracle nothing bad had happened to them. It all could’ve gone horribly wrong if they’d both been a little less sober and a little more inquisitive, or the bouncers on duty had actually turned out to be Sub-dropping dickheads.

“Remember the rules we talked about the other week?” Derek asks quietly. When Stiles hesitantly
nods, he persists, “Do you know which ones you broke last night?”

The Sub shuffles his feet, guilt twisting sharper in his chest. “Lying by omission,” he mumbles. “Um…the one about avoiding dangerous situations. And the one about texting you, although I guess that kinda goes with the one about lying, so… basically all of them?” He takes a deep breath and lets his forehead fall against Derek’s collarbone. “I’m really sorry, Sir.”

“I know.” The Dom’s hand comes up again to stroke the back of his head, Derek’s cheek pressed against his hair as he exhales a quiet sigh. “You don’t do anything by halves, do you?”

“Nope,” Stiles concurs despondently. “I’m a fucking train wreck.”

“Hey.” Derek eases him back a few inches (it takes a moment, because Stiles is quite happy where he is, thank you), gently pinching his chin to keep him from avoiding the Dom’s gaze. “So you made a few mistakes last night. It happens. It wasn’t the first time, and I’m pretty sure it won’t be the last. And it doesn’t change anything between us; I still love you. And I forgive you.”

No. No. Don’t cry, don’t you dare cry, you oversensitive bastard…

Ugh. Stupid fucked-up Submissive emotions.

“It’s okay,” the Dom murmurs, as Stiles tries valiantly to blink away the stinging heat forming in his eyes and swallow past the solid lump in his throat. Derek leans in to brush their lips together, the kiss chaste but full of tender affection, before guiding the Sub’s head back down against his shoulder, arms tightening around him. “Shhh, it’s okay.”

Stiles takes a moment to ground himself in the Alpha’s touch, breathing deeply and evenly. He feels frustratingly fragile, like a stray comment might just shatter the tenuous hold he has on his composure. He’s so goddamn relieved that Derek’s not angry or disappointed, but there’s a teeny-tiny part of him that’s also confused as fuck as to why, because he’s got all of these bad-sad-mad feelings bubbling away beneath the surface and he doesn’t know what the hell to do with them in the face of his Dom’s easy acceptance. Like, doesn’t the Alpha get just how badly Stiles messed up? He broke Derek’s rules. Like, all three of them. At the same time.

“Why the hell are you so calm about all of this?” he finally blurts, his voice slightly wobbly, the words muffled by the fabric of the Alpha’s shirt.

Derek sniffs a quiet grin and gives him another comforting squeeze. “I was plenty mad when I got here last night, believe me. I even thought about waking the two of you up to lecture you properly, but thankfully Scott talked me down from that idea. Besides, I knew he’d disciplined you both already.”

Stiles winces, even though he can’t feel any lingering soreness from last night’s trip over Scott’s knee. “My ass appreciates your restraint, Sir.”

The Alpha snorts and pulls away to smile at him, eyes crinkling at the corners as he cups Stiles’ cheek. The Sub leans into the contact like he’s been starved of it, eyes half-closing as his heart constricts, the uneasy churning of his stomach settling at his Dom’s touch despite the hollow sort of ache that continues to pulse beneath his breastbone. Derek studies him for a long moment with that quiet, assessing gaze of his, before sighing again and leaning in to brush a quick kiss between his eyebrows.

“I’m afraid it won’t be feeling quite so appreciative it in a moment,” the Dom warns, not without sympathy. “You and I still need to have a little talk about what happens when you deliberately
disobey the rules.”

Stiles whines, a wordless complaint, but a part of him is weirdly grateful that Derek isn’t just going to dismiss the whole issue. He still feels like shit, and he knows the guilt isn’t going to go away on its own. He’ll never admit to himself that he needs to be disciplined, and he’s always going to hate being spanked, but he knows he’d be feeling a whole lot crappier if his Dom had just decided to let him off the hook.

Derek doesn’t prolong the inevitable any more than necessary. The verbal part of their ‘talk’ apparently done for the moment, he wastes little time in steering Stiles out into the living room, taking a seat in the middle of the large couch and guiding the Sub facedown across his knees. It all happens so quickly and so smoothly that Stiles doesn’t manage more than a startled little ‘meep’ before he’s up close and personal with the fabric of the couch.

“You don’t lie to me,” Derek reminds him calmly but firmly, adjusting Stiles’ position to secure him comfortably (if such an adverb can ever truly be attributed to this particular position), before tugging his boxers down past the curve of his buttocks. “You don’t keep things from me when it concerns your safety. And you don’t walk headlong into danger without so much as a backup plan. Do you understand me?”

Stiles nods, his eyes already brimming with unshed tears from the scolding and the all-too-familiar position. “Yes, Sir.”

Derek’s left arm closes around the small of his back, warm fingers curling over his hip to keep him anchored in close as the Dom taps his right hand against his exposed cheeks warningly. Then the hand is gone, and that’s so much worse. Stiles tenses, clinging bracingly to the Pac-Man cushion in his grasp, but nothing ever quite prepares him for that first opening swat. It’s like his body conveniently forgets what it feels like to be spanked, even though it’s been less than twelve hours since he last found himself over a Dom’s knee. Although in fairness, Scott’s method bears no resemblance whatsoever to Derek’s, so it’s little wonder those first few smacks come as an unpleasant surprise.

It’s a far from the worst spanking he’s ever experienced; he can recall three separate occasions just off the top of his head that would rank higher, the underage-drinking-and-minor-forgery incident from a few years back being chief among them. His Dad had been understandably peeved about him breaking no less than six rules (two of them being actual laws, at that), and had set about sobering him up the old-fashioned way the minute they got home. That particular spanking had been memorable, to say the least.

This one? Not so much. Well, it’s awful, horrible, terrible in the way that all spankings are, and he’s definitely over Derek’s lap for a good while longer than he had been the first time around, but the leaden weight in his stomach seems to grow lighter and lighter with every passing second, the churning ball of guilt inside him gradually fizzling smaller and smaller before exploding into a torrent of sorry, sorry, sorry, pleasejusthugme…

And just like that it’s over, and Derek’s pulling him up into a firm embrace so that Stiles can cry the rest of his apologies into the Dom’s shoulder. His backside is burning something fierce, and Derek’s muscular thighs don’t exactly make for comfortable sitting, but there’s no way he’s shifting out of the Alpha’s lap any time soon. He’s earned himself some goddamn cuddle time.

“M’sorry,” he manages thickly, clinging to the Dom with a death grip that would’ve half-strangled a human.

“Shhh, I know. You were so good for me, Stiles,” Derek praises, rubbing a hand slowly between his
shoulder blades as the Sub’s breath hitches on shuddery little sobs. “You took that so well.”

Stiles figures that the bar for endurance must be set pretty low if ‘crying before the spanking even starts and bawling the rest of the way through’ can be classed as ‘taking it well’, but he’s not about to argue. It’s nice to be praised, and the words set a warm, pleased feeling pulsing in his chest. He snuggles closer and allows himself to be comforted as he listens to Derek murmur soothing nonsense, his hitching breaths slowing.

Eventually the Dom eases him back an inch or so to cup his cheek, brushing away the lingering tear-trails with his thumb. “Feeling better?”

Stiles knows he’s referring to the lack of inner turmoil rather than the uncomfortable sting in his rear-end, but he still feels that his answering pout is entirely justifiable.

“No,” he sulks, but without any real heat. “That hurt.”

The Dom’s eyes crinkle at the corners again, even as his other hand slides down Stiles’ arm to curl around his bare wrist, which tingles for a moment before the ache in his backside abruptly dissipates, leaving only heat in its wake, like Derek’s thighs are a sun-warmed bench beneath him. It feels plain weird. But it’s a hundred times better than the burning sting that had pulsed there before, so he shoots Derek a grateful smile, lifting a hand to scrub the remaining dampness from his eyes.

“Better,” he agrees, and leans in to peck a quick kiss against the corner of Derek’s mouth. “Thank you.”

The Alpha’s smile softens into something fonder, and his hand slides around from Stiles’ cheek to cup the back of his neck as he slots their mouths together for a deeper kiss. It isn’t heated or passionate in the least, but steady and confident, a wordless reassurance, and Stiles melts into it gladly. Nothing’s changed. Everything’s okay. They’re okay.

Fuck yeah.

Of course, his stomach chooses that moment to voice a complaint about the distinct lack of nourishment. Stiles feels Derek smile into the kiss, and he breathes an answering huff of laughter against the Dom’s lips before pulling away to look at the Alpha expectantly.

“Pancakes?”

Derek’s grin is indulgent as he bumps his nose against the Sub’s cheek, before gently nudging Stiles up from his lap. “I guess I could manage pancakes.”

“Your enthusiasm is overwhelming,” Stiles notes, trailing after the Dom as he heads towards the kitchen. He plasters himself to Derek’s back when the Alpha begins heating up the griddle, unwilling to maintain any semblance of personal space between them. “I want chocolate chip pancakes.”

“Oh you do, do you?” Derek asks, shooting an amused look over his shoulder.

The Sub bats his eyelashes at him. “Please?”

Derek huffs another quiet laugh. “Well, unfortunately this isn’t my kitchen, so your options are probably limited. I don’t think Scott even knows how to make-”

Stiles wordlessly opens up one of the overhead cupboards and retrieves a gigantic bag of chocolate chips. “Scotty doesn’t,” he agrees lightly. “Fortunately for me, I use his kitchen way more than he does.”
Derek smiles, then tilts his head a little to the side and snorts derisively. “The ability to reheat leftovers doesn’t make you a chef.”

Bristling, because nobody (smoking-hot Dominant or otherwise) insults his culinary skills and gets away with it, Stiles opens his mouth to shoot back a particularly scathing retort when the thought occurs to him that Derek might actually have been talking to someone else. Lo and behold, barely a moment later, he hears Scott’s voice growing more audible as he approaches.

“-right ahead and insult a wolf, why don’t you?” the Dom complains, feigning affront as he appears in the doorway to the kitchen, arms crossed over his chest. “And in his own den.” But then his faux-disgruntlement slips as he watches Derek tumble an obscene quantity of chocolate chips into the cream-coloured batter. “You’re actually making pancakes?”

“No,” Derek corrects without missing a beat. “I’m taking a bath.”

Stiles chokes on the handful of chocolate he’s just stuffed into his mouth, and Scott steps closer to whack him on the back obligingly.

“Unnecessary,” Stiles croaks once he’s recovered, wincing. “But thank you.”

“Welcome.” Scott wraps his arms around the Sub to hug him from behind, resting his chin over Stiles’ shoulder. “I was gonna make you pizza for breakfast, just FYI. But someone vetoed that idea.”

Derek rolls his eyes heavenwards, but his lips are twitching. “Pizza isn’t a breakfast food, Scott. We have this conversation every month.”

“Says the guy who lives off steak and pasta,” Scott mutters.

“You know, Stiles,” the older Dom muses pointedly as he drops a few dollops of batter onto the griddle. “I’m not so sure there’s enough here for four people. Maybe we should leave Scott to his pizza bagels.”

“I love steak and pasta,” Scott amends keenly, flashing Derek an earnest smile when his Alpha sends an amused glance over his shoulder. “Everyone knows that. I say that all the time, right, Stiles?”

“You’re both goofballs,” Stiles informs them flatly.

But he loves them. God, does he love them. And it warms something deep inside him to see their easy interaction; listening as they banter back and forth like siblings, bumping against each other accidentally-on-purpose as they retrieve plates and utensils, sharing snippets of inside jokes that Stiles can’t even begin to fathom.

“We were thinking of meeting up in the park later on, since the Pack’s not on shift.” Scott remarks as he sets down cutlery and glasses on the small dining table at the far end of the kitchen. “Liam aced his SDS college module, so we figured we’d throw a Frisbee celebration or something, maybe go out for dinner afterwards. Can I count you in?”

“I’ve got a board meeting at three,” Derek says apologetically, carrying a couple of plates over to the table, each laden with steaming-hot pancakes. “But I might be able to join you for dinner. Depends how late it runs. With the recent spike in emergency calls, I doubt it’ll be as straightforward as the last few.”

He sets down a plate in front of Stiles, clucking him under the chin with a smile before turning to Scott and nudging the younger Dom into a chair, passing him the second plate. The Alpha rests his
hand on the back of Scott’s neck for a moment.

“I’m gonna go talk to Isaac,” he says quietly, giving the Beta’s nape a gentle squeeze. “Alright?”

Scott nods easily enough, although his cheery enthusiasm has dampened somewhat. Stiles glances between the two of them, his mouth too full of pancake to voice his confusion, and by the time he’s swallowed Derek’s already heading for the door, switching on the Tardis-shaped radio as he passes it by and cranking up the volume to a level Stiles would call normal and most Werewolves would consider an annoyance.

Stiles turns his attention to Scott, his brow creasing fractionally. “Dude, he’s not gonna spank Isaac, is he?”

The Dom shrugs, cutting into his pancakes. “Depends how Isaac’s feeling,” he replies. “But yeah, probably.”

“But…” He feels his frown deepening. “But it’s not a work infraction. And I know Derek’s his Alpha, but shouldn’t you be the one taking care of things if Isaac still needs something?”

Scott swallows his mouthful and glances up, shaking his head. “Isaac decided to play private detective last night,” the Dom reminds him. “At an establishment that’s already under investigation by his employers.” He reaches for the carton of orange juice, heaving a quiet sigh. “Personal risks aside, he could’ve invalidated the results of an ongoing investigation just by being there under false pretences, and any evidence the two of you might have collected would’ve been discredited because it wasn’t conducted under official guidelines.”

Stiles blinks at him, flabbergasted. “Dude.”

Scott gives a wincing sort of smile. “Derek had a bit of a rant when he got here last night,” he explains. “Apparently some of it stuck.”

“Wait. Eclipse is already under investigation?” Stiles reiterates. And Scott’s answering nod, his brow creases further still. “But Isaac said all the follow-up reports all came back clear as a bell.”

“They did,” Scott agrees. “And if it had just been a couple of isolated cases, the service wouldn’t have had enough evidence to launch any further investigations. But five incidents in one month? That escalated things. Eclipse has been closely monitored for the past week or so; your Dad’s department’s involved and everything.”

“Shit.” Stiles braces an elbow on the edge of the table and drops his head into his hand as Hooked on a Feeling croons in the background. “Dad’s gonna kill me.”

“You and Isaac couldn’t have known about the undercover op.” Scott leans over to fill Stiles’ empty glass. “The higher-ups were keeping it hush-hush so that word didn’t get out. Which means this has to stay between the four of us, okay?” When Stiles merely continues to contemplate his rapidly approaching doom, the corner of his mouth kicks up. “Hey, c’mon, it wasn’t all bad. It was a dumb idea to go in there on your own, sure, but your heart was in the right place. Derek’s kinda proud of you both, actually. You know, rule-breaking aside.”

“Proud enough to let Isaac off the hook?”

Scott shrugs again. “Maybe. But you know Isaac as well as I do, man. Once he’s put himself on a hook, he doesn’t come down easy. Or he starts trying to hang himself off another hook instead.”

The Dom has a point. Once Isaac’s decided that he’s fucked something up, there’s little anyone can
do to dissuade him of the notion, stubborn-headed, self-deprecating idiot that he is.

Acknowledging resignedly that the other Sub has already sealed his own fate, Stiles shovels another forkful of pancake into his mouth to distract himself from his rear-end’s sympathetic tingling, and kicks Scott’s shin lightly beneath the table.

“So what’s all this I hear about a Frisbee celebration in the park?”

………………………………………….

“Stiles!”

Erica sprints over to knock the wind out of him with an enthusiastic tackle-hug, sending them both crashing down onto the springy grass. The Werewolf twists at the last second so that she catches the impact of their combined weight on her shoulder rather than bruising Stiles (said human is very grateful), but rolls back on top of him once they’ve landed, blond curls tickling his face as she braces her weight on one arm and beams down at him.

“Hey, sweetcheeks.”

Stiles returns her grin, winded but pleased by the enthusiastic greeting. “Hi. I guess this means you don’t mind me tagging along with the rest of your guys?”

“Who’s ‘tagging along’?” Erica leans down to nuzzle his cheek. “You’re Pack now, Stilinski. If you don’t come voluntarily, we drag you out.”

“Just to warn you, she’s being totally serious,” a new voice pipes up, and Stiles cranes his neck around to glance towards Mason. The Sub’s standing a few feet away, hands stuffed into the pockets of his beige slacks, grinning down at him knowingly. “She once climbed in through my bedroom window and threatened me with evisceration because I cancelled on her last minute. My apartment’s on the fourth floor.”

Erica waves her hand flippantly as she rolls to her feet. “There were balconies.”

Brett appears behind Mason, wrapping an arm around the Sub’s chest from behind, his brow creased. “Wait, she threatened you? How come I’m only just hearing about this?”

Mason pats the Dom’s arm consolingly. “We weren’t dating yet.”

“Dark times,” Boyd discloses with false gravity, reaching down to offer Stiles a hand up. He shakes
his head as he heaves the Sub to his feet. “Those two idiots pined after each other somethin’ awful when they first started working together. Seven weeks of pure hell.”

“Why do you think we were so keen to hook you up with Derek?” Erica quips from where she’s wrapped herself around Scott and Isaac. “The Pack couldn’t handle another two months of sexual tension.”

“The full moons alone almost killed us,” Isaac adds, scooting out of the blonde’s hold to saunter over to the couple in question, nuzzling Mason’s temple in greeting and grinning when Brett lifts a hand to mess up his curls.

“Oh c’mon,” the victimised Dom complains, and while his frown’s still in place, Stiles can see it’s just for show. “I wasn’t that bad.”

“You were,” Scott and Erica inform him in unison.

“The lovesick howling was pretty extreme, sugar,” Mason agrees, patting his Dom’s arm again where it rests across his chest.


Mason huffs a quiet laugh, extracting himself from Brett’s hold so that he can move close enough to deliver a friendly punch to Stiles’ shoulder. “Wanna know what happens when you expose a Pack of hypersensitive Werewolves to unresolved sexual tension for almost two months straight?”

“What?” Stiles asked, amused and intrigued in equal measure.

“They lock the culprits in a soundproofed Drop-cell for the night,” the Sub answers blithely. “Pretty effective strategy, actually. Although the Boss wasn’t so happy when he found us the next morning, since the whole place stank of se-”

“Babe,” Brett interrupts, pink splashed across his cheeks. “Let’s not bore Stiles with the details. He doesn’t want to know.”

“You’re kidding me, right?” Isaac scoffs. “You guys think I’m shameless, just wait until you’ve seen Stiles after a couple of beers.”

Erica’s grin turns predatory. “Now there’s an idea.”

“No,” both Stiles and Scott reply very, very quickly.

“I’m guessing Derek couldn’t come?” Boyd enquires, kindly sparing Stiles any further embarrassment.

Scott shakes his head. “Board meeting. He might catch up with us after, depends how long it takes. Figured we could always go out for pizza or something later.”

Mason’s hand shoots into the air. “I second that notion.”

“Ditto,” Brett agrees. “It’s two-for-one Tuesday down at Magiano’s; they do bottomless salad bowls and endless drink refills.”

Stiles grins. “Welp, that’s me sold.”

“Speaking of food,” Erica says, and suddenly she’s all up close and personal again. Stiles gives an undignified squawk of surprise when his head’s suddenly tipped back and there’s a nose tickling at
the hollow of his throat. “Have you been baking?”

“Cookies,” Stiles squeaks, and points towards where Scott’s dumped his rucksack nearby. “In the bag. Please don’t break me.”

She pulls back an inch or so, but only so she can smush his face between her hands and thunk their foreheads together hard enough to make him see stars. “You. Are. The. Best.”

“Erica, honey, Derek’s not gonna be happy if you rough up his boy,” Mason reminds her, amused. “We itty-bitty fragile humans bruise a whole lot easier than the rest of you.”

“Crap, sorry.” Erica pulls away to run her fingers lightly over his forehead, and the ache from the bump vanishes instantly. She surveys the area for a long moment before nodding and dropping her hand, apparently satisfied. “Okay, panic over; no harm done.”

Stiles’ brain finally manages to catch up with the rest of the conversation, and he shoots Mason a surprised look. “Wait, ‘we’? You’re not a Werewolf?”

Mason snorts. “Do I look like a Werewolf to you?”

Eyeing the unfairly-fit-and-perfectly-sculpted human up and down for a moment, Stiles gives him a flat look. “Um. Yeah, actually.”

The other Sub smirks, pleased, and settles his hands on his waist, the material of his red-and-black striped shirt stretching across the solid muscle that obviously lies beneath. “Nah. That’s just weight training, man. I had to do something while I was stuck at Stanford and everyone else was out hitting the clubs.”

Stiles arches a curious eyebrow. “Not into alcohol?”

The rest of the Pack make smothered sounds of amusement, and Mason’s grin widens. “I am now that it’s legal. But Stanford came down pretty hard on underage drinking, and I wasn’t about to risk my scholarship.”

“Einstein here got his degree a couple years ahead of schedule,” Isaac elaborates with a note of Packmate pride, slapping Mason on the back. “Let’s just say he’s not the kinda guy you want to challenge to a game of Trivial Pursuit. Or a drinking contest. Seriously, he’ll have you under the table in no time.”

Stiles nods, taking the advice to heart. He’s also secretly vowing to pick Mason’s brains for random Trivia facts at every available opportunity for the rest of his life.

“And on the subject of resident geniuses,” Erica remarks, raising her voice a little as she turns away from the group. “Look who finally decided to show up.”

“Ayy, there he is!” Boyd crows, as the rest of the Pack holler and whoop laughingly. “Man of the hour! Took your time, pretty boy.”

Liam, face flushed at being the centre of attention but grinning fit to burst, jogs across from the footpath to join them on the grass, letting himself get yanked into a loose headlock by the burly Dom, hands coming up to rest on Boyd’s muscular forearm as he laughs his way through a gentle noogie before managing to squirm himself free. His eyes light up when they land on Stiles.

“Hey! I didn’t know you were coming.”
Stiles returns the smile, although he winces internally when he sees the dark smudges under Liam’s eyes. The teenager’s got that classic just-pulled-an-all-nighter look, with just enough but-now-I’m-riding-an-adrenaline-high to make his grin slightly crazed. It’s a picture he’s seen in the mirror many a time.

“Frisbee and pizza?” he scoffs. “Like I was going to say no to that.”

“We’re getting pizza?” Liam queries, his excitement building, almost vibrating under Scott’s arm as the Dom pulls him into a sideways hug.

“Your heart’s going crazy,” Scott remarks, brow creasing a little as he glances down at the younger Beta’s chest. “Did you run all the way here?”

“Or more accurately, how much coffee did you chug this morning?” Brett interjects knowingly, with a playful jab to Liam’s midriff that makes the Wolf double over with a soft ‘oomph’.

Liam shakes his head quickly as he straightens, his 80-watt grin still in place. “I didn’t have any coffee. But the store down the road was doing a deal on energy drinks, so I bought a few.”

Stiles winces again. He’s intimately familiar with the ‘I’ll just buy a few energy drinks to keep myself awake’ routine. It’s a slippery slope towards near-madness and a twenty-four hour Assassin’s Creed marathon.

“A few what, exactly?” he asks carefully.

Liam’s gaze snaps towards him again, his grin growing impossibly wider, and if Scott’s arm hadn’t been looped securely around him from behind, the kid might’ve started bouncing on the spot.

“Redlines.”

“Aw hell,” Boyd intones, as Stiles stares at the energetic Beta in growing horror.

“What?” Liam asks, gaze snapping back and forth between the two of them so rapidly that it gives Stiles a sympathy headache.

“Dude. Redlines are the caffeine equivalent to, like, five cups of coffee,” he informs the younger Sub. “Didn’t you read the bottle? You’re only supposed to drink half of one.”

“Oh, I had three. Maybe four?” Liam gets a pinched look around his eyes, a flicker of worry passing across his features, but a moment later he’s grinning again and bouncing on the balls of his feet. “I feel totally awesome, though.”

Mason snorts derisively. “I bet you do.”

“Werewolves metabolise stimulants faster than most people,” Scott points out helpfully, and lifts a hand to mess up Liam’s hair, his smile fond. “You’ll burn it off soon enough, bro.”

“Yeah, and then we’ll be scraping you off the floor when you crash,” Stiles adds grimly. Both Scott and Liam send him disappointed looks, apparently mistaking common sense for pessimism, and he rolls his eyes with a sigh. “But hey, who am I? Just the resident caffeine expert.”

“C’mon, Stiles, don’t worry about me. I feel fine,” Liam placates. Then his grin stretches even wider (dear god, it’s going to split his face in two) and he ducks out from Scott’s hold. “Bagsy being on Erica’s team!”
The Sub bounds forwards to bump into him playfully on his way to the area of grass beneath the large oak tree where they’ve dumped their bags, although with the Beta’s added enthusiasm it feels like Stiles just got hit by a freight train. Brett steadies him before the momentum can take them both to the floor.

“Shit! I’m sorry!” Liam blurts, and looks so genuinely horrified at his control-slip that Stiles finds himself reaching out to squeeze the side of his neck reassuringly, a somewhat instinctive move after years of living with Isaac and Scott as Packmates.

“It’s fine,” he promises. “Just…no more caffeine for you, okay?”

Liam nods sincerely and rapidly – so rapidly, in fact, that Stiles’ neck gets a sympathetic ache too – and then he’s off again, bounding away towards where Erica and Isaac have retrieved the Frisbee from one of the backpacks and are throwing it back and forth between them. Liam takes a running leap and catches it neatly in mid-air about ten feet off the ground, tucking and rolling as he lands to absorb the impact. Scott whoops loudly as sprints across the grass to join them.

“Stiles, you’re with me and Isaac! You too, Brett!” he hollers back over his shoulder, and promptly slams into Liam, tackling him down onto the grass as Erica watches and laughs.

Stiles stares after them for a moment, blinking, eyes wide. “Uh. I don’t remember Frisbee being a full-contact sport.”

Brett chuckles, clapping him on the shoulder roughly. “We play by the Hale Pack rules,” the Dom informs him. “You can blame Derek for the bruises later.”

Flinching as Scott gets flattened by Boyd in a brutal sideswipe, Stiles nods slowly. “Oh, I will. Believe me.”

The Dom gives his shoulder another pat as he steers them closer to the group. “Word of advice?” He waits until he’s got Stiles’ full attention before flashing him a smile that’s all teeth. “Don’t get between Erica and the Frisbee. It’s not worth the blood loss. Competitive is an understatement when it comes to her.”

“I heard that!” the blonde calls, hands on her hips. “Just because I broke Mason’s fingers that one time.”

“Yeah, let’s not have a repeat of that, please,” the aforementioned Sub requests, catching the Frisbee neatly when it’s tossed to him and passing it to Liam just as quickly. “Yo, Stiles! If you want to avoid permanent damage, you gotta get rid of the damn thing before they have time to tackle you.”

“Gotcha,” Stiles calls back, and ducks automatically when Scott tosses the Frisbee at his head.

“Or you could do that,” Mason acknowledges, amused.

“Dude!” Scott gripes, flinging a hand towards where Erica has just performed an impressive forward-dive to catch the plastic disc. “You totally had that!”

“Yeah, in my face,” Stiles agrees sarcastically, even as he unzips his jacket and tosses it towards the pile of belongings near the tree “Aim better next time.”

“Ooooh,” Isaac crows, pointing towards his Dom with a shit-eating grin on his face. It doesn’t last long, though, because he intercepts Erica’s throw a moment later and gets slammed into the dirt by Liam for his pains.
The Hale Pack version of Frisbee certainly turns out to be unique. It’s frantic and brutal and exhausting, and just about the most fun Stiles has had in a long while.

There isn’t a part of him that doesn’t feel tender by the time they stop for a quick breather. He collapses down onto the grass under the tree beside Mason, chest heaving as he pants for breath, sweat plastering his fringe to his forehead. The other Sub grins at him, shirtless now and just as sweaty, and hands over an ice-cold soda from the zip-up cooler bag that someone apparently had the forethought to bring along. Stiles gulps half of it down in one go, then presses the can against his burning cheek, slumping back against Isaac’s shoulder.

“Dude,” he pants, closing his eyes. “I’m dying here. You could at least pretend to be out of breath, you know; go easy on my deflating ego.”

Isaac, looking unfairly unruffled (except for a smudge of dirt on his cheek), winds an arm around his waist, smiling. “Cheer up; our team’s winning.”

Stiles cracks an eyelid open. “Wait. Are you telling me there’s a point system involved somewhere?”

Mason waves a hand dismissively. “A long and complicated one, yeah. But mostly we just play for the kicks.”

“Oh, I’ve been kicked,” Stiles groans. “I’ve definitely been kicked.” He flaps a hand towards Scott, who’s busy unloading the snacks from their rucksacks. “Dude, I need sugar. Where’d you put the cookies?”

Liam drops down from pull-ups he’d been doing on one of the tree’s low-hanging branches, grinning eagerly.

“Cookies?”

“You’re getting one, mister,” Stiles tells him, pointing a finger in his direction. “You don’t need a sugar-crash on top of what’s inevitably going to happen when you’ve finally burned through all that caffeine.”

The teenager pouts. Actually pouts. And he’s even better at it than Isaac. Stiles crumbles pitifully fast.

“Alright, fine,” he sighs. “But don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

Isaac sniggers behind him, his arm tightening around Stiles’ midriff. “Dude. You’re so much like Derek, it’s unreal.”

“Don’t,” Stiles groans, and moves the can from his cheek to press it against the ache in his arm instead. “Don’t even say his name right now. This is all his fault. He’d better to show up for pizza, ‘cause I’m gonna say it right to his face.”
He doesn’t, of course. By the time they decide to call it a day and head to the pizza parlour, Stiles is feeling relatively ache-free, thanks to the Pack’s frequent tactile instincts.

He’s used to having Isaac’s arm around his waist in a casual sideways cuddle, or Scott’s hand squeezing the back of his neck or playing with his hair, but suddenly he’s been gifted another four Packmates, all of whom seem comfortable and at-ease with winding themselves around him and brushing up against at every opportunity, the initial tentativeness long gone now that they know he doesn’t mind the lack of personal space.

“How you holding up, Sweetcheeks?” Erica asks, dropping back from Boyd’s side to walk with him and Isaac, looping her arm through his. “Still got all ten fingers?”

He holds up his hands and wiggles them demonstratively. “Yup. So far, so good.”

She flashes him a grin. “Just don’t get between Brett and the last slice of pepperoni and hopefully things’ll stay that way.”

Mason laughs, ducking away from his Dom when Brett aims a retaliating swipe at him, only to get caught by Boyd, who flips him under one arm easily and rubs his knuckles against the younger man’s scalp as the Sub protests noisily.

Stiles grins as he watches them, acknowledging inwardly how well the Pack would get on with his other friends, and wondering just how soon he can introduce them to each other. Danny and Jackson would love the full-contact Ultimate Frisbee. And Lydia and Allison would welcome Erica into their womanly fold of fashion and badassary without hesitation. Admittedly, the three of them would probably find a way to overthrow the modern government system and solve third world poverty if they were ever left in a room together, but they’d look pretty damn good doing it, so fair’s fair.

“Looks like Derek’s here already,” Scott remarks, his arm resting across Liam’s shoulders as they cross the street towards the restaurant.

Stiles can’t see any sign of the Alpha or the Camaro, so he assumes that Scott’s Werewolf senses must be tingling. The rest of the Pack certainly don’t seem to question his assessment, piling into the pizza parlour behind him. They find Derek towards the back of the restaurant, where two long table have been pushed together to make room for the sheer size of their party, jugs of water and platters of garlic bread laid out along the middle, interspersed with little ceramic bowls filled with black and green olives.

The Alpha rises when they approach, greeting his Pack with brief touches and nuzzles that the Betas lean into with bright smiles before laying claim to certain seats at the table (Stiles is beginning to suspect that ‘pizza night’ might be a regular thing with the Pack, judging by the lack of discussion about who sits where). Derek’s smile broadens as he tugs Stiles into a quick kiss, his hands lingering on the Sub’s waist.

“Hey,” Stiles murmurs, skimming his fingers over the Triskele logo on Derek’s uniform shirt.
“Hey yourself.” The Alpha studies him quietly, a smile playing around his mouth, his eyes dancing. “Fun afternoon?”

“Your Betas beat me within an inch of my life,” Stiles informs him cheerfully. “And I’ve been led to believe it’s entirely your fault.”

Derek laughs, shooting his Pack an amused look. “Tackle-Frisbee?”

“It seemed appropriate,” Isaac pipes up, half a breadstick sticking out of his mouth. “We had to initiate him somehow.”

“And look,” Brett leans over from his seat beside Mason and tugs Stiles’ hand up by the wrist. “Erica managed not to break the human this time.”

The she-wolf growls and throws an olive at him. “That was one time, jackass.”

“Hey. No throwing food in public,” Derek chides, still amused, and nudges Stiles towards the padded benches on the opposite side of the table.

“Does that mean we have your expressed permission to throw food in private?” Mason asks.

Isaac feigns a noise of disgust. “Keep your kinks to yourself, dude.”

Dinner is as loud and crazy and exhausting as the Frisbee tournament had been, and Stiles loves every minute of it. He eats until he’s fit to burst (Brett hadn’t been kidding about the bottomless salad bowl thing), and then forces down a dessert as well because the options all sound too delicious to ignore.

Liam, whose energy had begun to fizzle out as the afternoon wore on, is worryingly subdued and distant at the start of the meal, and by the time Derek calls for the cheque, the Sub’s slumped against him looking distinctly hung-over. Stiles feels for him. He’s had caffeine crashes before – some really, really bad ones that left him shaking and puking and dealing with a really shitty migraine – and he imagines it must be a pretty horrible experience for the Werewolf, who’s clearly never had a hangover of any sort in his life.

Although in all fairness, the Sub’s pretty lucky; if he’d been human, four Redlines would’ve been enough to land him in hospital. Overdosing on caffeine and the other crap they pack into those drinks is no laughing matter – Stiles had googled the hell out of that shit before he’d even touched energy drinks, and he knows exactly how many Redbulls he can handle before the hypertension causes permanent physical damage. Important details to keep in mind whenever he has writing deadlines to meet.

It’s already starting to get dark by the time they finally leave the restaurant, congregating outside the entrance to say goodbye.

“Nice seeing you again, man,” Mason says when it’s his turn, pulling him in for another one-armed hug and slapping him on the back. “Look after the Boss for us, alright?”

“He will,” Derek assures him with a quiet smile, squeezing the back of Mason’s neck as he comes up behind the analyst. “I’ll see you tomorrow, kid.”

Mason sketches a sloppy salute, flashes Stiles a grin and a wink, and then jogs away to dive into the cab after Boyd and Erica. Brett, who’s holding the door open for him, raises his hand in a final parting wave before ducking inside after the Sub.
“Hey,” Scott pops up at Stiles’ elbow, looping an arm around the Sub’s waist in a sideways hug. “We’re gonna run back to my mom’s place and say hi before we head home. Call me tomorrow?”

“Hello, Tomorrow.”

Isaac cracks up behind him, a second before his arms close around Stiles in a backwards hug. “Say hi to Allison for us,” the Sub requests. “Oh! And let us know how your dad’s date went.”

“I can already answer that one,” Stiles replies, rolling his eyes as he mimics his father: “It wasn’t a date, Stiles. Deputy Parrish and I just stared at each other longingly for three hours straight and completely failed to talk about our feelings like actual grownups.”


“Yeah, I guess you’re right,” Stiles admits with a sigh, before bonking his forehead lightly against Scott’s temple. “Night, dude.”

“So, kiddo,” Derek says with a strained grunt as he helps Liam stumble out of the Camaro and swings the teenager up into his arms. “What lesson did we learn today?”

Liam doesn’t protest the bridal-style carry, just drops his head down on Derek’s shoulder and whines.

“Redlines suck?”

“How about ‘don’t overdose on metabolic stimulants to compensate for sleep deprivation’?” Stiles suggests blithely, shutting the car door behind them and locking it with Derek’s keys.

The teenager whines again and Derek sighs, his expression caught somewhere between concern and exasperation as he waits for Stiles to use the fob on his keychain to let them into the apartment building. He heads for the elevator rather than taking the stairs, adjusting his hold on Liam while they wait for the car to ascend to their floor.

“You’ve only got yourself to blame,” the Alpha chides, but his tone is too soft for it to be genuinely
scolding. “Four energy drinks, Liam. I don’t know exactly how much caffeine that amounts to—”

“Just over one-point-four grams,” Stiles informs him. “That’s triple your recommended daily allowance. All in one go.” When Derek shoots him a questioning glance, he shrugs. “I googled it while we were waiting for dessert.”

“Just kill me,” Liam groans, the words muffled into Derek’s shoulder. “Kill me now.”

“You’ll be fine, bub,” Derek reassures calmly, but glances sideways at Stiles for confirmation as they step out of the elevator.

“Well, technically you’re gonna feel like crap for a few hours,” Stiles corrects sympathetically, fumbling in his backpack for his keys. “But since you’re a Werewolf, it’s not gonna be half as bad as it could’ve been. Best thing to do is sleep it off if your brain lets you.”

He unlocks the front door and turns on the hallway lights, only to switch them off again a moment later when Liam whimpers pitifully. Derek sighs again, nudging the door closed with his foot.

“C’mon,” he murmurs. “Let’s get you into bed.”

“Is this what having a hangover feels like?” the Sub groans as Derek moves towards the closed door to one of the spare bedrooms, the one that technically belongs to Liam given the amount of stuff the teenager leaves there between visits. “Because if it is, I’m never touching an Infusion again.”

Derek’s eyebrows ascend, although the look he shoots Stiles is amused.

“Again?”

There’s a pause, then Liam whines pitifully. “That’s not fair, Der. M’compromised. Stop asking me stuff.”

In the end, it doesn’t take much to put the kid to sleep. He’s sort of semi-conscious by the time Derek’s finished tugging him out of his shirt and slacks, the only evidence of his lingering awareness being the abject look of misery on his face that Stiles knows all too well from his own caffeine-crashes.

“I’ll call your folks,” Derek murmurs, almost too softly for Stiles to here from the doorway, tugging the duvet up over his Beta and smoothing the teenager’s fringe back. “Let them know you’re sleeping here tonight. You’ve still got a couple of uniforms in the closet if you feel up for work in the morning.”

Liam groans again, curling into a tighter ball. “Noooo.”

Derek sniffs a grin, leaning down to press their foreheads together briefly. “Get some sleep. Shout if you need me, alright?”

The Sub’s answer is lost to muttering, and after a moment Derek rises, sliding the teenager’s phone to the edge of the bedside table for ease of access before heading for the door.

“That felt weirdly like putting our kid to bed,” Stiles comments in a whisper once they’re safely inside the master bedroom on the opposite end of the apartment.

Derek snorts, sitting on the edge of the bed and pulling Stiles closer by the belt-loops in his jeans until he’s standing between the Dom’s spread legs. Stiles settles his hands in the Alpha’s hair, playing idly with the strands as he smiles down at him.
“Hi.”

The Dom grins back. “Hi.”

Pushing up the front of Stiles’ shirt, Derek dips his head down to mouth kisses across his abdomen, warm lips teasing at the sensitive skin along his ribs. Stiles shifts, both because he’s incredibly ticklish and Derek’s not so smoothly-shaven at this time of night, and because he’s aware that they’re now sharing the apartment with a kid who has super-hearing.

“He’s asleep,” Derek murmurs from somewhere near his navel, dragging his nose over the skin lightly. “He won’t hear us.”

“Ohmygod.” Stiles covers his face with his hand. “We’re totally about to have silent parent sex, aren’t we?”

Derek glances up at him, amusement shining in his eyes. “Silent parent sex?”

Stile frowns at him, affronted. “Shut up, it’s totally a thing.”

The Dom laughs quietly, shoulders shaking and face pressed against Stiles’ abdomen, and the Sub tugs on his hair in retribution, only to give a laughing yelp of surprise when Derek uses his grip on Stiles’ hips to flip him over and onto the bed. The Alpha braces himself up on one arm above the Sub, grinning.

“Stiles,” he says, amused. “Baby, you’re a lot of things but ‘silent’ isn’t one of them.”

The Sub’s eyes narrow challengingly. “Oh, it is on.” He kicks off his shoes and wriggles further up the bed, grass-stained shirt and all, to starfish across the mattress invitingly. “Right. Do you worst, Sir.”

Derek’s grin turns predatory, his eyes bleeding red as he advances on hands and knees to crowd in close, pinning Stiles’ wrists to the mattress effortlessly and nudging his chin up with his nose to suck a large hicky into the sensitive skin of his throat, right above his collar.

Stiles manages to stay silent for approximately seven and half minutes (his personal best, without a doubt), but the sex is so fucking good, he doesn’t feel the least bit disappointed.

According to Derek, Liam sleeps through the whole thing anyway.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed the chapter! Some Packmate interaction was long overdue, and Liam needed some cuddle-time with his adopted Papa-Dom. Have I mentioned before how much I love Liam? Because I do.
We'll see more Allison in the next chapter! Also things will get a little darker in terms of politics and the intricacies of the DRA and how Stiles and his friends are horribly entangled in that particular web. Plus more Papa Stilinski! Because you all seem to be as keen as I am to get him hitched with a certain cute-faced deputy.

As always, I welcome any critiques, questions or requests - leave me a note below!
“You’re gonna be late,” Stiles cautions, but does little else to dissuade his Dom’s ministrations, tipping his head back as the Alpha mouths along the hollow of his throat.

Derek hums in acknowledgement, one hand burying itself in Stiles’ damp hair as he trails feather-light kisses along the Sub’s jawline, his other arm sliding around the boy’s midriff to press their hips closer together.

“I’ve got five minutes,” the Wolf dismisses, dragging his nose along the sensitive patch of skin beneath Stiles’ ear.

“You should probably be using to get ready,” Stiles suggests, amused, even as he settles his hands on the Dom’s towel-clad waist. “Unless you plan on giving your colleagues an eyeful?”

Derek finally slots their mouths together in a fierce kiss, passionate and lingering, with just enough tongue to leave Stiles’ head spinning, liquid heat tingling all the way down his spine.

The Alpha breaks away after a moment to lean their foreheads together, heaving a quiet sigh. “You’re frustratingly sensible sometimes.”

Stiles grins. “I know. You love me anyway.”

“True,” Derek agrees. The Alpha slides his hand down to cup the back of Stiles’ neck, his palm a burning warmth against the Sub’s bare skin. He bumps his nose against the younger man’s cheek and sighs again. “But you’re right, we should get dressed. Where’s your collar?”

It’s waiting on the bedside table as always, stored safely in the smooth mahogany box that Derek had given to him on their second date. It’s standard practice for a Sub to remove their collar at night to give their skin chance to breathe, even if it’s only to replace the leather Marker with a lightweight cotton alternative; some Submissives, once collared, hate to leave their neck bare for anything except showering. And although he probably wouldn’t feel comfortable going without his collar for a whole day – it’s not just a symbol of his Dynamic, after all, it’s a physical representation of the bond he shares with his Dom – Stiles isn’t really bothered about wearing one at night.

He smiles as Derek fastens the soft, woven leather around his throat, eyes slipping closed briefly as the Alpha presses a gentle kiss to his brow. Then he shoots a quick sideways glance towards the bedside alarm clock.

“Hate to say I told you so, but you’re already running late, hotshot.”

Derek follows his gaze and curses softly.

Perching on the edge of the bed, Stiles watches, amused, as the Dom hurriedly scrambles into his uniform, his movements lacking their usual grace and confidence as he hops on one foot, tugging a sock into place.

Stiles loves seeing this side of the Alpha. It gives testament to the level of trust between them that
Derek never tries to maintain his professional persona behind closed doors. Like Scott, who’s calm and collected and dependable as a WPDS officer but a total goofball when he’s not on duty, Derek’s a whole different person outside of work. Not that Stiles doesn’t adore Derek-the-manager, of course; there’s something incontrovertibly sexy about seeing his Dom in uniform, all big and strong and exuding the confidence and control of a seasoned Alpha. But it was Derek’s gentler side that he first fell in love with, and he’d rather burn every last one of those uniforms than lose out on daily dose of grumpy early morning cuddles.

He must be staring at his Dom with the sappiest expression ever, because when Derek catches his gaze, his lips turn up in a soft, amused smile.

“What?”

“Nothin’,” Stiles dismisses, but leans his cheek into Derek’s palm when the Dom reaches out to cup his face.

“Nothing?” Derek drags his thumb over the Sub’ bottom lip, eyes flashing red for a split second before returning to their usual hue. “Are you sure?”

Oh, that’s not fair. Derek knows perfectly well that Stiles possesses downright insatiable oral fixation, and that as far as he’s concerned there’s no better way to start off the day than with a nice, thorough blow-job. But since the Dom’s already running late and is therefore aware that Stiles doesn’t have the freedom to indulge himself in some quality cock-sucking time, teasing him like this is just plain mean. That sexy bastard.

Narrowing his eyes when Derek’s smile twitches wider into a knowing grin, Stiles opens his mouth enough to catch the Alpha’s thumb between his teeth and bite down. Derek gives a barking laugh and yanks his hand away, retreating a few paces to shake it out.

“You bit me!” he accuses, but he’s still laughing.

“I was under duress,” Stiles counters, although he’s fighting a grin. “Desperate times call for desperate measures, Sir.”

Derek lowers the undoubtedly fully-healed appendage to level the Sub with a calculating look. “I’ll give you desperate times,” he mutters, and advances upon Stiles with an air of determination.

“C’mere, you.”

Stiles gives a laughing yelp and scrambles backwards across the bed in an attempt to put more space between them.

“Nononono, I didn’t mean it!”

Derek leans across the bed and clamps a hand around the nearest flailing ankle, dragging the Sub back towards him. Stiles gives a very manly shriek and grabs one of the pillows in an attempt to fight off his attacker, succeeding only in messing up Derek’s hair before the weapon is firmly wrestled from his grip and he finds his wrists pinned above his head by a large, strong hand, a heavy weight settling on his hips as the Dom kneels astride him.

Derek smiles down at him pleasantly. “Any last words?”

Stiles, who’s been in this position often enough to know that resistance is futile, makes a last-ditch attempt at sensible dissuasion.

“You don’t have time for this, Sir,” he tries. “You’re gonna be late for work.”
The Dom clearly finds his argument invalid, because it does nothing to lessen, temper or in any way prevent the ensuing period of tickle-torture. Curse Talia Hale for giving Derek so many fucking siblings, because the bastard’s a pro at locating the most agonisingly ticklish spots along his ribcage, and Stiles is borderline hysterical in less than a minute.

By the time Derek decides justice has been served, the Sub is red-faced and worn out, wheezing desperate little pleas between irrepressible giggles, tears leaking from the corners of his eyes, his stomach muscles aching from laughing so much. He keeps his hands where they are even after the Alpha releases him, slumping against the mattress exhaustedly as he pants for breath.

Smiling, Derek leans down to nuzzle his burning cheeks and press kisses to his open, panting mouth. “Lesson learned?”

“Bastard,” Stiles grumbles, but kisses him back all the same. Then he shoves the Alpha away so that he can push himself upright. “Karma’ll get you back for that. Look, you’ve gone and creased your shirt.”

Derek shrugs, unapologetic. “Worth it.”

“And I bet you went and woke Liam up, too,” the Sub continues, determined to wipe the smug expression from Derek’s face.

The Dom pauses, listening for a moment, before shaking his head. “No, he’s still out.” At Stiles’ disbelieving look, he smiles indulgently. “Kid could sleep through the apocalypse if his Wolf felt safe enough. Back when he used to live with my folks, Cora and Nick had this game where they’d see how many M&Ms they could balance on his face before he woke up. I think the current record’s sitting somewhere around thirty-five.”

“Bullshit,” Stiles accuses.

Derek raises his hands. “Honest to God, he sleeps through everything.” He cards his fingers through his hair to neaten it somewhat. “I should probably give him a nudge, see if he feels up to working this morning.”

Stiles follows the Alpha out of the bedroom, but heads for the kitchen instead to whip up a quick breakfast-to-go (even though part of him doesn’t think that Derek deserves it after the whole tickle-torture incident). It’s nothing special, just a fruit smoothie and a bagel with ham and cream cheese and sliced tomato. He contemplates making one for Liam too, but decides to hang fire until he knows that Derek’s not going anywhere, he’ll probably appreciate a proper fry-up instead, being a meat-loving Werewolf and all.

He leaves the foodstuff out on the worktop just in case, and moves across the kitchen to fix himself a fresh pot of coffee, yawning into the back of his hand as he waits for it to brew.

“Did you make me breakfast?” Derek asks from the doorway, surprised and pleased. Stiles finds himself smiling at the tone.

“You do it for me often enough,” he points out, fetching a mug down from the overhead cupboard. “Figured it was time I returned the favour.”

Derek wraps his arms around the Sub from behind, kissing the shell of his ear. “You’re way too good for me.”

“I know,” Stiles acknowledges blithely, and laughs when the Dom nips his earlobe for his sass.
“Seriously, though, thank you,” Derek reiterates softly, cheek resting against the Sub’s hair as Stiles adds sugar to his coffee. “You’re amazing.”

The younger man preens internally, but manages to limit his outward response to a wide, goofy smile. “You can thank me tonight,” he promises. “With sex.” Then he blanches, remembering their current houseguest. “Liam’s not awake, is he?”

“No, he’s still out for the count.” Derek replies, amused, giving him another quick squeeze before moving across to retrieve his breakfast. “He looked so comfortable, I didn’t have the heart to wake him. And he’s had a rough week. Between the incident at the support centre and agonising over his college results, he hasn’t slept much these past few days. Let him snooze for a while longer. He can work the afternoon community patrol with Scott and Isaac; they’ll be at Kinsley Square until eleven.”

Stiles blows on his coffee to cool it, nursing the warm mug between his hands as he leans back against the countertop. “So you’re working at the Hub this morning?”

Derek shakes his head, taking a quick bite of his bagel before wrapping the rest back up. “I’m at the Centre all day. The Hub tends to be Laura’s territory. And I’m more than happy to leave all the multidisciplinary teamwork to her, even if she does spoil the Pack.”

Smirking, Stiles arches an eyebrow. “And you don’t?”

“Well, sure, but that’s different,” Derek dismisses. “They’re my Betas.” He crosses the kitchen again to run his fingers through Stiles’ still-damp hair, brushing a kiss against his temple. “What time are you meeting your friend for lunch?”

“Lunchtime,” Stiles answers smoothly. He grins when Derek tugs lightly on his hair and amends, “About twelve-thirty. I’ll text you if anything changes.”

Derek’s expression softens into a quiet smile. “Good boy.” He strokes the backs of his fingers down Stiles’ cheek. “Want me to pick you up after work?”

“Hell yeah,” the Sub replies. “Now go, okay? You’re already late.”

“Alright, alright.” Smiling, the Dom leans in to steal one last kiss. “Stay safe.”

…………………………………………………

It’s gone ten o’clock before Liam emerges from the guest bedroom, rubbing at his eyes, his hair pillow-mussed. Stiles glances up from his tablet to smile at the Beta when he pauses in the doorway.
to the living room.

“Hey, man,” he greets. “Sleep well?”

Liam nods, yawning into the back of his hand and blinking sleep-heavy eyes as he tilts his head slightly to one side. “How come Derek didn’t wake me for work?”

“Because he’s a total sap,” Stiles replies, amused. “And apparently you’re a heavy sleeper.” At the teenager’s confused blink, he elaborates, “Derek said you could work the afternoon community patrol with Scott and Isaac instead.”

“Oh. Awesome.”

The Beta raises both arms in a glorious stretch, rising up onto the balls of his feet as he groans, before stumbling over to the couch on fatigue-clumsy legs and dropping down next to Stiles. He scoots closer until he’s snuggled up against the other Sub, legs tucked up behind him and an arm tossed over Stiles’ chest, and heaves a sleepy sigh.

“Remind me never to drink caffeine again, okay?”

Lips twitching up, Stiles lifts a hand to ruffle the teenager’s chaotic bedhead. “Nothing wrong with caffeine, so long as you don’t go crazy with it. Stick to coffee, kid. Speaking from personal experience, energy drinks tend to fuck you up. Coffee is good. Coffee is our friend.”

Liam snorts against the Sub’s shoulder. “Dude. You’re so weird.” But a moment later he cuddles closer with a happy rumble. “M’gonna keep you.”

Grinning, Stiles squeezes the arm that’s still draped over his midriff. “Thanks, bud.”

“Welcome,” Liam mumbles, rubbing his cheek against the human’s shoulder in a brief, instinctual nuzzle before turning his attention to the tablet. “What are you reading?”

“An article about the latest DRA campaign,” Stiles says, angling the screen towards him so that he can see the webpage. “A friend of mine writes for the *Daily Beacon*, she’s been covering the Equality Reform debates this past week.”

“Lydia Martin?” Liam reads, leaning in a bit closer. “Hey wait, I know her.”

“You do?” Stiles asks, intrigued.

“Well, not personally,” the Beta amends. “But the Martins always used to help raise funds for my mom’s support centre back when it first started up; you know, before she got the government grant.”

That doesn’t come as much of a surprise. Lydia’s mom has always been incredibly supportive of her daughter’s life choices, including her decision to officially re-register as a Switch when she turned twenty-one, and Stiles knows that Lydia and Allison had relied heavily on the Switch Support centre when they were muddling their way through changing their registrations and arranging the necessary documents to become Bonded partners.

“She spoke at my high school too,” Liam continues. “In my senior year. They were doing these workshops on college courses, and she came to talk about journalism.”

“She did a workshop at Beacon Hills High?” Stiles asks, surprised.

Liam shakes his head. “No, at Woodside Academy.”
“But I thought you…” ‘got bitten by a rogue at BHH’, Stiles thinks but doesn’t say. He’s not sure if it’s still a touchy subject with the teenager. And besides, asking someone about how they got the Bite isn’t exactly something that’s socially acceptable unless the individual brings it up first. It’s just common courtesy. After all, it’s not like people go around asking Banshees about which multiple homicide they predicted first. That would be rude.

“I used to go to Beacon Hills High,” Liam explains, shifting against him. “Y’know, before the rogue attack. Then Derek and my parents took me out of school for a little while, and I went to live with the Hales until I learned how to control my shift and stuff. I tried going back to BHH after the summer, but…”

The teenager shrugs, fingers worrying at the seam of Stiles’ jacket pocket. “I dunno. People treated me different, I guess. Looked at me like I’d grown two heads, or even worse, like I was about to have a nervous breakdown right in front of them.”

Stiles gives a humourless huff of laughter. “Yeah, I know the feeling.” At Liam’s curious look, he takes a deep, steadying breath and elaborates, “Something happened to me around same age. One of the seniors at my school kinda got fixated on the idea of being my Dom and, uh, went on a psychotic killing spree when I turned him down.”

“Oh shit.” Liam’s eyes are wide, horror and shock intermingling as one. “The Matt Daehler Massacre victim? That was you?”

Inwardly flinching at the mention of the Dom’s name, Stiles nods, forcing himself not to tense up. “They kept my name out of the media reports because I was still a minor. I’d only been registered a month or so. A handful of kids at school knew, of course, but I had a couple of tech-savvy friends who periodically swept through all the Myspace and Facebook forums and deleted any posts that mentioned my name.”

Danny had been a godsend during those first few weeks after the incident, when the only thing people could gossip about was the bloodbath at the police station and the poor, traumatised Submissive minor who’d been there to witness it all. Danny had put his hacking skills to good use, working tirelessly to keep Stiles’ name from cropping up on social media websites, planting red herrings and troll links to conspiracy theorists to keep the gossip to an absolute minimum. It had almost come as a relief when that psycho water-witch had stolen the spotlight a month or two later by attempting to ritually sacrifice an entire class of elementary school kids in an effort to reincarnate her deceased Submissive. Not that he’d paid much attention to that particular manhunt at the time; between nightmares and panic attacks and increasing insomnia and dumbass sleeping pills that managed to make everything worse, he’d only just been keeping his head above water.

“You’re upset,” Liam remarks, crestfallen, watching his expression with worried eyes. The Beta winds his arm further around Stiles’ midriff to cuddle him properly, bumping his nose against the Sub’s jawline. “Shit, I’m sorry. It’s my fault, I shouldn’t have asked. What do you need? Do you want me to call Derek? Scott? Both?”

Smiling faintly, touched by the other’s growing concern, Stiles lifts his arm to return the hug. “Hey, don’t sweat it, I’m okay. Thanks, man.” He pats the teenager’s back and musters up a more cheerful tone of voice. “So, Woodside Academy. What was that like?”

“Old and stuffy and full of weird Werewolf traditions,” Liam answers honestly, pulling back enough to glance up at Stiles and wrinkle his nose in displeasure. “But the Betas were nice enough. And apparently Derek had been some kinda athletic superstar when he was there, so being driven to the gates in his new Camaro everyday was an easy way to get myself welcomed into the fold.”
Stiles feels his eyebrows shoot up. “Derek went to Woodside?”

Liam nods. “Mm. And he was captain of the basketball team until he graduated; the county team reps even offered him a chance to play professionally, but Derek said he wanted to follow in Johnny and Laura’s footsteps and work at the Centre instead, so he went to college.”

Pieces of the puzzle are finally starting to fall into place – this explains why Stiles can’t remember Derek from high school, even though everyone in his year had heard about Laura Hale’s crazy-good organisation skills (her name was often mentioned by teachers who were trying to give an example on how school events such as Prom and charity bake sales ought to be planned). And although she was on the swimming and volleyball teams for most of her high school life, Cora Hale’s sporting prowess was widely acknowledged by everyone at school, especially after she joined them on the lacrosse field as a sophomore and ran rings around them all – including all the other Weres.

“How come he didn’t go to BHH like the others?” Stiles probes, curious.

Liam shrugs. “He did, for a little while. But he transferred to Woodside when he was fifteen. I don’t know why; he used to get all glum and serious whenever we talked about it, so I stopped asking.” The Beta glances up to meet Stiles’ gaze, worrying his bottom lip between his teeth. “I probably shouldn’t have told you. You won’t bring it up around Derek, right? He’s really private about his past.”

“I won’t mention it,” Stiles promises, even though the insatiably-curious-detective part of his brain is just itching for answers. But everyone has secrets, himself included, and he knows better than to poke at still-healing wounds. Derek will tell him when he’s good and ready. Stiles can wait.

His thoughts are interrupted by a particularly loud grumble from Liam’s stomach. Stiles grins, clapping the kid on the back.

“Breakfast?”

Liam, predictably, doesn’t turn down the offer of free food, and ten minutes later Stiles passes him a plate heavily laden with pancakes, scrambled eggs, grilled bacon and sausage. The Beta leans up from his perch on the barstool to peck a grateful, chaste kiss against his cheek before tucking in with gusto. Smiling, Stiles settles down on the stool opposite him with his own (significantly smaller) plate, and smacks Liam’s hand gently when it drifts towards the nearby coffee pot.

“No.” He slides it further out of reach. “You’re staying caffeine-free for at least another twenty-four hours. Werewolf or not, your body needs time to recover.”

The teenager pouts momentarily, but the expression vanishes again the moment he shoves another slice of bacon in his mouth.

“Y’know, sense of impending doom aside, the caffeine crash wasn’t actually all that bad,” the Beta comments thickly, reaching for his glass of milk. “Like yeah, okay, I kinda felt like I was dying on the way home from the pizza parlour last night, but that was seriously the best sleep I’ve had in ages. I’d totally do it again.”

“Don’t let Derek hear you say that,” Stiles warns, but it’s all in good humour. He taps his fingers against the side of his coffee mug, head tilting curiously. “You an insomniac or something?”

“Not usually,” Liam answers, munching mulishly on a sausage. “Up until about a week ago, I never had any problem sleeping. Now I’m lucky if I can go for a couple of hours without waking up.”

“Which is it: stuff replaying over and over on in your head, or you just can’t get comfortable?” At
Liam’s surprised look, Stiles gives a self-deprecating smile and shrugs. “Let’s just say I’ve had my fair share of experience when it comes to sleepless nights.”

The Beta mirrors his half-smile, gaze dropping to his plate as he drags a forkful of pancake through a streak of syrup. “Derek said it was probably just because I was worried about the exams.”

“But?” Stiles prompts, because he can tell that one’s coming.

“But I knew from the start that I’d pass,” Liam admits quietly. “Not to blow my own trumpet, but I’m pretty good at facts and figures and I can write a mean essay. And besides, stressing about grades doesn’t give you the chills.”

Stiles blinks, confused. “Chills?”

Liam chews on his mouthful slowly and shrugs again. “I keep waking up because I’m cold, and I have to get out of bed to close the window. And then next time I wake up I’ll be too hot and everything’ll ache and I have to walk the cramps out of my legs and open the window again. And sometimes the air feels too thick, like I’ll drown in it – which is stupid, I know, but it really freaks me out.” He sighs, rubbing the back of his neck. “It’s been like that pretty much every night this past week.”

His brain buzzing a mile a minute with various complex diagnoses (fibromyalgia, malaria, CFS, cancer), Stiles feels his brow crease in concern. Most of the illnesses that immediately spring to mind aren’t even plausible, given that Liam’s a Werewolf, but there are still enough Were-specific diseases out there that the Beta’s symptoms send up an immediate warning flag. Weres don’t get sick, not like humans or Druids or Banshees do. If a Wolf experiences symptoms that last longer than twenty-four hours, there’s a problem.

“Dude,” he urges, his tone serious. “Why the hell haven’t you told Derek about this?”

Although he doesn’t get how the rest of the Pack haven’t noticed that anything’s wrong. Given the sensory strength that exists between Packmates, especially in such a closely-bonded group, surely somebody must have picked up on the Beta’s pain and suffering by now?

“I didn’t want to worry anybody,” Liam argues, although he keeps his head ducked. “Besides, it only seems to happen at night; during the day I’m fine. I only feel crappy when the rest of the Pack isn’t around, so I figured maybe it was just my hormone’s messing with me. I’m still Changing, so my Wolf’s always gonna be happiest when the other guys are nearby, right?”

Stiles supposes that makes sense. For Werewolves, both born and Bitten, there are essentially two separate stages of puberty – one that involves the growth and development of a person’s Dynamic and sexual identity (as with any individual), and a later stage that propels a Wolf’s senses and Pack-instincts to the peak of vitality. That final stage typically tends to start late teens to early twenties and can last anywhere from two to five years, depending on the individual. It’s the reason why Werewolves generally tend to stay closer to home until this period of development is over, the instinct to return to their Alpha almost overpowering if they stray too far from the Pack’s hometown. It’s one of the reasons Scott had been so adamant about Stiles sharing an apartment with him and Isaac during their college years – they’d become their own Beta-unit of three, and neither Wolf had been content with the idea of parting for more than a day at a time.

“I get that,” he sympathises, reaching across the bar to squeeze Liam’s wrist where it’s resting beside his plate. “But I still think you should talk to Derek about all this, and get yourself checked out. Better to err on the side of caution, right?” He pulls his hand back, stealing a sliver of bacon from the kid’s plate. “Besides, isn’t Derek’s older brother a Healer? Not the eldest one, the other one, what’s-
his-name?”

Liam’s lips twitch up at the corners. “You mean Adam?”

“That’s what I said.” Stiles returns the kid’s smile, glad to see him in better spirits. “Why don’t you ask him to give you a check-up?”

The Beta shakes his head. “Dude, honestly, I feel fine now. I slept like a baby last night; didn’t wake up once. I’m not gonna bother Adam about something that’s not even bothering me anymore.”

Stiles’ frown deepens. “Liam.”

“Can we talk about something else?” the teenager requests, shoulders hunching a little as he stabs at his sausage.

The older Sub sighs, but doesn’t push the subject. Instead he reaches across to flick the back of Liam’s hand, which brings the kid’s eyes up to meet his gaze briefly.

“Alright,” Stiles relents. “I’ll drop it. But only if you promise me that you’ll tell Derek or one of the guys if those symptoms start up again. Agreed?”

Liam nods quickly, looking relieved. “Yes, Sir.”

“Good.” Stiles hops down from his barstool, giving Liam a friendly thump on the shoulder as he passes by on his way to the dishwasher. “And don’t call me ‘sir’, you’ll give me delusions of grandeur.”

The teenager grins across at Stiles briefly, cheeks flushed, before returning his attention to the plate in front of him with renewed enthusiasm. Satisfied that the kid’s brief period of melancholy has been vanquished, Stiles busies himself stacking the dishwasher, only stopping when a persistent buzzing from the cell phone in his pocket startles him from the task.

“Hey,” he greets cheerfully, phone pressed to his ear as he leans back against the countertop. “How’s Jellybean and his Momma? Everything check out okay at the clinic?”

“We’re both fine,” Allison replies, a smile in her voice. “Healthy heartbeat, good position and one hell of an enthusiastic soccer player.”

“Awesome.” Stiles grabs the sponge from the sink and wets it under the tap to wipe down the stovetop. “You done with the antenatal classes already? Thought you wouldn’t be out ‘til midday.”

“The breastfeeding support worker had to cancel last-minute,” the Switch reveals. In the background, Stiles can hear traffic sounds, and figures she must be in the parking lot of the roadside health centre. “So I’m all yours until Lydia finishes up at four. Want me to come pick you up?”

“I’m all the way over on the other side of town,” Stiles apologises, scrubbing at a particularly stubborn smudge of grease. “Crashed at Derek’s last night. Want me to meet you halfway or something?”

“No, it’s fine, I’ll pick you up,” Allison insists. “To be honest, I’d appreciate a change of scenery; it’s not so easy to walk these days, and the only green I’ve seen this week is my own backyard. Your Dom’s apartment’s right next to Tideswell Park, right?”

“Right,” the Sub confirms. “It’s the new complex on South Street; you can see the duck pond from the living room window, if that helps?”
“Yeah, I think I know where you are.” A car door slams shut, and suddenly the background traffic noise is muted. “Do you think Derek’ll mind if I use his bathroom? I don’t think my bladder’s gonna survive the journey without a pit stop.”

Stiles grins, wringing the sponge out in the sink before setting it back on the draining board. “Derek’s at work, but I’m pretty sure he wouldn’t turn up his nose at the notion of sharing his bathroom with a pregnant woman in need.”

Glancing up from his plate over at the breakfast bar, Liam gives him a perplexed look.

Stiles laughs and adds into the phone, “Besides, there’s someone I want you to meet…”

“How old is Liam, exactly?” Allison asks, curious, as she slides carefully along the padded seat of the booth, one hand resting protectively on her swollen abdomen. “It seemed rude to mention it, but I didn’t realise the Centre had started taking on High School students.”

“I said pretty much the same thing when I first met him,” Stiles comments with a grin, passing Allison a lunch menu from the little clip-stand behind the salt and pepper shakers. “But he’s older than he looks. He’s already finished his first year at college; the Centre hired him as a trainee officer at the beginning of the summer.”

“He’s one of Derek’s Betas, right?” At Stiles’ nod, she smiles softly. “He seems pretty keen about you.”

“He’s pretty keen about everyone,” Stiles answers with a shrug, although inwardly he’s preening. It’s hard not to love the Beta; Liam’s like a super-cuddly, Submissive version of Scott. And that’s saying a lot, because Scott’s always been a tactile guy, even before the Bite.

Allison gives him a knowing look, but doesn’t rub it in, instead turning her attention to the menu and kindly changing the subject.

“So how are things with Derek?”

“Awesome,” Stiles reports cheerfully, giving the least of food-items a cursory glance before deciding that he’ll just order the special, as usual. “Everything’s so much better since he came along. He just gets me, you know? And he’s calm and super patient and his smile, God, and he laughs at all my crappy jokes and I just…I wanna give him babies, Ali.”
Derek’s already so good with kids. And Stiles can’t deny that he’s spent a fair few hours daydreaming about Derek playing with their kids; about turning the second spare bedroom into a nursery and picking out furniture together and finding a surrogate or adopting or stumbling across an abandoned baby in the woods (yes, he’s even had that fantasy) and claiming it as their own when the birth parent doesn’t come forward. He’s always liked the idea of a family, but he’s never craved one like he does these days; like he’s done since the very moment he saw Derek swing his little nephew up into his arms like it was second nature.

“You got it bad, huh?” Allison comments, amused, and Stiles realises with a flush of embarrassment that he’s pulling the sappiest, goofiest face ever.

He shrugs, cracking a wry smile. “Is it that obvious?”

Allison reaches across to lay her hand over his, Lydia’s Sub-marker circling her wrist as usual, the silver band etched with beautiful, elegant Druid runes that symbolise their Bond. Allison’s gone without a collar today, her pale throat bare, which probably means that Lydia is wearing one instead. Although Stiles has seen them both without a collar, on occasion. Which is fairly uncommon practice even for registered Switches, but then neither woman has ever attempted to conform to social norms just for the sake of it. They do their own thing, and Stiles respects that.

She squeezes his hand briefly, before withdrawing her arm. “Just promise me you’ll let Lydia plan your Sub Night in the run-up to your Bonding ceremony. You know she’ll never forgive you if you let the boys handle it.”

Stiles raises his hands in a gesture of surrender. “Wouldn’t dream of it. I value my balls.”

Laughing, Allison shakes her head, dark hair shifting over her shoulders. “Good to know.” She taps her nails rhythmically against the laminated diner menu and arches an eyebrow, watching him closely. “So has he mentioned Registering, or is it a little too early for that?”

“Derek’s got this probationary rule in place,” Stiles informs her disappointedly. “I guess he didn’t want me jumping into anything I wasn’t ready for; said the honeymoon period might affect my final decision if we did things too quickly. But if I still feel the same way by the end of the month, we’ll go register together.”

Allison nods approvingly. “Sensible guy you’ve got there.”

“He’s amazing,” Stiles enthuses, and feels heat creep into his cheeks again at how quick he was to respond. Allison’s smile only widens fondly.

“I’m really glad things are working out between the two of you,” she murmurs. “I was worried Lydia was going to start hunting for the perfect match if you hadn’t found someone by Christmas.”

Stiles pulls an exaggerated face. “Heaven forbid.”

“She only wants to see you happy,” Allison reasons, amusement shining in her eyes. “Although by the sounds of it, you’ve already got that covered. I guess she’ll have to turn her attention towards finding a mate for Kira instead.”

They share a laugh at that. Kira’s basically the definition of an independent Submissive, calm and confident and focused and completely in-balance with herself without the need for a Dominant presence. And although the Yukimura martial arts centre technically belongs to her mother, Kira basically manages the place on her own, a task that includes everything from acting as a Katana/self-defence instructor to scoping out new employees and handing out contracts. The Kitsune’s never
really shown the same intense desire to find a mate as most Were-Subs, although Kira insists that the main reason for this is because she’s too busy with work to waste time ogling all the hunky Doms she meets.

That, and she probably comes across as a little bit intimidating to the Dominant students who train at the martial arts centre. When Kira’s in her instructor uniform, there’s no question about who’s in charge. Outside of work she’s a bouncy, cuddly klutz, but wielding a Katana she’s fucking deadly.

“Dad says the station’s not the same without you,” Stiles comments a little while later, after the waiter’s come to take their order. “I’m supposed to try and persuade you to come back on desk duty for another couple of weeks. And apparently Greg helped to deliver all three of his children, if that’s any comfort.”

Allison splutters a laugh into her soda, lowering the glass so that she can wipe her mouth with a napkin, her eyes dancing. “He already knows what my answer’s gonna be. Three months behind a desk was more than enough, thank you.”

Stiles raises a hand in supplication. “That’s what I told him. Between you and me, I think he’s just sick of working with your replacement.”

“Mm, I’ve been hearing a lot about the newbie recently; none of it good,” Allison remarks, taking another sip of her drink. “Haigh, right? What’s he like?”

“He’s an asshole,” Stiles replies simply. “Dude’s only been there three weeks, and he’s already pissed off just about everyone on the team. Dad’s at his wit’s end; he’s paired Haigh with Costego in the hopes that she’ll set him straight.”

“God help him,” Allison intones.

Stiles mirrors her grin. Angela Costego is a no-nonsense, say-it-how-it-is type of Dominant who doesn’t take shit from anyone. She’s awesome. Stiles used to be a little scared of her as a kid, but he’d learned quickly enough that her fierce, imposing exterior (reinforced by her towering, muscular six-foot-three frame) belied the quick-witted, good-humoured Momma that lay beneath. But that was a hidden side that she only revealed to people she liked. Given Haigh’s persistent ‘I’m a stronger Dom than you, bitch’ attitude around the other officers (he hasn’t ever said it in as many words, obviously, but Stiles is good at interpreting people’s expressions), Angela isn’t going to go easy on him.

“Serves the bastard right, if you ask me,” Stiles mutters, using his straw to swirl the ice cubes around his glass. “He’s been a total dick to Parrish.”

Allison’s eyebrows shoot up. “And your dad hasn’t fired him yet?”

“He’s come close, a couple of times,” Stiles discloses. “But you know what Jordan’s like. He wants Dad to give the guy another chance. I think pairing him with Angela’s is Haigh’s final lifeline; if he screws this up, he’s out.”

“And if he doesn’t?”

Stiles shrugs. “It’s only a temporary contract. He’ll be gone in six months.”

The waitress arrives with their food a moment later, and a few long minutes are lost to silent eating as they satisfy their initial hunger-pangs. Stiles’ plate is almost half-empty before he wipes the sauce from his mouth on a napkin and returns his attention to the Switch sitting opposite him.
“How’s your dad?”

Allison nods and shrugs. “He’s doing okay. Keeping himself busy with work, but that’s probably for the best; I guess it’s always gonna be harder for him this time of year.” She rubs at the condensation on her glass, her gaze distant. “It would’ve been their anniversary earlier this month.”

Stiles feels a sympathetic ache in his chest, and reaches across the table to squeeze Allison’s hand. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have brought it up.”

She glances up at him and manages a soft, sad smile, flipping his hand over gently to squeeze it in return, a Dominant token of forgiveness. “No, it’s alright. I’m actually glad to be reminded of her. Sometimes I feel like I don’t think about her as much as I should do, you know?”

He nods in quiet understanding - because he does know, and he’s shared the same guilt regarding the memory of his own mother often enough. He still misses her fiercely, but not in a painful way like he once did; he recalls her fondly now, and the memory of her smile and her voice and the warmth of her embrace brings him comfort rather than grief. But for Allison, the memories probably still bear that painful edge of loss, since her mom had only passed away a small number of years ago, when she was still in high school.

Allison and her father had turned up out of the blue in Beacon Hills a few weeks before the Spring break of Stiles’ junior year. On Allison’s first day at BHHS, Lydia had arrived at their usual cafeteria table with the brunette in tow (the two having shared the same Political Studies class) and announced, “Guys, this is Allison. She’ll be sitting with us today.” Which she had done. And every day after that, too. They’d all warmed to her immediately, and it wasn’t long before she’d gained a reputation for herself as fiercely protective Dominant, especially after she’d decked that senior douchebag in front of the whole school for making inflammatory remarks about single-Sub households and insinuating that Submissive parents fucked their kids up if they weren’t Bonded. She’d landed herself in detention for the rest of the week, but she’d become an overnight celebrity as far as the rest of the school was concerned, and word spread quickly: Allison Argent was a badass Dom. Not too hard on the eyes, either.

And the apple clearly hadn’t fallen far from the tree, because Chris Argent had turned out to be equally as badass, and a widowered Submissive to boot. He’d come to Beacon Hills to continue his work as a weapon’s specialist and security consultant, a business enterprise he and his wife had begun some fifteen years earlier. Given that his arrival had coincided with the whole mass-kidnapping-of-elementary-school-children incident, the Sub had found himself with a town full of anxious parents who were keen to upgrade their home security, and soon enough Chris had set up an office right in the centre of Beacon Hills and employed half a dozen engineers and installation experts to meet the demands of his clients. Even the police department had referred to his expertise, calling him in to act as a consultant on cases where the killer’s weapons of choice were unclear. Which is how he’d come to acquaint himself with Stiles’ dad; as a fellow widower and singe-father, John had struck up an immediate friendship with the Sub.

As far as Stiles is aware, they still go out for coffee together every week.

“You should stop by the house sometime,” Allison says, startling him from his thoughts. She’s smiling quietly, fondly. “He’d be glad to hear that you’ve found someone. And he still insists you’re the best student he ever had.”

Stiles snorts derisively and dips another fry into his ketchup. “I couldn’t shoot straight for the life of me when I first started.”

“No, but you were stubborn,” Allison points out. “Determined. And you refused to give up until
you'd perfected your aim. Dad respected that.” She grins then, amusement shining in her eyes. “Plus you always brought him baked goods.”

“Toffee-apple cookies,” Stiles concurs, nodding as he smiles. “Yeah, I remember. Although I’m fairly sure he didn’t eat all of those by himself.”

Allison takes a careful sip of her soda. “I have no idea what you mean.”

“Oh-huh.” Grinning, he pulls out his phone to glance at the time. “We’ve still got a few of hours to kill. Wanna go catch a movie or something?”

They spend a good fifteen minutes scrolling through the movie reviews on Rotten Tomatoes to see which option sounds most promising, by which time they’ve both cleaned their plates and drained their glasses. Allison smacks the back of his hand lightly when he tries to leave a twenty dollar bill on top of the cheque the waitress brings them.

“My turn,” she insists, and pulls out a handful of notes to cover the meal (and a very generous tip). “You paid last time.” When Stiles opens his mouth to argue, she points a finger at him warningly. “Sweetheart, if the next words out of your mouth are ‘but you’re pregnant’, you’re going to regret it.”

Stiles closes his mouth again audibly.

“Thank you.” She shuffles carefully to the edge of the booth, bracing a hand against the table to lever herself to her feet. She winces a little as she straightens up, her free hand moving to press against her lower back.

“You okay?” Stiles murmurs, reaching for her.

She waves off his concern with a calm smile. “Just momentarily regretting my life choices. It’ll pass.” She links arms with him and turns them towards the door. “Come on. I’ll even let you buy the popcorn.”

“Deal,” Stiles agrees as they walk arm-in-arm towards the exit.

It’s quite by chance that, at the last second, his gaze travels up towards the wall-mounted flatscreen TV above the bar area of the restaurant as it flashes to a local news channel, interrupting the sports game that had previously been playing. The device is on mute, but the banner scrolling across the bottom of the screen is hard to miss, and it makes his blood run cold as the words sink in.

**Breaking News: WPDS officer injured in brutal daylight attack on local Switch Support Centre.**
Hope you enjoyed the chapter! I'll try to have the next one out by New Year, but Christmas is always a busy time for me, and I was hoping to do something a little special for all my wonderful readers....

So here's your chance for a little Christmas present! If you have a REQUEST for a little one-shot (can be set in this universe, but doesn't have to be), ask me in the comments below! It can be anything from cuddly platonic cuteness to gloriously filthy smut, any pairing that you desire, and I'll make a little series of one-shots that I'll post over the next month or so in addition to this story.

Let me know your requests, m'dears! I want to give you all something back as a big thank-you for the tremendous support you've shown me with this story. Never dreamed I'd have so many lovely readers! You all mean the world to me. :)

Merry Christmas! xxxx
“I’m okay,” Scott tells him through gritted teeth, skin glistening with perspiration. “It’s not as bad as it looks, honest.”

Stiles sure as hell hopes so, because it looks fucking horrific.

The burns cover half of Scott’s neck and a good portion of his torso, a sunburnt pink in the areas that were partially protected by the material of his uniform, and an angry, raw-looking beat red where his skin had been fully exposed, his right forearm appearing to have taken the worst of it. And the scariest thing is, it’s not healing. Not even a little bit. The skin’s broken and raw and weeping, and it shouldn’t be, not after such an extended period of time.

“Why aren’t you healing?” he asks numbly, still breathless from his mad-dash from the traffic lights at the T-junction near the medical centre (the third consecutive red light had been the last straw, and Stiles had abandoned both Allison and her car without so much as a by-your-leave; he’d have to apologise for that later).

“Beats me. Magic, probably.” Scott smiles in a way that he probably hopes is reassuring, but it ends up looking more pained than anything else. “The Healers are working on it.”

Stiles nods, swallowing down the acid burn at the back of his throat, clenching his fists to keep his hands from trembling in the wake of his receding panic. His legs are shaky as he makes his way over to the bedside, fear-fuelled adrenaline deserting him now that he’s seen Scott with his own eyes and clarified the extent of the damage for himself. Even if his best friend looks awful, at least he’s alive and semi-lucid. Stiles had conjured up all kinds of horrific mental images during the frantic drive across town. All that Erica had been able to tell him over the phone was that Scott had been injured during a routine community patrol and emergency services had taken him straight to Haven (the only medical facility in Beacon Hills that specialised in treating Supernatural folks). And that had been after Stiles had spent a frantic five minutes fruitlessly trying to reach Scott and Isaac on their cell phones. He’d been anticipating missing limbs or poisoned knife wounds or Wolfsbane bullet holes; granted, second degree burns are only marginally better than those alternatives, but at least burns can heal. Burns won’t kill a Wolf the way a well-aimed silver bullet might.

Dropping down into the chair at the bedside, Stiles takes Scott’s (thankfully uninjured) hand between both of his own and just breathes, grounding himself in the warmth of his friend’s skin, in the steady beat of a strong pulse below the Beta’s thumb.

“Dude.” He closes his eyes and lets his head bow forwards until it bumps against their joined hands, elbows resting on the edge of the mattress. “You scared the shit outa me.”
“I’m okay,” Scott reiterates, squeezing his fingers in return, but the strained quality of his voice is wrong. “Deaton’s on the case; he’ll figure out how to fix this.”

Stiles has to believe it. If he lets himself think otherwise, his chest is going to get tight again, and now would be a really bad time to have a panic attack. He takes a few slow, careful breaths and forces himself to sit a little more upright, focusing his gaze above the neckline so that he doesn’t have to look at the grizzly burns.

“What the hell happened to you?”

Scott regards him carefully in poorly veiled concern, but after a moment he seems to decide that Stiles isn’t teetering on the brink of a Drop anymore and heaves a long, grim sigh, his gaze shifting to something far off in the distance.

“We were out on patrol downtown when the screaming started,” the Dom tells him quietly. “By the time we reached the support centre, they’d already trashed up the entrance pretty badly. There were five guys, hooded and wearing scent-blockers; a couple turned tail and ran when they saw us, but the other three decided to put up a fight. They were all human, so the struggle didn’t last more than half a minute or so once we’d disarmed them.” Scott sighs, shaking his head a little. “I thought we had ’em all pinned, so I stepped away to call the station for backup. I guess that’s when the van must’ve pulled up.” He glances down at the peeling burns on his chest. “The driver threw a Molotov cocktail at me.”

“Shit,” Stiles breathes, a sour taste pooling at the back of his throat again as his stomach lurches. Given the pattern of Scott’s wounds, he can picture it all too well: the bottle shattering against the arm Scott had raised to protect himself, the liquid igniting as it splashed across his chest and dripped down his bicep to his shoulder, engulfing his upper body in flames. It’s a miracle the burns aren’t more severe; stop, drop and roll doesn’t do shit when you’ve been soaked in flammable fluid.

“Liam ripped off my shirt half a second later,” Scott continues, shifting uncomfortably against the pillows that are propping him up. “And Isaac pretty much tore up the fire hydrant to hose me down. It all happened so fast, I didn’t even register the pain until after the fire was out.”

Scott’s eyes cut across to the doorway all of a sudden, and Stiles cranes his neck around in time to see Liam skidding to a halt outside. The young Beta’s uniform is singed in places and splattered with unidentifiable stains (the origin of which Stiles doesn’t even want to think about), but it’s his hands that draw the Sub’s gaze first and foremost. The underside of his palms and fingers are beat-red, the skin cracked and raw in places, especially around the creases of the knuckles. It looks so fucking painful, and Stiles’ own hands tingle in sympathy.

“There you are,” Scott says, openly relieved, lifting his injured arm with a barely-concealed wince to gesture the Sub closer. “Derek’s been looking all over for you, man; we were worried sick.”

“Why isn’t he with you?” Liam asks, perplexed, as he crosses the room towards them and settles himself on the edge of the mattress near Stiles’ chair, pressed up against Scott’s thigh. “He should be here; you’re hurt.”

“You’re hurt, stupid,” Scott counters, slipping his hand from Stiles’ grasp to reach for the Beta’s wrist, fingers brushing against the leather Sub-band. “C’mero.”

Liam yanks his arm away sharply, although the movement makes his face pinch up in discomfort. “Don’t. You’ve got enough pain to deal with already. I’ll be alright.” He gives the room a nervous glance in the tense beat of silence that follows, fidgeting a little. “Is Isaac still giving his statement?”
Scott nods carefully, mindful of the burns on his neck. “Erica and Boyd are with him, he’ll be alright.” The Dom rests a comforting hand on Liam’s knee, brow furrowing. “Buddy, where were you? Derek tried calling you a bunch of times, but he kept getting put through to voicemail.”

The younger Beta fidgets, his unbothered expression slipping for a moment as a dozen or more emotions flit across his face. “I was talking to my Mom.”

The crease in Scott’s brow deepens in concern. “Is she okay?”

“She’s at the hospital with my Dad,” Liam confesses. “She wasn’t hurt bad, just a couple of scrapes, but some of the other staff weren’t so lucky. Gina, my Mom’s secretary…she might not make it.”

Stiles feels his insides clench at the words, at the reminder of what could have happened to Scott and Isaac and Liam, had things gone a little more south. It’s not just a case of aggravated assault, this was attempted homicide. And the perpetrators aren’t even in police custody yet.

“I’m sorry, man” Scott murmurs, squeezing the younger Beta’s knee gently.

The teenager sighs, his posture visibly slumping, and frowns down at his burnt palms. “I should be there with her.”

“You need to get those hands looked at first,” Stiles reasons, lightly knocking his knees against Liam’s. “And the best place for that is here.”

The Beta sighs again. “I know, I know. My Dad said the same thing. Doesn’t mean I have to be happy about it.”

Seeing the Sub unhappy about anything is alarming all by itself, never mind his injuries. His current despondency is a far cry from the cheerful, talkative Beta who’d cuddled up to Stiles earlier that morning, and it makes something ache in his chest just to look at him. But before he can work out how to pull the kid into a hug without causing further discomfort, a voice from the doorway has him twisting sharply in his seat.

“Liam,” Derek breathes, and Stiles watches as his Dom sags in relief, bracing a hand against the doorframe for support.

The Werewolf looks haggard. He hasn’t fully shifted, but his features seem sharper, his jaw more angular, and his eyes are half-turned, glowing a dull red as they flicker towards Stiles. Surprise registers in the Alpha’s expression briefly, but when he crosses the room it’s to slide his fingers through Liam’s hair, settling a hand on the kid’s nape as he leans down to press their foreheads together.

“Don’t you ever do that to me again,” the Alpha warns quietly, his voice low and hoarse. Stiles can see black lines begin to thread their way up Derek’s arm as the Dom circles his other hand around the young Beta’s wrist. “Where have you been? Why weren’t you answering your phone?”

“Battery died,” Liam replies meekly, guilt evident in his voice. “And before that I was talking to Mom.” He tilts his head into Derek’s touch, eyes closing for a brief moment. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to worry you.”

“Battery died,” Derek replies, guilt evident in his voice. “And before that I was talking to Mom.” He tilts his head into Derek’s touch, eyes closing for a brief moment. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to worry you.”

“You know better than to go running off without telling anyone,” Derek chides, but even Stiles can tell that it’s concern rather than anger that makes his voice sharp. “I came back and you were gone; what was I supposed to think? The bastards who did this are still out there, how was I supposed to know that someone hadn’t.”
The Dom swallows back the rest of the sentence when his voice cracks, nostrils flaring as he takes a few steadying breaths, his forehead still pressed against the teenager’s. Liam’s breathing hitches, his expression crumpling, and suddenly he looks so goddamn young that Stiles feels a painful lump swelling in his own throat.

“I need to know where you are,” the Dom murmurs, his tone significantly softer now. “I need to know you’re safe.”

“Derek,” Liam whispers brokenly, and it’s the only word he gets out before the Alpha wraps both arms around the teenager and draws him into a firm embrace.

Stiles can see Liam’s shoulders shaking, but he can’t hear anything at all, and part of him knows that’s worse. Silent crying’s the type you do when you just can’t stop.

Derek keeps the teenager’s head tucked beneath his chin, one large hand stroking over the kid’s hair, a low, soothing growl rumbling from his chest. Stiles can only see half of the Alpha’s face from this angle, but the thin set of his lips and the pinched, pained look he’s sporting speak for themselves. Derek looks thoroughly overwhelmed, fear and anger and concern at war with one another in his expression. And little wonder – not only is he dealing with the protective impulses of a Guardian Dom whose Sub has recently been injured, but he also has to contend with the more pressing instincts of an Alpha whose Pack is currently under threat. It’s a miracle that he hasn’t fully shifted, to be honest.

Stiles can’t help but wonder if this is the first time something bad has ever happened to Derek’s Betas. Scott and Isaac have certainly never come to any real harm over the course of the past year and a half, aside from the occasional bump or bruise; and he’s pretty sure Erica had mentioned only joining the Pack a few months before that, around the same time as Brett and Mason, after she and Boyd had transferred in from another State. For a long while, it would’ve just been Derek and Liam, and the only hazards the teenager would’ve been facing back then were the regular trials and tribulations of high school life.

It’s a reminder of how young Derek really is, in Wolf terms – sure, he’s an Alpha, but he gained the title through circumstance rather than ceremony. Usually prospective Alphas have years to build themselves up to the leadership mentality, and with Derek being the younger sibling he was probably never given the ‘How To Train Your Beta’ lectures and ‘Pack Building 101’ manual before the attack at Beacon Hills High. He’d just gone to work one morning, a regular rookie officer without a care in the world, and come home with a newly-turned teenage Beta and a whole heap of new Supernatural powers. He’d obviously adjusted well, but clearly some things came with experience. Like the ability to stay cool when somebody threatened your cubs.

However, after several long minutes, the tightness in Derek’s expression passes and the Alpha sighs, his grip on Liam easing a little as he runs a hand down the teenager’s spine.

“No more wandering off,” he murmurs against the Beta’s hair. “You’ll give me grey hairs.”

“Subs dig the middle-aged Alpha look,” Liam tells him (sounding a little more like his usual self, Stiles is pleased to note), the words muffled in the Dom’s shirtfront. “You could totally make it work in your favour.”

Derek huffs a quiet laugh, dropping a quick kiss against the teenager’s hair before finally straightening and pulling away. He lets his hand slide up to linger on Liam’s cheek, thumb brushing away the dampness there, and it’s enough to coax a wobbly smile out of the Beta.

Then Derek’s attention shifts to Stiles, and he reaches out to gently run the back of his fingers down
the Sub’s cheek, his eyes searching the other’s expression.

“T’m okay,” Stiles reassures, because he knows the question’s coming.

Derek’s lips twitch up in a slight smile, but it’s a poor effort compared to what Stiles has grown accustomed to, and it doesn’t quite reach the soft crinkles of his eyes. Beneath his forced mask of calm and control, Derek is grim and worried and tense, and Stiles just wants to cuddle up in the Alpha’s lap and make it all go away.

He captures Derek’s hand with his own, leaning into the Wolf’s touch briefly and turning his head to kiss the man’s knuckles. It seems to ease a little of the tension in Derek’s shoulders because his hand slides down to cup the side of Stiles’ jaw instead, and he stoops to brush their lips together. The kiss is brief and chaste, but it succeeds in settling the sickly flutter of anxiety in Stiles’ stomach.

“Your dad’s here,” Derek tells him as the Dom settles himself on the bed next to Scott, ignoring his Beta’s half-hearted attempts to bat his hand away and carefully laying the appendage over an unburnt area of skin on the younger Wolf’s left shoulder. Despite his initial protests, Scott immediately slumps back against the pillows with a relieved exhale, the tightness in his expression easing. “I bumped into him on my way back here. He said he’d go check up on Isaac; apparently he’s not overly fond of the deputy who’s been taking statements.”

“Officer Haigh?” Stiles guesses, dread pooling in his stomach.

Derek nods, brow pinched a little as thick black lines continue to track up his forearm. “Yeah, that’s the guy.”

Oh God. Poor Isaac.

“He’ll be fine, dude,” Scott mumbles, eyes half-closed. “Erica and Boyd won’t put up with his bullshit. It’s Haigh you should feel sorry for.”

The mental image of Erica kneeing the smug deputy in the groin while Boyd watches approvingly from the sidelines, muscular arms crossed over his broad chest, is amusing enough to make Stiles’ lips kick up in a half-smile. Liam mirrors it knowingly, and the tension in the room seems to ease tenfold.

Scott grunts suddenly, cracking open an eyelid to squint sideways at his Alpha, whose brow is still creased in concentration. The Beta lifts his arm enough to smack a hand against the Dom’s chest.

“Derek, stop it. You’re gonna wear yourself out.”

“Don’t worry about me,” the Alpha replies, gently pressing Scott’s arm back down against the mattress, his hand never faltering from its resting place on the Beta’s shoulder. “I can handle it.”

“But you don’t—”

“Scott.”

There must be some Alpha-mojo in the glance Derek sends him, because the younger Dom abruptly stops arguing, falling back against the pillows with a sigh.

One of the Healers arrives shortly after that; a Druid judging by the intricate clan tattoos that weave their way down both of his tanned forearms. He speaks in low, soothing tones, the words teased by an accent that Stiles can’t quite place, but his rapid staccato heartbeat immediately calms as the air in the room grows lighter, fresher, sweeter. There’s a tingling at the back of his neck that tells him it’s
magic of some sort, but Derek and the others don’t seem phased by it, so he assumes it’s the good kind.

The Healer slathers Scott and Liam’s burns with some kind of ointment that smells vaguely minty, and both Betas heave audible sighs of relief when the pain eases, murmuring their thanks.

“I’d ask what was in it,” Scott mumbles, his eyes half-closed again, “but from experience I’m probably better off not knowing. Is this Doc Deaton’s work?”

Nodding, the Healer moves to rinse off his hands at the nearby sink. “He hoped it would ease your discomfort until the sample analysis is complete.” The Druid dries his hands on paper towels and sends the two invalids a calming smile. “You’ll be glad to hear that we’ve ruled out most of the more sinister causes. Going by the initial lab results, it’s likely to be a concentrated form of Wolfsbane, infused into a common flammable liquid.”

“Treatable?” Derek asks, his voice carefully neutral.

The Druid nods again. “Absolutely. As soon as we’ve confirmed what strain of irritant they’ve used, we can start working on a curative. I’m sure we’ll have you both healed up by nightfall.”

Derek’s posture visibly relaxes, and he nods his thanks to the Healer, who gathers up his supplies and heads for the door...only to narrowly avoid being bowled over by Isaac, who comes careening to a stumbling halt an inch before impact. The Beta’s eyes are wide and fearful, his face a shade paler than normal, his breathing rapid and shallow.

“It’s alright,” Scott immediately soothes, pushing himself up from his semi-recline against the pillows and reaching for Isaac with his uninjured arm, all evidence of his previous discomfort carefully hidden. “You’re okay.”

Isaac’s tense posture wilts as he moves to the bedside and sinks fluidly to his knees, amber eyes fading to blue again as Scott settles a hand in his hair. He’s close enough for Stiles to touch – which he does, laying a reassuring hand on the Beta’s shoulder as Scott gently runs his fingers through the Sub’s curls.

“Sorry,” Isaac says shakily, head bowing forward as he leans into his Dom’s touch. “The emergency page went off for room one-oh-four, and I couldn’t remember which room you guys were in, so I panicked.”

Stiles can relate. He’d pretty much been holding himself at the brink of a full-blown panic attack from the moment he’d seen the Breaking News banner on the TV screen at the diner, only falling back from that deadly precipice once he’d finally set eyes on Scott. Even now he can still feel that forcefully suppressed fear and horror threatening to plug up his throat and seize his lungs in a vice – the emotions are too fresh to discard entirely – and it’s an ongoing struggle to keep them firmly squashed inside of him. When all this is over, when Scott and Liam are fully healed and he’s somewhere quiet and safe and alone, he’s going to let himself have a damn good cry. But until then, he’s keeping everything sealed deep down inside a little box with the lid screwed on tight.

“Stiles?”

He blinks, startled out of his thoughts, his gaze cutting sideways towards Isaac, who’s watching him with obvious concern. Judging by the way both Scott and Derek are mirroring the expression, the Sub’s probably tried calling his name more than once.

“Mm?”
“Your dad’s looking for you,” Isaac repeats. “He’s been trying to call you on your cell since he got here. Said he didn’t want you seeing the news report and panicking.”

Too late, Stiles thinks wryly, hands automatically sliding down to check his pockets. His heart gives an uncomfortable sort of twist when he only feels the outline of his keys and wallet. His mind flashes back to the tension-filled drive across town in Allison’s car, Erica’s words spinning horrific images in his head, the echoing thunk as he set his cell phone down on the dashboard and braced his hands on his knees while Allison told him to breathe, promised him it was going to be alright…

Oh shit.

“I gotta run,” he blurts, shooting to his feet with an abruptness that makes Liam rock back against Scott’s legs. “Just,” he makes a vague gesture to include the three Betas, “just don’t go anywhere, okay?”

“Stiles?” Derek calls after him, half-rising out of his seat with a furrowed brow, but the Sub’s already heading for the door, waving him back down.

“I’ll be back, I promise,” he shouts over his shoulder, and takes off down the corridor at a sprint. It earns him a few strange looks from the Haven staff he passes them by, but he’s too busy contemplating his approaching doom to pay them much attention.

He’s forced to slow to a brisk walk when he almost knocks over a couple of Healers, who are carefully wheeling a large glass tank between them. Water sloshes against the high sides of the tank when the Druids come to an abrupt halt, and something inside it moans, faint and high-pitched, piercing Stiles right to his core. The female Healer fixes Stiles with a disapproving look as he skirts around them, stammering out apologies, but her companion abruptly dips his a hand into the water and murmurs something soothing in a tongue that Stiles vaguely recognises as the high-born langue of the Naiads, the fresh-water nymphs.

Stiles tries not to stare at the glimmering water, because that’d be rude, but the temptation’s hard to resist. Water nymphs are known to be a solitary race, rarely interacting with anyone beyond the Druid clans that have sworn to protect the sanctity of their lakes and rivers. Stiles has only ever seen them in photos and documentaries, and even then the wispy, ethereal forms are blurred at best.

However, recalling that Naiads can also be as deadly as black mambas when provoked, he decides to move on before he ends up drowned from the inside out.

Stiles realises, belatedly, that he probably should’ve stopped to ask for directions before allowing himself to stray so far from Scott’s room – he could be heading straight for the morgue, for all he knows. Unlike the Memorial Hospital (which Stiles, unfortunately, is thoroughly acquainted with), he’s only been to Haven once or twice, and the corridors here are a veritable labyrinth.

It doesn’t help that the place looks absolutely nothing like a hospital should do. Instead of white walls and standard, mass-produced furniture and medical equipment, Haven had clearly been designed as a cross between a traditional (if aesthetically tasteful) hotel and something straight out of Hogwarts. The building’s old and grand, with a lot of the original décor remaining, and it lacks the sterilised feel that most hospitals tend to have. Probably, Stiles muses, because sterilisation isn’t such a pressing issue when you’re dealing with patients who can’t actually get wound infections. Most medical facilities generally combine clinical science and the ancient Healer’s art in fairly even doses, but given that Haven caters to a predominantly Supernatural clientele, he knows he’s more likely to see the powdered bones of a vole’s spine and the ground bark of a twice-blessed hornbeam than the usual scalpel and suturing kit.
He reaches another set of double doors that read *Staff Only* and comes to the reluctant conclusion that he’s hopelessly lost. Heaving a frustrated sigh, he heads back to the last fork in the corridor and takes a right rather than a left, hoping that maybe he’ll stumble across one of those signposts he’d whizzed by earlier-

He rounds the corner and abruptly slams into a wall of muscle.

“Whoa there, tiger,” a warm voice chuckles as strong hands steady him by the shoulders.

Stiles glances up, surprised. “What are you doing here?”

Deputy Parrish arches an eyebrow at him. “I could ask you the same question. Although here’s a better one.” Jordan slips his hand into the top pocket of his uniform shirt and brandishes a familiar device in front of the younger man’s nose. “Why did Allison have your cell phone?”

“Uh.” Stiles doesn’t really have a decent answer for that one. He clears his throat awkwardly, giving a wincing sort of smile as he takes the phone and slips it back into his own pocket. “I like to share?”

The look the other Sub sends him is alarmingly similar to his dad’s ‘*how have you survived this long?’* stare, but the way his lips twitch upwards in an easy smile is a hundred percent Jordan, which takes the sting away. The deputy sighs in fond exasperation, wrapping a companionable arm around his shoulders and steering him off down the corridor towards the nearest elevator.

“Your dad’s about five minutes from having a coronary,” Parrish warns him, hitting the button for the ground floor and keeping Stiles tucked into a sideways hug. “You’re lucky Allison showed up just after we did, or he might’ve sent out a search party.”

The younger man leans against him, grateful for the contact. “Probably would’ve needed one if I’d been left to wander the corridors much longer. This place is like a freakin’ maze.” After half a beat, his brow creases curiously. “How’d you find me, anyway?”

The deputy shrugs nonchalantly. “I have my ways.”

Stiles gives the man a sideways glance. Jordan’s a bit of an anomaly even by Beacon Hills’ standards, being the first of his kind born in over half a century, and with very few Supernatural roots on either side of the family. Apparently the Phoenix’s abilities hadn’t kicked in until his mid-twenties, after a near-death incident involving a house fire, so by all accounts Jordan had been raised Human, and he tends to act accordingly. In fact, he uses his skills so rarely that Stiles often forgets that there’s a supremely powerful being hidden behind that cheery, carefree smile.

“You used magic, didn’t you?” Stiles surmises. It’s not really a question.

The deputy gives another casual shrug. “Maybe a little. It wasn’t all that hard to find you; your Mark is the spitting image of your Dad’s, and I know his well enough.”

“I bet you do.”

Parrish checks him with his hip, but he’s smiling. “Shut up.”

Stiles grins to himself. As far as prospective step-fathers go, Jordan’s pretty damn awesome. And with his father *finally* making an effort to court the Sub properly instead of pining after him from afar, that extensively detailed Bonding ceremony plan that’s currently saved on Stiles’ laptop under the heading ‘*Project Cupid: Boss Level*’ might actually have the chance to bear fruit.
His Dad is understandably vexed about the whole left-my-cell-phone-in-the-car-and-legged-it-through-traffic thing, so Stiles takes the resulting lecture with as much grace as he can muster.

They’re in a spacious side-office near the main entrance to Haven’s emergency department. (The place smells like the fresh dampness of the forest after heavy rainfall, the air fairly *thrumming* with magic, and Stiles feels invigorated just breathing it in – why the hell don’t they pump school air-cons full of this stuff?) It’s a room that’s clearly used for meeting and planning purposes judging by the number of chairs at the large table. There are binding symbols and Druid runes carved intricately into the wooden surface, and Stiles wonders if they’re designed to act as some kind of silencing charm, to mute the conversation of the meeting’s participants. He supposes it’d be pretty difficult to have a private discussion without a spell or two to help, given that a significant number of the patients and staff at Haven are probably Weres.

Stiles is grateful for their forethought; being scolded by your father for recklessness is embarrassing enough when you’re twelve, never mind in your mid-twenties, and he’s glad his dressing-down isn’t going to be overheard by everyone within a five mile radius.

It’s worth it for the hug that comes afterwards, though. He might not be able to fit comfortably in his dad’s lap for a proper cuddle the way that he can with Derek (although, Stiles notes wryly, his father never has any problem fitting Stiles *over* his lap whenever he’s in trouble), but there’s nothing quite like the long, firm bear-hugs that John metes out after a well-earned scolding. It’s love and forgiveness and protection all wrapped up in a snuggly blanket of strong, warm arms, and it’s just about the best Stiles can think of.

“How’s Scott?” his dad murmurs, stroking the back of his neck as Stiles remains firmly glued to the man’s front.

He’s not sure if it’s the scolding or the cuddling that’s allowed him to let his guard down, but to his horror, Stiles feels a familiar ache building up in his throat, his eyes hot and stinging. He closes them firmly and swallows past the thickening lump, hands tightening on the back of his father’s BHPD jacket.

“Not healing,” he replies after a beat that lasts too long.

John sighs against his hair, arms squeezing him tighter for a brief moment. “We’ll find whoever did this,” he promises. “We’ve got Trackers going over the crime scene, they’re sure to pick up a scent.”

“Hn-nn.” Stiles shakes his head against his father’s shoulder. “Scott said they were all wearing blockers.”

“And Isaac told me they had three of the perpetrators pinned before Scott went down,” the Sheriff reasons, rubbing the Sub’s back with slow, even strokes. “There’ll be evidence left behind. Blood, skin cells, cotton fibres; the Trackers won’t need much.” He gives Stiles another squeeze before pulling back, settling his hands on the younger man’s shoulders. “I need to head on over to the Memorial Hospital to check on the other victims. Are you gonna be alright?”

Nodding, Stiles swipes an arm across his eyes. “I’ll be fine. The Pack’s all here, so it’s not like I’ll be
short on company.”

John gives him an appraising look, then leans in to brush a kiss against his hairline. “Alright, kiddo. Stay safe. I assume you’re crashing at Derek’s place tonight?”

Stiles nods without hesitation. The idea of being anywhere that Derek isn’t doesn’t sit well with him. And not just because his instincts are driving him to seek comfort in his Dom’s presence after his recent scare, but also because Derek needs him right now. It’s been a rough day for the Alpha, and while they might not be legally mated, the bond between them runs deep enough that Stiles’ presence might offer the Dom a little stability in the face of the current threat to his Pack.

In fact he’s already itching to return to Derek’s side, and they’ve only been parted for half an hour, tops. He gives his Dad another brief, tight hug, and leaves him with a placating promise to text with hourly updates for the rest of the day.

Allison’s waiting for him further down the corridor, near the stairwell that’ll lead them back up to the private inpatient suites on the first floor. She’s seated on a low stone bench (and okay, seriously, the décor in this place is so weird), one hand resting on her swollen abdomen, the other cradling her phone as she frowns down at the screen. Stiles ambles over to her, plopping down beside her on the bench to bump their shoulders together gently.

“Hey,” he greets. “Sorry for bailing on you like that. The stoplights were driving me crazy.”

She glances up from her phone to flash him a smile, but it’s thin-lipped and tremulous at best, and doesn’t quite reach her eyes. And maybe it’s just the unearthly glow of the overhead lamps, but the Switch is looking at least three shades paler than normal.

Stiles feels his own smile slip, setting a hand on her arm as his brow creases. “What’s wrong?” he asks, concerned. “Is it the baby?”

Allison shakes her head quickly, throat moving as she swallows. “No. It’s…” She quickly slips the phone back into her purse, levering herself carefully to her feet, accepting Stiles’ steadying hand on her elbow. Her smile is a little more convincing this time around. “It’s nothing. Give the boys a hug from me, okay?”

He blinks, surprised. “You’re not coming up to see them yourself?”

She shakes her head again, glancing further down the corridor towards the exit and heaving a quiet, grim sigh.

“I need to talk to my Dad,” she explains, in a carefully neutral tone that Stiles has learned to associate with bad, bad things. But at Stiles’ concerned look, her expression softens a little. “It’s nothing you need to worry about.”

“You’re wearing that face again,” Stiles points out warily. “Something’s happened.” Her lips thin, which is an answer all by itself, and he presses, “Why can’t you tell me? Is it a police thing?”

“Yes,” the Switch confirms, a little too quickly. Then, after a brief pause, she exhales another sharp sigh. “No. I don’t know.” Allison curls a gentle hand around his wrist, drawing herself up a little taller, every inch the calm, collected Dom Stiles knows she can be. “At the moment it’s all speculation. I need answers. I’ll call you as soon as I get them, okay?”

Stiles nods, and Allison squeezes his wrist briefly, reassuringly, as she leans in to brush a kiss against his cheek. Then she’s gone, leaving him standing in the middle of the corridor with a somewhat baffled expression on his face.
Scott’s room has become significantly more crowded by the time Stiles returns.

He’d wondered, at first, why the inpatient suites were so very *spacious*, but it quickly becomes apparent they’re designed to accommodate more than just the bed-bound invalid. Most of the patients at Haven will be from Packs or Clans or Covens or Guilds, and clearly the caretakers here acknowledge the importance of maintaining familial bonds during the healing process.

Derek’s Betas are sprawled out on the floor around Scott’s bed in a cosy-looking huddle, close enough that they can reach up and touch him if they want to, but maintaining enough distance to avoid crowding into the Dom’s space. Isaac hasn’t moved from the spot nearest the head of the bed, folded arms resting on top of the mattress with his chin propped up on his wrists, Scott’s fingers still combing through his hair gently. Seated on the floor beside him is Erica, her back pressed against his side, her legs resting across Brett and Mason’s laps. On Isaac’s other side is Boyd, propped up against the wall with a knee drawn up to his chest, a broad palm resting comfortingly on Isaac’s nearest shoulder.

And seated beside *him*, most surprisingly of all, is Johnathan Hale, Derek’s eldest brother. Like Boyd, he’s got his back pressed against the wall, but his muscular arms are wrapped around Liam, who seems perfectly content to be cuddled. The teenager’s slumped back against Johnathan’s chest, burnt hands resting palm-upwards in his lap, looking a little more cheerful than he had been previously.

Derek, perched on the edge of a chair on the opposite side of Scott’s bed with his fingers curled around the Beta’s wrist, is the first to look up towards the doorway when Stiles pauses at the threshold, taking in its new inhabitants at a glance. The crease in the Alpha’s brow softens a little in relief, and he graces Stiles with a small, genuine smile as the Sub crosses the room towards him.

“Hey! You’re back,” Isaac notes with the contented drowsiness of early Subspace, as Stiles allows himself to be tugged into Derek’s lap.

“Scott was convinced you’d gotten yourself lost,” Mason discloses cheerfully. “He’s been trying to persuade us to launch a search and rescue op.”
Stiles feels heat creeping into his face, and Erica’s smile widens into grin as she sits up a little straighter. “Oh my god, you actually did get lost?”

“It’s a big hospital,” Stiles protests, cheeks aflame. “All the corridors look the same, and I swear there are only like three signposts.”

The Betas all grin at him and make various fondly teasing remarks about his appalling sense of direction, Scott and Isaac chipping in with slightly embarrassing anecdotes from their time together at college (and c’mon, he’d only walked into the wrong lecture hall a small handful of times – like, maybe twelve max), but he can’t begrudge them a little amusement at his expense. The tension in the room’s already easing, and Stiles would be more than happy to make a fool of himself ten times over if it means keeping the Betas smiling.

Derek presses a kiss against his hair, the arm around his waist squeezing gently in a silent thank-you, and Stiles settles back against the Dom’s shoulder with a soft, contented sigh. He’s got this.

………………………………………….

“So it was wolfsbane?” Laura asks, perched on the foot of Scott’s bed with the Beta’s feet cradled in the concave of her crossed legs.

Alan Deaton inclines his head, crushing a few bright-green leaves between his palms before blowing on them and dropping the wet clump into what looks remarkably like a rune-covered cocktail shaker.

“Unfortunately, yes,” the Druid confirms, uncapping a vial of black liquid and adding a few drops to his concoction. Stiles can’t even begin to hazard a guess at what it is, but judging by the way the Werewolves all wrinkle their noses at the smell, he probably doesn’t want to know.

“Was the Molotov tailored specifically to harm Werewolves?” Derek presses, his tone deceptively calm and controlled. But Stiles can read the lines of tension in his face, in the hard set of his shoulders – his Dom’s still pissed. He’s just hiding it for the sake of his Betas.

Deaton glances across at the Alpha, pouring a clear, pungent liquid from a glass decanter into the metal funnel. “It seems that way,” he agrees. “Against a human, gasoline or a similar flammable agent would’ve been far more effective, and certainly easier to obtain. However, this particular infusion was brewed.”

“So that’s a yes, then,” Stiles surmises grimly.
“But how did they even know we’d be there?” Isaac asks, brow furrowed. “It’s not like we patrol the same area every afternoon. They can’t just have had the Molotov ready on the off-chance that a WPDS officer would stroll by.”

“Four of the counsellors at the centre are Werewolves,” Liam mentions quietly, still tucked up against Johnathan’s chest. “And mom told me that almost half her clients are Weres, too. She says it’s because Packs tended to be more accepting of dynamic changes than other species.” He glances up towards Scott, his expression pensive. “You moved back towards the entrance to radio for backup - that’s when the bottle hit you, right? So, well…maybe the driver wasn’t aiming it at you.”

“That’d make sense, actually,” Mason agrees contemplatively. “If it had reached its target, a regular Molotov wouldn’t have done much besides a bit of property damage. But fermented aconite, ignited and left to burn? The fumes alone would be enough to incapacitate any Wolf within a hundred-foot radius.”

There’s a long beat of grim silence as everyone digests the analyst’s words, broken only by the unexpected poof of a fireball as Deaton ignites his concoction with a wave of his hand.

“I hope you’re not expecting us to drink that,” Scott comments, eyeing the tray of ingredients warily.

Deaton smiles, and it’s somewhat unsettling to look at. He stirs the liquid three times with a long, thin glass rod, and Stiles is alarmed to note that the apparatus is smoking when the Druid sets it back down on the tray.

“Topical application only,” the Healer assures them, screwing on a peculiar-looking lid with a spray nozzle. “You aren’t healing because the aconite’s seared itself into your tissue. This curative’s deigned to sluice off the tainted skin and neutralise the irritant to help kickstart the natural healing process.”

“That sounds…unpleasant,” Liam notes hesitantly.

Deaton sends the young Beta a sympathetic glance. “I’m afraid it won’t be a painless process,” he acknowledges softly. “But it’ll be over quickly.”

“I’ll go first,” Scott offers, but Stiles can see the uneasy way he’s been eyeing the bottle in Deaton’s hands.

Derek switches his grip to allow Scott to grasp onto his hand instead, and the other Dom gives the Alpha a shallow nod, squaring his shoulders. Laura shifts almost imperceptibly at the foot of the bed, her hands sliding up to rest lightly over Scott’s ankles.

“Brace yourself,” Deaton cautions, the nozzle poised over Scott’s chest. “This might hurt a little.”

Understatement of the century, that.

The Druid sprays Scott’s burns with brisk efficiency, from the raw-looking marks on his neck down to the sunburnt-pink patches that fan out beneath his pectorals, and for a long moment nothing happens. Then suddenly the skin starts to sizzle, and Scott’s body goes rigid on the bed as he grips Derek’s hand hard enough to make the bones crack, letting out a low, hoarse scream through clenched teeth as his face scrunches up in pain. The rest of the Pack flinches, and Isaac looks about ready to knock the spray-bottle from Deaton’s grip, but suddenly the bubbling, blistered skin loses its rawness, new skin forming in its place. It’s perhaps the longest ninety seconds of Stiles’ life, but by the time Deaton steps back, Scott’s chest is fully-healed, albeit heaving with ragged breaths from the strain of it all.
“Thanks,” Scott pants, looking two shades paler than normal and about ten seconds from passing out, but significantly less crispy around his torso area. He carefully loosens his grip on Derek’s hand, giving the Alpha an apologetic wince. “Sorry.”

Derek carefully flexes his fingers, joints popping back into place and bruises fading, and dismisses the apology with a soft smile and a quick shake of his head.

“You’re going to want to wash that off,” Deaton advises, gesturing to the liquid that’s now dripping in muddy-coloured streaks down Scott’s chest. “Thoroughly.”

Scott sketches a weary salute, pushing himself upright and, with Derek’s help, swinging his legs over the side of the bed. He stands, teetering precariously for a moment, unbalanced, and Isaac’s beside him in a blink of an eye to wrap a supportive arm around his Dom’s waist, guiding him through the door that leads to the en suite bathroom.

Clearly it’s the result of whatever magical hocus-pocus they’ve endured, because Liam isn’t fairing much better once Deaton’s done fixing up his hands. Derek has to practically hold him up to keep his legs from crumpling beneath him as he washes his hands at the sink, eyes drooping wearily.

“It’s been an eventful afternoon,” Deaton dismisses calmly when Stiles and Laura shoot him alarmed looks. “And superficial penetration or not, they’ve both just recovered from an extended period of aconite poisoning.” He snaps the lid shut on his ancient-looking wooden chest of potions. “They need food, rest and companionship.”

“Sounds great,” Scott agrees, dressed now in a plain Haven scrub top and his slightly singed uniform pants, leaning against Boyd’s shoulder while Isaac fusses over his damp, unkempt hair.

Mason, still seated on the floor at the bedside and tucked under one of Brett’s arms, glances up at Derek with a hopeful look as the Alpha steers a pliable Liam into a nearby chair.

“What night?”

Derek’s smile softens into something fonder for a brief moment as he reaches down to run a hand over Mason’s short, dark hair.

“What night,” he agrees with a nod.

There are various noises of approval from the other Betas, including what sounds suspiciously like a ‘fuck yeah’ from Brett, and Derek calmly raises a hand to refocus their attention. “Head on home first,” he instructs. “Let your folks know you’re okay – they’re bound to have seen the news report by now. Then grab whatever you think you’re going to need for the next couple of days and bring it to the Den. Dinner’s at seven.”

Which is how, a few hours later, Stiles finds himself snuggled up next to Derek in the middle of a mass, semi-naked Pack-pile.

The couches and armchairs in the living room have been pushed back against the walls, leaving a large open space big enough to house them all comfortably. Derek had produced an impressive hoard of pillows and duvets and blankets from the wardrobe in one of the spare bedrooms, and the
Betas had set to work arranging them into a giant, squishy nest of cosiness right there in front of the TV.

They’ve managed to eat their way through six large pizzas and an alarming quantity of junk food, and personally Stiles is *stuffed*, but Erica and Brett don’t show any signs of slowing down. Goddamn Werewolf metabolism. He wonders if it’s some sort of longstanding competition between the two of them – they certainly seem to be matching each other bite for bite, Oreo for Oreo.

Liam’s already fast asleep, curled up on Derek’s other side with an arm tossed over the Alpha’s midriff, dead to the world. He’d passed out pretty much as soon as Johnathan had dropped him off after taking the teenager to visit his parents at the Memorial Hospital. He’d half-heartedly nibbled on a slice of pizza under his guardian’s watchful gaze, but he’d eventually passed the second half to Scott before he was done with it and had promptly dozed off against Derek’s shoulder.

Scott doesn’t seem all that far behind him. He keeps making low, sleepy little sighs behind Stiles, cuddling closer to press up against the Sub’s side. There was a time, once, when Stiles would have struggled to maintain a steady train of thought in a room full of scantily-clad hotties, but he’s known Isaac and Scott long enough that he can only find them aesthetically pleasing at most, and now that he’s got Derek’s collar around his throat as a constant reminder of how awesome his life’s turned out to be, he finds himself less inclined to daydream about other Doms the way he used to. Don’t get him wrong, he can look at Boyd’s impressively muscled physique and think ‘*fuck, he’s handsome*’, but there’s a huge difference between appreciation and infatuation. In short, he’s fairly confident that he won’t be popping any unexpected boners in the middle of *Monsters Inc.* just because he’s surrounded by half-naked Werewolves.

“What are you smiling about?” Derek asks him quietly, amused, trailing is fingers over Stiles’ shoulder and down his arm and back up again, pausing only briefly to pass them through Scott’s hair in a fond, tender gesture as the younger Dom struggles to stay awake.

“What’s, nothing,” he murmurs back, still smiling, watching Brett and Erica get into a furious battle of rock-papercissors over the last Twinkie. Mason makes a sleepy, snuffling sort of noise against Stiles’ knee, an arm curling around his lower leg. “Just happy, I guess.”

And he is. Regardless of the day’s events, of the near-panic-attacks he’s suffered and the stress he’s endured and the ever-present knowledge that there are people out there who have attempted multiple homicide today, Stiles is happy. Because here, cuddled up against his Intended and surrounded by his new Pack, it finally feels like he’s come *home*.

Derek gives a low, rumbling hum of agreement, lips pressing against Stiles’ temple in a gentle kiss as he follows the younger man’s gaze, his expression fond.

“Mm,” he says quietly. “Me too.”
My new Sterek fic: Take Me Out To The Ball Game (Or to dinner, I'm easy either way)

A huge thank-you to all the fic requests you guys submitted with the last chapter - I've already posted the first one, a single-Dad-Derek/Stiles fic (link above), and there are about four or five others that are nearing completion and just need some polishing, so I'm hoping to get a few more of those posted over the next month or so.

Also, by popular demand, there will be a lengthy Sheriff/Parrish fic detailing their relationship from first meeting to eventual bonding and beyond. Avec beaucoup de smut. If you have any specific John/Jordan scene requests, now would be the time to let me know! That fic's almost completed too.

This story will be updated in a fortnight or so, work permitting. Until then, I love you all!
Derek isn’t there when Stiles wakes up.

Scott's still pressed against his other side, a solid and reassuring warmth, but there's a large empty space in front of him that his Dom had previously occupied, and the duvet and pillows are cold to the touch when Stiles smooths a hand over them in a sleepy stretch, so clearly the Alpha's been gone for some time. Liam too, by the looks of things.

He's tempted to close his eyes again, because he feels safe and secure here surrounded by Derek's betas, soothed by the sound of deep, even breathing and the gentle tickle of sleepy nuzzles against his skin as the Wolves shift in their slumber, but an uncomfortable pressure in his bladder reminds him why his body had bothered waking him up in the first place, and he reluctantly peels himself away from Scott's warmth to clamber carefully to his feet, extracting his legs from Mason’s loose grip in the process. The Sub stirs but doesn't waken, rolling over to curl himself around Brett instead.

Stiles carefully picks his way towards the door, moving as silently as he can so as not to disturb the others, only to freeze at the comically loud crunch of a stale cheese puff that disintegrates beneath his heel.

Boyd, who's laying nearby with his head pillowed on Brett’s thigh, stirs at the sound and cracks an eyelid open to squint up at him sleepily in the dim light of the living room.
"Sorry," Stiles mouths with a wincing sort of smile, and the corners of Boyd's mouth kick up briefly before he closes his eyes again and goes back to sleep, arms tightening around Erica, who's sprawled in an inelegant starfish across his chest, dead to the world.

Managing to escape without causing any further disturbances, Stiles carefully pulls the door closed behind him so that the betas won't be bothered by the ruckus he'll undoubtedly make puttering around the Den. It's not like he intends to interrupt the tranquil silence of the apartment, but he's always been a bit of a klutz, and his propensity to cause minor disasters tends to be at its peak first thing in the morning. It's generally safer to assume that all inanimate objects are potential hazards before he's downed his first cup of coffee.

On the upside, at least the apartment doesn't have stairs.

He makes use of Derek's en suite bathroom rather than the main one, solely because his toothbrush is there and his mouth tastes gross after last night's junk food binge. He blinks at himself sleepily in the mirror and splashes cold water on his face to wake himself up, briefly considering the merit of getting dressed versus the added comfort of walking around in a t-shirt and boxers all morning. To be fair, the other Betas are wearing even less, so it's not like he has to worry about modesty. To hell with clothes.

He hadn't bothered to take off his collar before going to sleep, and the leather feels tacky against his skin where the sweat has built up overnight. He removes it with care, setting the Marker to one side so that he can give his neck a thorough wash, patting the skin dry before using the edge of the towel to buff up the dark leather of the collar to a good shine.

A sudden warmth presses up against his back, startling him, but he relaxes again half a second later when Derek hooks his chin over Stiles' shoulder and smiles at him in the mirror, muscular arms winding themselves around the Sub's waist.

"I'm gonna have to put a bell on you one of these days," Stiles huffs, but he's smiling as he leans back against the Dom.

Derek kisses his neck, then rubs his cheek against the skin there in a blatant scenting tactic. "It'd look better on you."

"Good answer," the Sub tells him, pleased, and passes Derek his collar so that the Alpha can fasten it around his throat with careful fingers.

Once it's secured in place, he turns in Derek's arms to smile up at the Dom.

"Hey there, handsome," he murmurs, and tilts the Dom's chin down for a proper kiss, tasting the sweet-sharp acidity of orange juice on the Wolf's tongue, clashing with the wintergreen-mint of his own mouth. He wrinkles his nose a little at the combination, and feels Derek grin against his lips as their lips brush together in a series of soft, chaste kisses that set a pleasant warmth buzzing in his limbs.

Derek eventually pulls away enough to press their foreheads together, eyes closed, his palms still warm against the Sub's skin.

"I'm glad you're here."

Despite the automatic smile that curls at Stiles' lips, there's something about the way Derek says it that doesn't sit right with him; a weariness to his tone that adds a solemnity and weight to the words, and plants a seed of unease deep in his chest. He lifts a hand to curl it gently around the Dom's wrist,
leaning back a little so that he can study the Alpha's face, eyes tracing familiar features for the tell-tale signs of stress that he's grown to recognise over the past few weeks.

"Hey," he murmurs softly. "Hey, what’s wrong? Did something happen?"

Derek’s gaze shifts to the side briefly as his mouth forms a thin, grim line, shoulders heaving in a quiet sigh. "Liam’s father called earlier this morning," he says, after a pause. "One of the victims from the Switch support centre died last night."

Stiles feels the bottom drop out of his stomach. "Who?"

“Gina Wright,” the Dom replies. “Megan’s secretary. Her injuries were too severe; in the end, even the Bite couldn’t bring her back.”

“Fuck,” Stiles breathes, his skin breaking out in goosebumps as he feels the hard porcelain of the sink pressing up against the small of his back, cold even through the material of his shirt. The words are a chilling reminder of the events that had taken place the previous day; of how lucky Scott and Liam had been to come away from the attack with only second-degree burns and temporary wolfsbane poisoning, rather than something far more life-threatening. He can’t help but dwell on what might have happened to his best friend if nobody had been there to rip off the Dom’s burning shirt and douse the flames with water. Fucking hell, Scott could have died.

He rubs the back of his hand across his suddenly-dry mouth, trying to banish the image from his mind. “Do the cops have any leads yet?”

Derek sighs again, shaking his head as he gently runs the pads of his fingers along Stiles’ collar. “Nothing concrete. The Trackers are still going over the crime scene, but with the whole place soaked inaconite, I doubt they’ll be able to pick up a decent scent trail.”

“What about the van?” Stiles presses. “Surely there’s gotta be enough CCTV footage from the cameras on the main road to work out which route it took.”

A muscle in the Alpha’s jaw twitches as he looks away again. “We already know who the van belongs to.”

The Sub’s interest peaks, his expression brightening as he feels a surge of hope run through him at the possibility of a legitimate lead. “What? Who?”

“Chris Argent.”

“Shut up,” Stiles blurs. “Dude, that’s bullshit.”

Derek blinks at him, clearly surprised by the vehemence of his denial. “The vehicle registration’s already been matched to Argent’s records. He confirmed the insurance details himself.”

Stiles is going to be sick. His stomach’s churning something awful, and there’s a heavy weight pressing down on his chest and wrapping icy fingers around his lungs, because no. Chris couldn’t have done it. He couldn’t have. Sure, as a private security consultant and weapons specialist, he possesses both the brains and the means to pull it off, but the notion itself is unthinkable. The Chris Argent who’d patiently taught Stiles self-defence to help him regain his confidence after the whole ‘Matt incident’ would never have dreamed of doing anything that put innocent lives at risk. And why the hell would he attack the support centre? What discernible motive could a man like Chris possibly have, when he’d welcomed Allison and Lydia home from college with open arms after they’d both re-registered as Switches? That same man had walked down the aisle at their Bonding ceremony with a daughter on each arm, beamed proudly as Lydia and Allison had exchanged vows, and given
a non-traditional guardian-of-the-Sub speech that had moved nearly everyone in attendance to tears, Stiles included.

No. Chris isn’t a murderer. He can’t be.

“Hey.” Derek interrupts his escalating internal freak-out with a careful squeeze to the back of his neck, his voice gentle. “Easy. I’m not saying he’s a suspect. Aside from the fact that he’s got an airtight alibi that puts him twenty miles south of Beacon Hills during the time of the attack, I know Chris on a personal level; he’s not the kind of man who goes around committing hate crimes. And even if he was, he wouldn’t be so obvious about it.”

Mollified by the Dom’s words, Stiles leans into his touch, breathing deeply in an attempt to settle his roiling stomach. “But you’re saying that somebody used his van?”

Derek nods grimly in confirmation. “At first, I assumed the theft was coincidental; the van was stolen from an unguarded parking lot in broad daylight - not exactly a professional heist. But Argent and the Sheriff seem to think otherwise.”

“They’re worried someone’s trying to frame him for the attack?” Stiles guesses, brow creasing. He suddenly remembers Allison, looking pale and unsettled, frowning down at her phone in the hospital waiting room; perhaps the text had been from her father, warning her about the setup. It makes sense – with Allison so close to her due date, Chris undoubtedly wanted to spare her the unpleasant shock of finding out about his involvement via second-hand information or idle speculation.

“Well, whether they intended to implicate him or not, it didn’t work,” Derek concludes, calmly dismissive, although Stiles gets the feeling that there’s something the Dom isn’t telling him. “Like I said, he’s got an airtight alibi. If anything, he’ll probably be seen as a victim.”

Stiles nods, feeling some of the tension leave his posture as Derek tugs him closer and wraps his arms back around the Sub, brushing a kiss against his hairline. Stiles nestles in close, feeling his nerves begin to settle as gentle fingers comb through his hair, rubbing against his scalp soothingly.

“Better?” his Dom murmurs after several minutes of comfortable silence, and Stiles nods sleepily. Derek brushes another kiss against his brow. “Good. C’mon, there’s someone I want you to meet.”

Intrigued, Stiles allows Derek to lace their fingers together and lead him out through the master bedroom and into the hallway. The door to the kitchen is closed, which is definitely a first as far as Stiles can remember, but the reason for this becomes apparent when Derek pushes it open and the low murmur of a deep voice, previously muffled almost to the point of silence by the thick wood, filters back into the corridor. (Stiles, suitably impressed, wonders if the door is Druid-crafted, like the ones back at Haven, and makes a mental note to enquire about their origin at a later date.)

Derek’s body blocks his line of sight momentarily, so at first he only sees Liam and Johnathan seated at the small dining table on the far side of the room, the early morning sun casting a warm glow against their skin through the open French windows that lead out onto the balcony. Liam’s posture is slumped beneath the arm the older Sub has wrapped around his shoulders, his gaze unfocused as he stares at the mug cradled between his hands, and there’s a tell-tale redness to his eyes and cheeks that suggests he’s only recently stopped crying. Johnathan’s talking to him quietly, but he stops mid-sentence to glance up at them as they enter, his mouth curving into an easy smile.

“Morning, Stiles.” He nods towards the expensive-looking percolator sitting on the edge of a nearby countertop. “I made coffee, if you’d like some.”

Okay, so Johnathan’s his new favourite Hale sibling. It’s official.
Stiles shoots the Sub a grateful look and slips his hand out of Derek’s in order to make a beeline for his first caffeine fix of the day, only to pause mid-step when movement from the other side of the kitchen catches his eye.

There’s a man dressed in dark jeans and a light grey button-down shirt standing over by the stove. The stranger turns away from a large bowl of pancake batter, drying his hands off the dishtowel that’s draped over his shoulder as he sends Stiles a warm, friendly smile that looks unnervingly familiar, and in the short space of time it takes the man to close the distance between them, Stiles’ sleepy brain manages to catalogue the Sub’s wide-shouldered, narrow-hipped physique and angular jaw, and he comes to the startling realisation that he’s staring at the Hale patriarch a split second before the Wolf extends an introductory hand towards him.

“Ale...” the man says, his grip firm and lingering. “You must be Stiles?”

“Guilty as charged.” Stiles returns the handshake, smiling politely. “It’s great to finally meet you, Sir.”

“Please, call me Alex,” the older Sub requests, wrinkles deepening around his eyes as his smile broadens, and the resemblance between the three Hale men becomes all the more apparent; his beard’s less full than Johnathan’s, a happy medium between his eldest son’s neat trim and Derek’s near-permanent five o’clock shadow, and his hair’s the same dark hue as most of the Hale family, albeit liberally streaked with silver. For a man who must be pushing his mid-to-late fifties at least, he’s doing admirably well.

“I’m only sorry we couldn’t have been introduced under better circumstances,” Alex continues, clapping him on the shoulder in a friendly manner. Then the corner of his mouth twitches. “Touch my bowl, kid, and you’ll be getting oatmeal for breakfast.”

It takes a moment for Stiles to realise that the Hale patriarch isn’t addressing him anymore, by which time Derek has already placed both hands behind his back and is leaning against the countertop near the stove with an air of nonchalance, looking for all the world like butter wouldn’t melt in his mouth.

Alex retreats to rescue his pancake batter, and nudges Derek aside with his hip, delivering a light smack to the back of the Dom’s thigh. “Get outta here,” he rumbles, fondly amused. “Go wake your pups.”

Derek grins, leaning in to brush a quick kiss against his father’s cheek before obediently heading for the door.

Smiling at his Dom’s fit of childishness, and with a tender sort of warmth pulsing pleasantly in his chest at the playful interaction between father and son, Stiles helps himself to a steaming cup of coffee, taking a moment to relish the first few sips before moving to stand beside Alex, watching the man work.

“Is there anything I can do to help?”

The older Sub glances at him sideways, lips twitching. “From what I’ve heard, you’ve already done your fair share of kitchen duty while I’ve been away. My wife can’t stop raving about your baking skills. And Nick mentioned you’d done something rather extraordinary with a batch of brownies?”

Stiles reddens, both flattered and embarrassed that he’s gained such a reputation for himself amongst the Hale Pack, and rubs the back of his neck with a wry smile.

“Popping Brownies. They’re, uh, basically just double chocolate brownies with whole ton of pop-
rocks thrown in.”

Alex smiles at him, eyes crinkling, and oh god that’s so Derek. “Secret family recipe?”

He reddens even further. “Not quite. They’re one of my more successful experiments,” he explains. “And believe me, there were plenty of disasters. Scott took the brunt of it back when we were in middle school.”

“The tomato-cinnamon muffins were particularly memorable,” Scott adds from the doorway, and Stiles glances back over his shoulder to grin at him.

“An important lesson was learned that day,” he admits. “To be fair, that was probably about as adventurous as I got.”

Scott arches an eyebrow at him as he crosses the kitchen towards them. “You’re kidding me, right? What about the eels?”

Stiles shudders. “Dude. We don’t talk about the eels.”

“S’probably for the best.” Scott wraps his arms around Stiles in a backwards hug and smiles at the older Werewolf over the Sub’s shoulder. “Hey, Alex. How was the Big Apple?”

“Loud, busy, hot,” the Wolf lists dismissively. “The usual. It’s good to be home.”

“Thought you weren’t due back until the end of the week?” Scott asks curiously, one hand sneaking out to steal a slice of strawberry from the cutting board.

Alex gently flicks the back of it with the reflexes of a man who’s raised a rather impressive number of children. “That was the original plan. But after what happened yesterday afternoon, we decided to cut the business trip short.”

“Oh,” Scott acknowledges, his smile fading somewhat. Then his expression turns curious again. “We?”

“Mm,” the Sub affirms, shooting Isaac and Boyd a warm smile as the Betas file into the kitchen. “Peter came back with me.”

“Uncle Peter’s home?” Liam asks, sitting up a little straighter in his chair, a hopeful sort of look on his face.

It takes a moment for Stiles to realise they mean Peter as in ‘Peter Hale’, co-CEO of Hale Industries. It’s often easy to forget that his Dom comes from a family of multi-millionaires, due in part to the fact that the Hales all seem so normal, especially compared to a number of the richer families in Beacon Hills. Like the Martins, whose property practically screams well-off from the moment you step onto the carefully manicured front lawn, with antique furniture and crystal chandeliers in every room and a fucking boat house out back. But the Hale house is a lot more subtle, and the only real signs of wealth lie in the sheer size of the place and the number of cars parked out front. Even Derek’s apartment, while impressively large, has fairly understated furnishings. Everything’s good quality, but it’s practical and cosy, giving the place a homely feel that Lydia’s parents’ house has always lacked.

“It’s only for a couple of weeks,” Johnathan supplies, moving the teenager’s mug out of the way before he can knock it over. “Just until we get things straightened out.”

“Awesome.” Liam kicks out the chair beside him so that Boyd can take a seat, allowing the Dom to
pull him into a sideways hug. “We need to introduce him to Stiles.”

“Oh?” Stiles wanders back over to the table to join them, and finds himself being tugged down to sit in Isaac’s lap, long arms winding around his waist as the Beta tucks his chin over Stiles’ shoulder.

Liam grins at him, his previous melancholy thankfully forgotten. “Peter’s basically like an older, slightly more sarcastic version of you. You’re gonna love him.”

“More sarcastic?” Stiles echoes.

“Hard to believe, I know,” Derek quips, coming up behind them and running his fingers through Isaac’s hair as he dips down to kiss the crown of Stiles’ head. “But it’s true.”

Stiles clutches a hand to his chest, feigning offence. “What exactly are you implying?”

The Alpha just smiles at him knowingly and drifts away to take a stack of plates down from one of the overhead cabinets.

“Morning, Johnny. Aren’t you supposed to be speaking at Kinsley Square today?” Mason asks, pinning the older Sub with a sleepy frown as he settles down to perch on one of Boyd’s thighs.

“We’re putting the open-air debates on hold for now,” Johnathan explains. “After what happened at the support centre, I figured it was best to keep altercations between the two parties to a minimum. There’s no evidence so far to suggest that the perpetrators behind yesterday’s attack were affiliated with the DRA, but given the current level of animosity directed towards the group, I doubt it’d make much difference either way. Laura and Deucalion are coordinating the Hub team to get the square cordoned off before people start arriving later this morning.”

Liam pulls his coffee mug back towards him. “You really think it’ll stop fights from breaking out?”

“Honestly?” Johnathan heaves a quiet sigh and shakes his head. “No. But I’m hoping it’ll help with crowd control, at the very least.”

“What about us, Derek?” Brett asks, leaning against the wall behind Boyd’s chair as Erica nudges Mason over to share her Dom’s lapspace. “Are we heading for the Hub?”

The Alpha shakes his head. “I’ve taken you all off active duty for the next couple of days.” He holds up a hand to forestall the immediate barrage of protests, his expression calm but resolute. “It’s standard procedure after a critical incident. Even if I wanted to send you out on patrol, which I don’t, the decision’s out of my hands. Laura’s already called in Deuc’s Pack to cover for us until the weekend.”

“But we can help,” Scott insists, his brow creasing into a rare frown. “And if Johnny’s right, Laura’s gonna need all hands on deck at the Hub.”

“This isn’t up for discussion, Scott,” the Alpha tells him, firmly but not unkindly, settling a hand on the younger Dom’s shoulder. “The answer’s no. I don’t want any of you going within half a mile of Kinsley square until you’re back on duty. Understood?”

The Beta looks like he wants to argue the point further, so Stiles reaches out to curl a hand around Scott’s wrist, squeezing gently. The fight immediately drains from the Dom’s posture, and he loses the frown, dropping his gaze from Derek’s as he nods.

“Understood, Sir.”
“Good.” Derek gently smooths down Scott’s hair at the back, sparing him a quick, warm smile that lessens the sting of his previous words, and the temporarily tense atmosphere in the kitchen eases significantly.

Stiles realises that Alpha’s decision probably comes as a disappointment to a fair number of the Betas, but truth be told he’s so fucking relieved that he can barely keep it from showing in his expression. The thought of the Pack heading out into danger so soon after yesterday’s nightmarish attack had sent chills down his spine, and now it feels like he can finally breathe easy again.

How long it’s going to stay that way remains to be seen.

---

Chapter End Notes

A little shorter than I'd intended, but I'm stuck midway through a pretty significant (and lengthy) political-issues and background-social-history sequence that my muse is struggling with at present, so I decided to cut out that entire scene and feature it in the next chapter instead, otherwise there would NEVER be an update. I apologise for the belated nature of this chapter, life's decided to get super-busy just when my writing muse decided to take on four different projects and it's exhausting. Hoping to have the next chapter posted a little sooner next time though. :)

And oh, um, also? My fic is apparently required reading for a college fic-writing masterclass? Say what now? o.O I'm both flattered at the attention and bemused by the appeal of my WIP to college students, but I guess there's no harm in it so long as people play nice. I've seen some not-so-nice comments on other fics that have featured in the list, and while I'm not really bothered about flames, they will be promptly deleted because I can't be arsed to waste my time replying to that sort of crap. Fair warning. <3
“Are you sure you don’t want us to pick you up on our way back from mom’s house?” Scott asks, rolling down the window so he can lean out of the car a little. “It’s not a problem, dude.”

Stiles shakes his head, hitching his empty duffel bag a little further over his shoulder. “I’m only gonna stick around long enough to say ‘hi’ to my dad. I’ll meet you at the Hale house as soon as I’ve grabbed some stuff from home.”

Not that he’s overly keen on being separated from the Pack even for a short period of time at the moment, considering the shit that went down yesterday afternoon, but he needs clean clothes and his laptop (he feels like he’s missing a limb without it, and he desperately needs a way to keep himself up to speed with the ongoing situation), so a quick pit-stop at home is an unavoidable necessity. Plus the guy from the garage dropped his Jeep off at the house this morning, and he’s eager to get his baby back.

Scott seems reluctant to leave him on his own, but doesn’t try to argue the point, much to Stiles’ relief.

“If you’re sure, man,” he acquiesces. “But call me if you change your mind, okay?”

“Will do.” Stiles sketches a quick salute, waves to Isaac in the backseat, and turns to head inside.

The police station’s a veritable hubbub of activity, in the way it tends to be mid-crisis – phones ringing and papers rustling and printers whirring. And the place is absolutely teeming with officers. It looks like they’ve called in just about everyone on standby – even Lana, who’s technically supposed to be on maternity leave for another two weeks. Not that the Kitsune looks like she’s only just popped out a baby; in her plated vest and bulletproof helmet (Beacon Hills’ seldom-used riot gear), she’s looking as badass and battle-ready as ever. Stiles figures she must be taking a team down to the Hub at Kinsley Square – BHPD officers aren’t usually in the habit of wearing that much gear, not unless they’re expecting a fight.

A hand closes around his elbow suddenly, tugging him smoothly out of the path of a burly officer hurrying towards the back corridor with a tall stack of files teetering precariously in his arms.

“Saved your life,” Deputy Parrish says by way of greeting, rubbing his knuckles lightly against Stiles’ scalp and effectively messing up his hair.

“Gah! Dude, stop,” the younger Sub protests laughingly, batting his hand away. “You’re such a jerk. I’m telling dad.”

“Snitch.” Jordan drops his hand with a grin and crosses his arms over his chest, shoulder braced against the wall in a casual lean. “So how come you’re here on your own, man? I thought you were crashing with the Hale Pack for a couple of days.”

Stiles jostles the strap over his shoulder to indicate the duffel bag. “Need to grab some stuff from
home first; figured I might as well stop by to check up on you and Dad.” He leans in a little closer, lowering his voice. “So, any progress with the investigation? Have we confirmed if it’s the DRA yet?”

“You know I can’t talk about that,” Jordan tells him, but at least he sounds apologetic about it. “Want me to go fetch your dad?”

“Only if he’s not too busy.” Stiles is very much aware of the pressure his father gets put under in a crisis situation, and he’ll try his damnedest not to add to it, if he can.

Jordan shakes his head. “He’s debriefing the Trackers in the conference room, but I’m sure he can spare a few minutes.” The Phoenix glances sideways at the throng of officers, lips pressed together, before curling his hand around Stiles’ elbow again and tugging him quickly towards the Sheriff’s office.

“Wait in here,” he suggests, with a significant sort of look that Stiles can’t quite interpret. “There’s something over by the wall you might wanna take a peek at. Just while you’re waiting for your dad.”

Stiles glances over his shoulder and spots the corkboard over on the far side of the office, now covered in photographs and post-it notes, red tape connecting images to names and locations like a disjointed dot-to-dot puzzle. It’s been a while since he’s seen his father use one of these – hell the last time there was a proper homicide investigation like this, Stiles was still a senior in high school.

“Thanks, man,” he says, shooting Parrish a grateful look.

The older Sub raises his hands in a gesture of innocence. “Hey, no, I didn’t do anything. You stumbled across the evidence all by yourself.”

“Right.” Stiles nods, lips twitching. “Gotcha.”

Jordan winks as he ducks out of the office, closing the door behind him, and Stiles wastes little time in crossing the room to survey his father’s visual mind-map of the ongoing investigation, gaze flitting from one piece of evidence to the next, rushing to take it all in before his dad inevitably finds him and puts a stop to his perusal.

There are a dozen or so images of the crime scene itself; snapshots of overturned furniture and a broken potted plant, soil and blood congealing together on the carpeted floor; sticky brown footprints trodden into scattered sheets of office paper; a reception desk stained dark red and littered with bullet holes; a double set of glass doors smashed in, a bloody handprint streaking down the inner frame; a beige WPDS uniform so badly burnt that its original colour is only discernible at its edges, the spiralling Triskelion logo almost blending into the charcoal-black of the singed material.

Stiles rubs a hand over his mouth and tears his eyes away from the photo, taking a few steadying breaths as he mentally reassures himself that his best friend hadn’t actually been burned to a cinder – that Scott’s alive and fully healed and safe. It had been one thing to hear the Dom give a first-person account of what had happened, but to see the corresponding images himself paints a horribly vivid picture of the brutal attack.

There’s a smaller photograph right in the corner of the corkboard, three lengths of red tape connecting it to several other images, a yellow post-it note stuck next to it with a question mark written in thick, black ink. The picture itself is of a black symbol spray-painted onto a cream coloured wall; the emblem seems vaguely familiar somehow, but Stiles can’t quite put his finger on where he’s seen it before. Three tall pillars, the centremost tower crowned with a neatly curving semi-circle, all held within a fragmented ring, the thick lines curled into sharp dagger-points above
the columns.

The photo seems to have been taken just inside the entrance to the switch support centre, the broken glass doors visible in the background; the soft, muted décor makes the graffiti seem even more out of place, and there’s something about it that just makes his stomach turn. Whichever group the symbol belongs to, Stiles has a feeling they’re bad news.

He pulls out his phone to take a snapshot of the image, determined to get online and start researching extremist cult symbols as soon as he can get his hands on a laptop.

“Stiles?”

Shoving his phone back into his pocket quickly, he spins around to face the door, smiling. “Hey, Dad. I’m not interrupting anything, am I?”

The Sheriff shakes his head, closing the distance between them so that he can pull Stiles into a tight hug, cupping a hand over the back of the Sub’s neck in a familiar gesture of comfort and reassurance. Stiles sags into the embrace with a long sigh, grateful for the contact. It doesn’t matter how many cuddles he gets from Derek and the Pack, nothing quite lives up to one of his Dad’s bear hugs. Everything just seems so much simpler when he’s here. Like he’s five years old again and his Dad’s still an unbeatable superhero who scares away the monsters from under his bed.

“I’ve always got time for you,” John murmurs, fingers squeezing his nape gently. “How’re you holding up, kiddo?”

“M’okay,” Stiles promises. “Heading over to the Hale house in a little while; the Pack’s crashing with Derek’s folks for the day. Safety in numbers an’ all that.”

“Good.” His Dad pushes him away gently to hold him at arm’s length, pinning him with an assessing gaze. “Did you come here on your own?”

Stiles shakes his head. “Scott dropped me off.”

“How’s he doing?”

“He’s Scott,” Stiles replies with a shrug. “Nothing ever seems to faze him, you know what he’s like. Isaac’s still a bit shaken up, but that’s understandable – he watched his Dom go up in flames yesterday, and the men who did it are still roaming free.”

John nods grimly. “I think we’ll all feel a lot better once the perpetrators are in police custody.” He heaves a short, sharp sigh. “Unfortunately, they seem to be very good at covering their tracks.”

“What about the symbol?” Stiles asks, glancing back over his shoulder towards the mind-map. “Is it from a known hate group? Dynamic extremists or something?”

The Sheriff follows his gaze and frowns a little, although he seems more exasperated than annoyed. “You weren’t supposed to see that; its existence isn’t public knowledge.”

“Why not?” the Sub pries, both curious and concerned. “Is it that bad?”

“We don’t know yet.” John runs a palm over Stiles’ unruly hair in an attempt to flatten it. “We’re still waiting to hear back from CIDPO to see if they can find a match. But it’s generally considered a good idea to keep this sort of thing on the down-low until we’ve identified a definite source; if it’s the calling card of an extremist hate group, it could either fuel the current animosity directed at the DRA, or inspire likeminded folk to commit their own acts of terrorism. These things have a tendency
to blow up in our faces if we act to quickly. It has to be handled delicately.”

Stiles nods. It pretty sound reasoning, now that he thinks about it. Beacon Hills has a strong sense of community, and at present it’s rallied together against the Dominants Rights Activists in response to the political party’s attempts at changing the Equality Act. People are bound to be looking for an excuse to blame yesterday’s attack on the DRA representatives in Kinsley Square. And although there’s a stubborn part of Stiles that says ‘good riddance’, there’s a more sensible voice in his head reminding him that a whole group of people can’t be held accountable for the actions of a select few. The activists might all be bigots, but most of them are non-violent, and it isn’t illegal to have opinions (even if those opinions are stupid).

But the Switch support centre had been well-known and well-loved by the community; being the first of its kind in the State, it had gained national news coverage when it had first opened six years ago, and through granting it government funding Beacon Hills county had made a bold statement of acceptance, normalising the process of transitioning to a non-binary Dynamic and easing the legal re-registration process. It had been a huge, positive step for Switches all over the country. An attack against the support centre would likely be seen as a direct attack against the Switch transition movement, and when it gets out that the contents of yesterday’s Molotov had been tailored specifically to incapacitate Weres…well, the backlash isn’t gonna be pretty. The Were-packs of Beacon Hills are a force to be reckoned with.

The door to the office opens suddenly, a young deputy poking his head around the jamb. “Sir? Laura just called in a 10-34, she’s requesting backup.”

Stiles feels a twist of unease in his stomach at the words. There hasn’t been a proper riot in Beacon Hills for years, and while the animosity of the protesters is perhaps well-founded, he dreads to think of the consequences that’ll arise if things escalate further. Innocent people get hurt in riots; bystanders get caught up in the fray, peacekeepers get accused of violence, and the mob mentality provokes random acts of theft and vandalism that the media will no doubt latch onto and blow out of proportion. Stiles knows how this shit works. It’ll turn out better for everyone if the riot can be stopped in its tracks before it gains too much momentum.

“Send in Lana’s team,” the Sheriff instructs, moving around his desk quickly to grab his badge and gun from the drawer there. “Radio Johnson and O’Neil, tell them to move to perimeter patrol. I’ll be right behind them.”

The deputy nods and ducks out again quickly.

“Dad,” Stiles protests, catching his father’s arm as John clips his holster onto his belt. He understands the role that the Dom has to play as the town’s Sheriff, but still, the man’s not long off fifty now, and he’s about to run headlong into a riot. “Do you have to go? Can’t you just delegate from here or something?”

John covers the Sub’s hand with his own. “I’m the Sheriff, son,” his father reminds him, but his tone is kind. “I have a duty to my team, and to the people of this town. I’m not much use to anyone sitting behind a desk.”

“But-”

The door opens again to admit Jordan, who’s already decked out in combat gear, a spare Kevlar vest draped over one arm. “Laura’s called it in, Boss. You ready to go?”

The Sheriff nods, reaching for the vest with one hand and palming the side of Stiles’ head with the other, tugging him close in a brief sideways hug and pressing quick a kiss to his temple.
“Stay safe,” he murmurs. “I’ll call you when it’s over.”

Stiles nods, his stomach all twisted in knots, and reluctantly lets go of his father’s arm. He watches the Dom leave, a hot sort of tightness in his throat, heart pulsing loudly in his ears.

“Hey.” Jordan takes him by the shoulders gently, his expression softening in understanding. “I won’t let anything happen to him, kid – not while I’m still breathing. That’s a promise.” He lifts a hand to mess up Stiles’ hair, lips curling up in a reassuring smile. “We’ll see you tonight, okay?”

The younger Sub nods again, and this time it’s a little more confident. He trusts Parrish. The man’s taken a bullet for his father before, and with a Phoenix watching his back, the Sheriff really couldn’t ask for better protection. Stiles just wishes he didn’t have to go at all. With so many young, fit, supernatural officers with super-duper healing abilities and lightning-quick reflexes, it grates on him that his very-human, very-mortal father still has to wade into the fray. And yeah, okay, Stiles gets it, he does – his dad’s the Sheriff, and a great title comes with great responsibilities, blah-blah-blah.

Doesn’t mean he has to like it.

The Hale house is as warm and welcoming a sight as it had been the first time around.

Stiles slows to a stop alongside a sleek, silver SUV ("Don’t get jealous, baby, I still love you more,” he tells his Jeep, stroking a fond hand over her newly-repaired dashboard), and waves towards the grassy area of the clearing that serves as the Hale’s front yard, where a trio of kids are firing water pistols at each other, giggling and running around in dizzying circles. They’re being supervised by David, Laura’s bonded Submissive, who’s standing under the oak tree nearest the driveway at a sensible distance from the water fight. The accountant raises a hand in greeting, tossing a bright orange ball with the other for the giant Bernese mountain dog that’s sitting patiently at his feet.

“Hey, man,” Stiles calls, jumping down from his jeep, laptop bag slung over his shoulder. “Is Derek back yet?”

He can’t see the Camaro parked in the huge asphalt driveway, but that doesn’t mean his Dom didn’t catch a ride back with someone else after stopping by the WPDS centre.

But David shakes his head. “He’s probably gotten himself caught up running damage control with the media – Laura says a couple of news networks have been parked outside the staff entrance since breakfast, trying to interview anyone wearing a uniform. I think he’s got his work cut out for him.”
Stiles feels a brief pulse of disappointment, but he pushes it aside in favour of crouching down as the big family dog comes ambling over, orange ball clamped between his teeth.

“Hi, buddy,” he greets, holding out a hand for the dog to sniff. Max obediently drops the ball into his open palm, and Stiles huffs a quiet laugh, petting him. “Good boy.”

“Where’s Uncle Derek?” one of the twins asks, appearing suddenly at Stiles’ elbow. He startles, the ball rolling off his palm to bounce on the asphalt as he darts a sideways look at the young girl – Josie? Elisa? He can’t remember which is which, and the only discernible difference is their clothes.

“Uncle Derek had to go to the office,” Stiles tells her. “Don’t worry, he’ll be back later. I like your shirt.”

The dark-haired girl grins, pleased, fingers curling into the hem of her Transformers t-shirt as she glances down at the print. “He’s called Optimus Prime. He’s the best autobot. I’m gonna be just like him when I’m bigger, even if ‘Lisa says I can’t.”

“Awesome,” Stiles enthuses, grinning, and jerks a thumb over his shoulder towards his Jeep. “This here’s Betsie. She’s not as cool as Optimus, I’ll give you that, but I love her just the same.”

Josie glances behind him, head tilted to the side as she studies the old Jeep. “She’s a pretty colour,” she says at last. Then, “Hey, when I’m older, will you let me drive her?”

“Sure,” he agrees easily, scooping the ball up off the ground and lobbing it across the grassy clearing, watching Max go lumbering after it with clumsy eagerness as he pushes himself to his feet, only to recoil half a step when he’s suddenly blinded. “Gah!”

He raises a protective hand against the onslaught of cold water jetting towards his face, eyes scrunched closed.

“Tyler!” he hears David reprimand. “What have we told you about shooting at people who aren’t playing?”

“Not to,” comes the mumbled reply.

Stiles scrubs a hand over his face to clear the water from his eyes, shivering as cool droplets trickle down his neck to soak into the collar of his shirt. Tyler pokes his head out from behind the bonnet of the silver SUV beside him, Supersoaker still aimed and ready.

“Tyler James,” David says warningly.

The five-year-old lowers his weapon to the ground, lips turning down in a pout as he scoots out from behind his hiding spot and inches closer to Stiles, the very picture of dejection.

“Sorry, Stiles.”

Reaching out to ruffle the boy’s mop of damp, dark hair, Stiles quirks an easy smile. “That’s okay, buddy, no harm done. But listen to your dad, okay?”

Tyler nods, darting forwards to give him a quick, crushing hug around his waist, before shrieking as Josie and Elisa open fire on their cousin from behind. The boy squirms away from the onslaught and dashes back behind the safety of the SUV, scooping up his discarded weapon and firing blindly towards the twins, who scream and take shelter behind their uncle.

David sighs, the sound caught somewhere between fond and exasperated. “You might want to head
inside before you end up wet through,” he advises. “I think most of your Pack are in the living room with Grammy.”

Stiles feels a sudden burst of warmth at having Derek’s betas referred to as ‘his’ Pack. He knows it’s not really a big deal for the others – they’ve been treating him like a Packmate since day one, accepting him into their fold without question – but to have an outsider acknowledge that so casually? To him it feels monumental.

He has a Pack. *Fuck yeah.*

Stiles makes his way up the drive towards the house with more of a bounce in his step, lips kicking up into a wide smile when the cherry-red front door opens and Mason steps out onto the porch to greet him.

“T ook your time, pretty boy,” the Sub teases, wrapping an arm around Stiles’ shoulders as soon as he draws close enough, steering him into the house. “Scott’s about ready to launch a search and rescue op.”

“Yeah, well, Scott tends to be melodramatic about these things,” Stiles replies, just loud enough that the Dom will hopefully be able to hear him.

“I do not!” comes the wounded protest from down the hall, and Stiles laughs as he moves to lean in the doorway to the living room, taking in its occupants at a glance.

All of Derek’s pack are present, minus the Alpha himself, curled up on couches or sprawled across the floor, their attention focused on the giant flat-screen TV that takes up a fair portion of the opposite wall.

“Hey, man,” Boyd greets from one of the big, comfy-looking couches. He’s got Liam tucked under his arm on one side, Erica snuggled up against the other, and a snoozing cocker spaniel puppy curled up in his lap. “We were just talkin’ about you. Manage to get your stuff okay?”

Stiles nods, setting down his laptop bag to lean against the wall just inside the room. “Yeah, thanks. Sorry it took so long; the traffic was pretty horrific.”

“They’ve closed a lot of the main roads that cut past Kinsley Square,” Isaac explains, lifting his head from Scott’s lap to shoot Stiles a hesitant, concerned sort of look. “You heard about the riots, right?”

“I was at the station when Laura called it in,” the Sub replies, moving to sink down onto a floor cushion next to Miriam Hale’s armchair. “Hi, Grammy.”

“Good afternoon, Stiles.” She reaches out to run a gentle hand over his hair. “Don’t fret, dear. Derek telephoned a short while ago; he’ll be on his way home shortly.”

Stiles isn’t quite sure how the Hale matriarch was able to read his innermost worries so easily, but he’s grateful for the reassurance. With yesterday’s scare still fresh on his mind, and the threat of riots and extremist cult groups and further acts of terrorism seemingly looming ever-nearer, he feels the absence of his Dom keenly. He understands that it’s just the volatile, fractious instincts of a newly bonded Submissive, but knowing the cause and being able to suppress those urges are two very different things indeed.

“Dude, your Dad’s seriously badass,” Nick tells him, leaning forwards from the other side of Grammy’s chair, cradling a giant pale-green iguana against his chest like a baby. The teenager adjusts his hold, smiling at the older Sub. “Takes guts to stand up in front of a mob like that.”
“He did what?” Stiles asks, glancing wide-eyed towards Scott.

The Dom gives a wincing sort of smile. “ENC has live news coverage of the riot,” he explains, gesturing towards the TV screen. The volume’s turned down so low that Stiles can barely hear it, but he figures it’s probably as loud as it needs to be for the Werewolves. “Things have settled down now, but for a while the crowd was kinda out of control. Your Dad grabbed a loudspeaker and climbed up onto the hood of his car; gave them this lecture on basic human decency and ‘being the better person’.”

“He didn’t tell them to ‘grow the fuck up’ directly, but it was pretty heavily implied,” Erica adds, grinning.

“Oh my god.” Stiles runs a hand through his hair. “He pulled a classic Dad Guilt Trip. And it worked.”

“Well, mostly,” Mason affirms, moving to sit in Brett’s lap over on the other couch. “They had to make a few arrests, and there’s still a pretty sizeable crowd there, but a helluva lot of people left when he asked them to.”

“Remind me never to piss off your dad,” Malia comments, perched on the arm of the couch next to Erica.

Miriam pats Stiles’ cheek, an amused sort of half-smile tugging at her lips. “Remind me to invite your father over to dinner sometime next week.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

The news channel suddenly cuts to an interview with one of the protest attendees, a young collared Sub with a ripped shirt and a blossoming bruise running down the side of his face. He explains how the initially peaceful protest had spiralled into a full-on brawl after someone had thrown a bottle at one of the DRA supporters.

“I know people are angry,” the Sub tells the camera, a hint of an Indian accent rounding his vowels. “We have every right to be angry after what happened yesterday. But we can’t just go blaming the DRA for the actions of four, five, six men. Maybe they are part of this group; maybe they’re not. It doesn’t matter. We shouldn’t be taking the law into our own hands.” He gestures behind him at the remaining crowd, dozens of uniformed officers acting as a barrier between one group and the other. “Innocent people were hurt today because of this violence.”

“Preach,” Erica agrees, and the other ‘wolves rumble their assent, attention focused on the screen as the young man’s Dom arrives, blood running down from a cut on her forehead, and tucks the Sub against her in a sideways hug.

Something aches in Stiles’ chest at seeing them, and he has to look away. The Sub’s right – they don’t even know if it is the DRA, not yet, but with tensions as they are, people aren’t having much difficulty pointing the finger of blame at the easiest target. He needs to find out who that symbol belongs to. He’d forwarded it to Danny on his way home (emphasising the need for discretion, given that it technically wasn’t public knowledge yet), and the Dom had promised to get on it right away. That guy was a computer genius. Not only that, he also had a fairly impressive library pertaining to the more mythical/magical side of Beacon Hills, so if the symbol was something cult-related (like that ancient Greek witch coven he’d helped the BHPD track down back in their senior year of high school), he’d likely be the first to find out.

Stiles fidgets, growing restless as the TV shows yet another interview with one of the riot victims.
He hates being so useless, and immobility has never sat well with him. He needs to do something, even if it’s just to pace up and down or index the Hale’s DVD collection.

He rubs his palms up and down his thighs, wiping the sweat off on his pants, feet twitching in a way that means his knees would be bouncing if he was sitting in a chair. It doesn’t take long for Scott to notice his fidgeting – they’ve been BFFs since kindergarten, dude knows his tell-tale behaviourisms by now.

“Getting antsy?” Scott guesses, watching him with a wincing, sympathetic sort of smile.

“Yeah.” He realises he’s attracted the attention of the entire room and clears his throats, fingers flexing against his thighs. “I don’t really handle the whole ‘sitting around and waiting’ side of thing very well. I need to do stuff, y’know?”

Nick leans around his grandmother’s armchair again, nodding down at the iguana in his arms. “Wanna hold Smaug for a bit? He’s a total sweetheart, I promise.”

Stiles is genuinely tempted (who wouldn’t be – lizards are fucking awesome), but he figures that he’ll just end up unsettling the reptile with his fidgeting. He’s heard that animals tend to pick up on other people’s nerves like that.

“You could bake something?” Isaac suggests, sending him a hopeful sort of look. “That’s what you’d do if you were at home.”

Nick withdraws his iguana quickly, cradling the lizard closer to his chest. “On second thoughts, baking sounds like a better idea.”

“Agreed,” Brett and Mason pipe up in unison, shooting him identical grins.

“Guys, it’s not my kitchen,” Stiles tries to protest, although the idea of losing himself in the therapeutic motions of measuring and mixing and moulding sounds glorious.

“Nonsense,” Miriam tells him, smoothing down his hair at the back and letting her hand settle against his nape. “It’s a family kitchen, and you’re a part of this family. You have as much right to use it as any of us.”

Stiles flushes, pleased by the Dom’s affirmation of his place in the Pack but embarrassed to have drawn so much attention to the issue. Nick leans towards him in the beat of silence that follows to stage-whisper:

“Grammy has a sweet tooth.”

“This isn’t about me, boy,” Miriam dismisses, tugging lightly on the teenager’s hair, but her tone and expression are full of gentle amusement.

So Stiles laughs and gives in, throwing his hands up in surrender as he climbs to his feet. “Alright, alright. Any special requests?”
His phone starts to buzz in his pocket just as he’s sliding the second batch of chocolate chip cookies into the oven.

Stiles curses softly, fumbling with his oven gloves as he pushes the two loaded trays onto the shelves and closes the oven door. He tosses the protective mitts onto the nearby marble island and wipes his hands off on the front of his jeans to clean them of flour before fishing his cell from his back pocket. A quick glance at the caller ID and his face splits into a grin as he lifts the device to his ear.

“Hey, handsome,” he greets, moving over to the main sink so that he can rinse out his mixing bowls. “Please tell me you’ve got some good news.”

“Yes and no,” Danny answers vaguely, his voice uncharacteristically grim.

Stiles feels a frown start to form as he leans his hip against the edge of the marble countertop, eyes tracking the movement of Tyler and the twins as they scale up the oak tree in the backyard to hang precariously off the tire swings and rope ladders that dangle down from the treehouse. He’d be more concerned about their safety if David and Yasmin weren’t so utterly unfazed by it, sitting on a bench at the base of the tree and feeding Max nibbles of cookie.

“Okay, now you’ve got me worried,” he says, running the tap to get the water warm, secretly hoping it might help to drown out his voice from any prying werewolf ears.

“Good news is I’ve found a match for the mark you sent me,” Danny tells him.

“And the bad news?”

Danny heaves a short, sharp sigh. “You were right to worry about it being an extremist Dynamic group or a cult,” he says. “Because it’s both. With a whole load of racist, xenophobic, pro-segregation bullshit thrown into the mix. It’s the original mark of the Enforcers, Stiles. And not the Purist cult from the 70’s. I’m talking pre-integration era here.”

The name sends a chill running through him, an icy weight sinking down from his sternum to settle in the pit of his stomach, churning it into knots.

He remembers learning about the Enforcers in Social and Dynamic History class. Dating back to a time in the late 1800s where marriage (and indeed any form of social interaction) between humans and supernatural folk was strictly forbidden, and a public act of defiance to these rules could result in immediate death or imprisonment. It was an era of rigid Dynamic roles, where Submissives were expected to keep the home and raise the children and serve their bonded Dominant. Enforcer was the title given to an individual (invariably a white, Dominant human who had good social connections with the right people) tasked with ensuring that the strict rules were adhered to. They were often granted the authority to serve as judge, jury and executioner if a member of the supernatural community was found to be in violation of one of these laws.

By all accounts, it had been a pretty shitty period of time for everyone involved.
But then came the Social Revolution in the early 1900s, an uprising of defiance from Submissives both human and supernatural alike, demanding equality. It was a slow start to be sure, but the movement quickly gained momentum across both Europe and America, and by the early 1930s a fully-integrated society had been established and the previous government overthrown, the Enforcers along with them. Sure, there had been the occasional extremist cult who’d popped up over the years, spouting Purist propaganda that fit quite nicely with the Enforcer mentality, but none of them had claimed the title for their own.

“Why the hell would someone come to Beacon Hills if they want segregation?” Stiles asks, still frowning. “We’ve got one of the highest concentrations of supernatural folk in the whole fucking country. Purist cults never even bother trying with us, they generally stick to Texas.”

Danny hums in agreement. “That’s what I thought, until I did a little more digging. I might’ve had to tap into a couple of secure networks to get what I wanted, so there better be some banana bread heading my way later on.”

Stiles nods, even though Danny can’t see him. “You got it, hotshot.”

“Thank you. Anyway, like I was saying, I did some more digging. And I found a report from eleven years back; a house fire, triple homicide. And guess what was apparently added to the flammable agent?”

“Wolfsbane?” Stiles infers.

“Bingo,” Danny confirms grimly. “The victims were two Dominants, one human and one Werecat, and their teenage son. Seems the father was a pretty outspoken Transition activist; he was working with the newly formed WPDS team to promote legal equality for Switches.”

“Until someone murdered him?”

“Not just someone, Stiles. The report says they found a symbol spay-painted onto wall of the basement. The photo they took was shit, but there’s no mistake – it’s the same mark.”

Stiles feels a pattern start to form slowly in his head. “Dude, there’s got to be more than just those two cases. You don’t murder three innocent people and then sit on your hands for a decade or so until the itch comes back. Have there been any other homicides that meet the same criteria?”

“Not in Beacon Hills,” Danny tells him. “But in the State of California? At least two-dozen. There’s no mention of the mark showing up at the crime scenes, though. And not all of them were direct arson. Some were blunt-force trauma with the Wolfsbane ignited post-mortem. But as far as I can tell, most of the victims were Dynamic activists on some level, or were registered as Switches themselves. Almost all of them were of supernatural origin.”

“Shit.” Stiles drags a hand down his face and exhales shakily. “Okay. I’m gonna have to tell my dad, this thing just got way too big for us. See if you can find out if they ever got ‘round to making an arrest. It should be on the formal report somewhere. Keep this to yourself until you hear back from me, okay? I don’t want people freaking out about multiple homicides if it turns out we just jumped to conclusions.”

“Roger that.”

“Well now,” a new voice pipes up from the doorway. “I came for the cookies, but I think I’ll stay for the gossip. Sounds far more interesting than my usual office-talk.”

Stiles blanches, spinning around to stare at Peter Hale as the man leans against the doorframe, arms
crossed over his chest, a quiet, amused sort of smile curling at his lips in a way that makes him look positively dangerous.

“My nephew certainly knows how to pick them,” the Dom continues mildly, head tilting to the side as he arches an eyebrow, looking unfairly attractive in his dark jeans and form-fitting v-neck shirt. “Conducting a little private investigation are we, Stiles?”

The Sub freezes, wide-eyed, heart lurching in his chest at the casual (and devastatingly accurate) accusation. Peter merely arches the other eyebrow knowingly, like Stiles is a particularly naughty pup who’s trying to hide stolen cookies behind his back.

Either way, he’s busted.

Fuck.

Chapter End Notes

Phew! It's been a while, huh, folks? Too many stories going on all at once, too many new fandoms sinking their hooks into my soul. *sigh* But here you have it! Another chapter. Hope you enjoyed. :)

And don't worry, Peter and Stiles are going to be BFFs. The Peter in my universe is very definitely NOT a psychopath, just a very overprotective uncle/father/pack member. And remember ya'll, Stiles is pack now. So Peter's got his six. :)

Let me know your thoughts! xxx
Stiles wets his lips and swallows, his mouth dry.

Peter Hale has accusatory-eyebrow-arching down to a fine art, and it’s perhaps the most intimidating thing he’s ever seen in his whole fucking life. If it weren’t for the fact that the wolf looks mildly amused by Stiles’ apparent involvement in what’s technically supposed to be a classified police investigation, he’d be downright unnerved by the Dom’s stare.

As it is, he manages to limit his reaction to a low, sincere, “Fuck.”

“Stiles?” Danny’s worried voice buzzes in his ear, tinny through the cell phone’s speakers. “Is everything okay?”

“Gotta go, call you later,” Stiles blurts, and hangs up on the Dom before Danny can say anything else incriminating, shoving the phone back into his pocket.

He gives Peter his widest, most convincingly innocent smile. “Hi! Sorry, I didn’t hear you come in.”

“Apparently not,” Peter agrees mildly. “Although I suppose that’s what happens when you let yourself get too wrapped up in a conversation about multiple homicides.”

Stiles winces, wise enough to know when he’s been well and truly caught, and drops the act. “Yeah, about that. Don’t suppose there’s any chance we can keep this between the two of us?”

“I might consider it. On one condition.” The Dom crosses the kitchen at a leisurely pace, moving to lean against the countertop near Stiles. “You’re going to let me help you with the investigation.”

Stiles tries not to gape too openly. “Uh...”

“I assume you and your friend are hoping to discover the identity of the group responsible for yesterday’s attack,” Peter infers calmly, as though they’re talking about the weather and not Stiles’ borderline-illegal snooping into classified police records. “And from what I just overheard, you’re making progress.”

“A little,” Stiles confesses warily, still cautious about digging himself a deeper grave here.

Peter watches the Sub’s expression for a long moment, silent and intent. Then he rolls his eyes a little, a distinctly amused smile tugging at the corners of his mouth.

“Relax, sweetheart,” the Dom drawls, but it’s quiet and fond rather than condescending. “Your secret’s safe with me. I’m only interested in getting to the bottom of this as quickly and efficiently as possible. And to be perfectly honest with you, I neither have the time nor the patience to wait around for the authorities to start investigating things properly.”

“Hey,” Stiles protests, defensive on his dad’s behalf as well as Derek’s. “They’re doing the best they can.”

Peter raises a placating hand. “I’m aware of that. And believe me, I have only the highest respect for
your father – but you can’t deny that both he and my niece are currently a little preoccupied trying to stop the townspeople from killing each other.”

Stiles nods, sighing. “Yeah, no kidding. That’s kinda why I started looking into things in the first place, y’know?”

“I’ve had my fair share of triumphs in the past when it comes to solving…unusual cases,” the Dom remarks casually, wetting a dishcloth at the sink to start wiping down the flour-dusted countertop. “And from experience, I’ve often found that two heads are better than one.”

“So you want in?” Stiles concludes, taking the mixing bowl and sticky utensils over to the sink, rinsing them off so that he can stack them in the open dishwasher. Then he pauses, still bent over, and glances back towards the Dom. “Uh, just so you know – all this stuff I’m doing? It’s not technically legal. You gonna be okay with that?”

“Somebody set my nephew’s Beta on fire yesterday,” Peter says by way of a reply, his tone unnervingly pleasant. “Rest assured I have no intention of leaving Beacon Hills until I’ve found the group responsible. Exactly how I go about obtaining that information isn’t my chief concern.”

“Right. Good to know.” Stiles nods again, wiping his hands dry on a dishtowel. “As long as we’re both on the same page.”

He glances furtively towards the open doorway to the kitchen, wondering if they ought to head outside before they start discussing anything case-related. It’s not like he wants to keep secrets from the Pack, but at the moment everything he’s got is little more than conjecture and loosely-connected leads. Seems unnecessary to get their hopes up without anything concrete.

Although in all fairness, any ‘wolf who really wants to listen in to their conversation will still be able to overhear them even if they do leave the house (given what he knows of Scott and Isaac’s auditory range, anyway). So maybe it’s not worth the effort.

Peter seems to read his mind, because the corners of his mouth twitch up slightly.

“Don’t worry about the others. See those runes up there?” He nods towards the intricately carved wooden plaque that hangs above the doorway, which Stiles had initially thought to be a decorative piece. “They act as a sound barrier – keeps the clamour of pots and pans confined to the kitchen. My father was a Druid; he carved those soundproofing runes shortly after my parents finished building the house. Made it ten times easier for my siblings and I to sneak an extra cookie from the jar when we were kids, but I think Dad already knew that.”

“So they can’t hear us?” Stiles reiterates, prompted by the Beta’s anecdote to go peer through the translucent door of the oven at the progress of his own baking.

“Nothing above a background murmur,” the Dom replies, moving to sit on one of the chairs at the small dining table nearby. He gestures to the plate of cooling cookies that Stiles had kept back in case Derek arrived home before the next batch was done. “May I?”

“Sure, man, help yourself.”

“Thank you.” Peter takes one but doesn’t bite into it, watching the Sub as he adjusts the oven temperature. “So. Multiple homicides?”

Stiles sighs and turns to face the wolf, twisting his hands together simply to give them something to do. “We don’t really know if it’s directly related to what happened yesterday,” he explains. “But there are definite similarities.”
Peter hums, intent and listening. “Go on.”

“The group who attacked the Switch support centre left something behind,” the Sub continues, fishing his phone out of his pocket again and crossing over to the table. He pulls up the snapshot of the spray-painted sign, turning the device so that Peter can see. “Do you recognise this?”

“Vaguely,” the Dom replies, studying the image closely. “I take it your friend managed to track down its source?”

Stiles nods. “Apparently it’s the original mark of the Enforcers. Like, the super prejudiced, pro-segregation law enforcement dudes from the Oppression Era?”

“Well that’s certainly one out of the history books,” Peter murmurs, his slightly-arched eyebrow the only sign that the news comes as a surprise to him. He takes a bite out of his cookie and hums, appreciative. “These are good.”

“Thanks.” Stiles sits down opposite him, setting his phone to one side. He takes a cookie for himself, turning it between his fingers as he observes Peter for a moment. “Do you remember anything about a house fire in Beacon Hills eleven years ago?”

The Dom tilts his head a little to one side, face unreadable. “Why do you ask?”

“Because the police report said it was arson,” Stiles explains. “And whoever did it apparently used an unknown flammable agent infused with Wolfsbane.”

Peter’s brow creases, his gaze shifting to one side contemplatively. “Were there three victims?”

“Yeah, actually,” Stiles confirms, surprised. He nods towards the picture on his cell phone. “A bonded couple and their kid. Police found the Enforcers mark inside the house.”

After a brief pause, Peter sighs grimly. “The Johnson family. I only met the parents in passing on full moons, but I know Talia considered them close friends. Their son was around Derek’s age, maybe a little older; the two of them went to school together.”

Stiles listens, an aching sort of second-hand grief clenching tight in his chest at the thought of his Dom losing a friend so suddenly like that. He remembers Liam telling him about how Derek had dropped out of Beacon Hills High when he was a teenager and switched to Woodside Academy, and how the Alpha never seemed to want to talk about the reason why. Stiles wonders if it’s because of this. If he’d lost Scott back when he was fifteen, he probably would’ve had a hard time coming back to school, too.

“They never found out who did it,” Peter murmurs, reaching for another cookie.

The Sub shakes his head, even though it hadn’t been a question. “And Dan- uh, my contact says he’s found police reports detailing other cases of domestic arson in a dozen or more counties across the State of California over the past decade.” He sighs, thumbing at the screen of his phone to bring the image back up. “There’s been no mention of the Enforcers mark cropping up anywhere else, but there’s always been Wolfsbane involved somehow, even if that wasn’t the direct cause of death.”

The egg timer suddenly goes off, making Stiles jump, and he stands up quickly from the table to go rescue his cookies from the oven. He’s just started transferring them onto a cooling rack when a new voice from the door brings his head up.

“Hey, Uncle Peter,” Liam greets, making a beeline for the older Beta. “Figured you’d be hiding out in the kitchen.”
The Dom’s lips quirk up at the corners even as he extends a welcoming arm towards the teenager.
“Is that so?”

“We all know you’ve been itching to meet Stiles,” the teenager elaborates, moving closer to perch sideways in Peter’s lap, feet resting on the lower rung of the chair. “Plus there’s cookies.”

“True enough.”

“Why didn’t Aunt Talia come back with you?” Liam asks, his face inquisitive.

“Pack business.” The Dom offers Liam the other half of his cookie. “She and Alex probably won’t be back until after dinner.”

The younger Beta perks up at that, his expression hopeful. “Can we get pizza?”

Peter feigns a surprised countenance. “Surely you aren’t suggesting that I take advantage of my sister’s absence?” At Liam’s shameless grin, he pats the Sub on the back. “Good boy.”

Stiles snorts, setting the empty baking trays aside and moving to turn off the oven. “Do I even wanna know how much pizza it takes to feed both packs?”

“The delivery guy almost cried last time,” Liam recalls cheerfully around a mouthful of cookie. “Although that might’ve been because Uncle Peter gave him, like, a sixty dollar tip.”

He leans across the table to retrieve Stiles’ cell phone from where the other Sub has left it lying next to the plate, the movement jarring the device’s auto-rotate function and bringing up the Enforcers symbol from before.

“What’s this?”

“Nothing that concerns you, little one,” Peter replies smoothly, plucking the device from the Beta’s fingers and holding it out to Stiles, who’s already crossing the room to retrieve it.

Liam glances suspiciously between the two of them, his brow creased a little. “But I’ve seen that sign before.”

“Where?” Peter asks, a little more firmly.

“Outside my house,” the Sub replies, looking both concerned and confused by the older wolf’s intensity. “I woke up one morning and looked out my window, and it was just there, on the roof of our garden shed. Figured some kids from down the street must’ve snuck in over the fence and spray-painted it for kicks or something.”

Stiles gapes at him, horrified. “Dude-”

“And what did your folks have to say about it?” Peter interrupts, eyebrow arched.

“Um. I don’t think they actually know it’s there?” At his uncle’s disapproving look, Liam fidgets a little. “It’s not like you can see it from anywhere else in the house. I was gonna paint over it before they found out, I just haven’t got around to it yet. No biggy, right? I can always do it next week.”

Peter closes his eyes for a brief moment, and Stiles has a suspicious feeling the Dom’s counting
backwards from ten in his head.

“I take it your parents are both at the hospital today?” Peter asks after a pause, calm and composed again. At Liam’s hesitant nod, his posture seems to relax fractionally and he nudges the teenager up from his lap. “Good. Let’s go.”

“Go where?” Derek asks from the doorway.

Stiles spins around, a smile melting the concerned frown from his face as he crosses the distance between them in a few quick strides and plasters himself to the Dom’s front. Derek’s arms come up to return the hug, one hand smoothing his hair down at the back, and Stiles hums happily into the wolf’s beige uniform shirt, listening to the steady pulse of his heartbeat.

It’s only been, like, six hours since they last saw each other, but in light of recent events (and the fact that the crazed cult fanatics who openly attacked his Pack with fire yesterday are still at large), he’s feeling a touch more antsy than usual about being separated from his Dom. He wants Derek where he can see him; where he knows the Alpha’s safe. At least until his Dad’s managed to wrangle up the perps and put them behind bars where they belong.

“Hi,” he mumbles, cheek squished against the Dom’s collarbone. “You’re late.”

“I know, I’m sorry,” Derek agrees, dropping a kiss against Stiles’ hair as he squeezes him in a tighter hug. After a beat, the Dom glances up towards his uncle. “Where are you two going?”

“I’ll explain everything in the car,” Peter replies, nudging a still-baffled-looking Liam towards the door. But he pauses briefly beside Derek, reaching out to palm the side of his head and tug him closer to press a quick, chaste kiss to his temple. “It’s good to see you.”

The Alpha smiles, ducking his head to allow for the height difference. “You too, Uncle Peter.”

Then Derek’s gaze cuts across to the Beta surreptitiously trying to sneak past him out the door. He reaches out with lightning-quick reflexes to snag the teenager gently by the back of his shirt and reel him in, one arm still wrapped loosely around Stiles’ waist as he draws Liam close to face them.

“Your heartbeat’s all over the place,” he comments, brow creasing in concern as he runs a hand over his Beta’s hair. “What’s going on?”

“Honestly?” The Sub gives a helpless little shrug. “I have no idea. Those two are being all cryptic and serious, I’m totally lost here.”

“We’re going to your parent’s house, dude,” Stiles tells him, taking pity on the teenager. “Need to check out that mark.”

“Wait, what mark?” Derek asks, glancing between his Sub and his uncle. “Would one of you please tell me what’s going on?”

“Children,” Peter sighs, sending a long-suffering look heavenwards. Then, with the forced patience of someone all too accustomed to dealing with his very large, very loud, occasionally very slow family: “I’ll explain everything in the car.”

And despite being the only Alpha present, Derek doesn’t argue the point any further – although Stiles is pleased to note that the Dom lingers behind long enough to snag a cookie from the plate on the table before joining them.
“You’re telling me it’s been there for almost two weeks,” Derek reiterates, glancing back at his youngest Beta in the rearview mirror, openly incredulous. “And this is the first time you’ve decided to bring it up?”

“I thought it was just random graffiti,” Liam protests, gesturing emphatically with his hands. “How was I supposed to know it was the calling card of a fucking anti-Werewolf cult?”

“Language,” Peter reprimands quietly, his attention still on the busy road as he makes a sharp left-turn.

“Fuck my language!” the Beta snaps, and Stiles is mildly alarmed to see the teenager’s eyes glowing gold. He’s never seen the Werewolf this angry before. Given the kid’s usual cheerful exuberance, he hadn’t really considered the possibility that Liam could get angry, but boy was he wrong on that account.

“Liam,” Derek warns from the front passenger seat, but there’s something else in his tone now, something distinctly Alpha-ish. “You need to calm down.”

The teenager’s shoulders hunch a little, fists clenching and lips pressed tightly together in a thin line as he sucks in a few ragged, steadying breaths through his nose. His eyes are still glowing faintly, but behind his anger and frustration Stiles can see the Sub’s fear and uncertainty.

And who can blame the kid? In the rush of everything that’s happened over the past twenty-four hours, Stiles had briefly forgotten just how much crap the Beta’s had to deal with. Liam’s mother had been injured in the attack on the centre yesterday (fucking hell, if things had really gone south, it would’ve been a helluva lot worse; she could’ve been killed if Isaac, Scott and Liam hadn’t made it there in time). He’d watched his Packmate go up in flames, and gotten himself badly burnt in the process of saving him. And now the dude’s just found out that the murderous bastards responsible for all of this might’ve been silently watching his family for weeks.

In his shoes, Stiles would be a fucking nervous wreck by now.

“Hey,” he murmurs, unbuckling his seatbelt and sliding across to the middle seat so that he can wrap an arm around Liam’s shoulders. The teenager’s posture is so tense it’s a miracle he hasn’t fractured something, and Stiles can feel the faint tremors running through him. “I know you’re kinda freaking out right now, and that’s totally fine – happens to all of us. But your parents are safe, dude. My Dad’s posted, like, half a dozen cops at the hospital as witness protection until we find these guys. Nothing’s gonna happen to them, okay?”
Liam nods, tension bleeding out of him gradually as he leans into the contact, his eyes returning to their original colour. “Okay.”

“Mom’s already persuaded your parents to spend the next few nights with the Pack,” Derek adds gently, the previous note of Alpha-authority gone. “They’ll be safe with us, pup.”

The teenager nods again and manages to muster up a faint half-smile for his Dom, but the rest of the short car journey remains wrought with silent tension. It’s almost a relief when they finally make it to the house and Stiles can tumble out of the car to flex out all his pent-up nervous energy.

Derek catches Liam gently by the upper arm when the teenager makes as though to hop over the low brick wall that fences in the large front lawn.

“Be careful,” the Dom murmurs. “And stay alert.”

“But the mark’s been here almost two weeks,” Liam argues, even as he moves to go through the painted wooden gate instead, “If I was gonna accidentally trigger something, wouldn’t it have already happened by now?”

“It doesn’t hurt to be cautious,” Peter reasons calmly, eyes slowly scanning their surroundings as they head up the gravel path towards the house.

Derek settles a hand on Stiles’ shoulder. “Maybe you and Liam should wait here while we check around the back.”

“It’s not visible from the ground,” Liam reminds him, fishing a set of keys from his pocket as he heads up the porch steps. “You’re gonna have to come up to my room if you wanna see it.”

The interior of the house is clean and tidy and tastefully furnished, but it’s got a *cosy* feeling to it too; snippets of family life hinted at in the worn lacrosse stick propped up against the wall just inside the door, and the jacket hanging over the bottom of the stair bannister, and in the framed photographs hung up along the hallway wall.

“This way,” Liam says (somewhat unnecessarily), heading upstairs quickly. Peter nudges Derek and Stiles ahead of him, still glancing around with a faint frown on his face.

“Sorry if it’s a little stuffy in here,” the teenager comments, opening a door at the end of the upper hallway and stepping inside. “I’ve spent the last couple of nights at the Den, so I haven’t been home in a few days.” He coughs, and when he speaks again his voice sounds a little strained. “Yeah. Definitely need to crack open a window.”

Stiles enters the room after him, and makes a beeline for the window Liam’s pushing open, glancing down into the backyard. And there, just as promised, spray-painted in black against the serrated tin roofing of the garden shed, is the *Enforcers* symbol.

“It’s definitely the same mark,” he reports, glancing back towards the bedroom door where Derek is standing. At the peculiar look on the Alpha’s face, his stomach drops a bit. “Derek?”

The Dom’s brow creases, jaw muscles shifting. “Something’s wrong.”

Peter slips past him into the room, his countenance wary as he glances around. He makes it as far as the rug on the floor near the bed, only halfway to window, before he freezes. The Dom’s body tenses, eyes shifting to their Beta hue.

“Derek,” he says, low and urgent. “Wolfsbane.”

Stiles is already shoving Liam back across the room towards the two Doms, heart hammering in his chest as his gaze cuts around frantically for the source of the poison. Wolfsbane isn’t something to be trifled with. Infused into a liquid it’s only dangerous upon direct contact with the skin, but if the toxin’s been concentrated into powder form (which in itself is illegal to produce and/or procure in the US) or, even worse, aerosolised, the stuff’s as deadly as cyanide gas to Were-folk.

“Stiles!” Derek snaps urgently from the doorway, having already pushed Liam out behind him.

“I’m human,” the Sub argues, with the sort of calm resoluteness that tends to wash over him in times of crisis. “I’ll be okay, just give me five minutes.”

The Alpha makes it halfway across the room before coughing, his features sharpening as his body prepares to shift instinctively. “I’m not leaving you in here on your own.”

“Dude, five minutes,” Stiles promises, crouching down to peer at the skirting board beneath the window, looking for any powdery residue. “I’ll be right down.”

“He’s right, Derek,” Peter insists, his voice lower and more gravelly, suggesting that he’s also in partial-shift. “The Wolfsbane can’t hurt him. Go.”

The Alpha lets out a short, gruff half-growl of frustration, but still allows his uncle to all but shove him from the room. Stiles takes a steadying breath, trying to ignore the Submissive voice in his head that’s spluttering in mild horror at how openly and stubbornly he’s just defied his Dominant mate. Luckily the rest of his brain’s too busy trying to figure out where the hell the Wolfsbane’s coming from to dwell on his instincts too long.

“You should go, too,” he says, glancing back over his shoulder at Peter, who’s still scanning the room, nostrils flared and eyes glowing. “It isn’t safe. And I’m not strong enough to drag your ass downstairs if you pass out on me.”

“You have three and a half minutes left, Stiles,” the wolf tells him instead of a reply. “I suggest less talking and more searching.”

Stiles bites back the automatic retort, reluctantly acknowledging the Dom’s logic as he pushes himself to his feet again, his gaze lingering on the Enforcers mark visible from the window.

Wait. From the window.

He curls his hands into fists to keep from touching the surface of the sill (and potentially smudging any existing fingerprints in the process), peering closely at the glass, gaze searching for any abnormalities. Frustratingly, it all checks out. With a huff, he pulls the cuff of his shirtsleeve over his hand and carefully pushes the window open as far as it will go in order to stick his head and shoulders outside.

And that’s when he sees it, out of the corner of his eye; well-hidden unless you happened to be leaning as far out as Stiles is. There’s a long strip of what looks like dark padded fabric, cut perfectly to match the inch-or-so width of the frame and stuck to the underside of the window latch. It’s clearly not meant to be there. And Stiles is no Werewolf, but the things only half a foot away from him and smells funky as fuck, so he knows it’s bad news.

Glancing down, he frowns. There’s nothing but a two-story drop into the bushes below, so whoever put it here must’ve used a ladder or something. The whole thing had to have been planned with such malice of forethought, it makes his blood run cold just at the idea of it all. Someone watching Liam’s
family, working out which bedroom belonged to the teenager and then waiting until the house was empty so that they could glue some kinda Wolfsbane pouch to his window? That’s just *fucked up.*

“I think I’ve found our source,” he reports grimly, and manages not to fall out of the window in shock when Peter’s hands suddenly grab him from behind.

“Good work,” the Dom says, pulling him back inside. “But next time, be a dear and warn me before you decide to try and break your neck.” Peter staggers half a pace to the side suddenly, features shifting fully for a moment before returning to normal. “Ah. I fear I’ve rather outstayed my welcome.”

“Let’s go,” Stiles agrees, looping one of Peter’s arms across his shoulders to help steer him from the room. “I need to call my dad. Whoever tampered with that window is a fucking *professional.*”

And Stiles doesn’t often use that term lightly; he grew up a cop’s kid, he’s heard tons of stories about all kinds of criminals. But guys like these? Criminals that are skilled and meticulous perfectionists but also shamelessly unsubtle when it comes to leaving calling cards? Those are the dangerous ones. The ones that know how smart they are, how much they can get away with, and enjoy waving that power in everyone’s face. They’re usually the ones that are the hardest to catch, too.

The more he considers the evidence, the more he’s beginning to wonder if they’ve got a cult of fucking *serial killers* on their hands.

Chapter End Notes

Finally starting to hit the action/fast-paced shit. Fair warning; next 3-4 chapters are fairly intense as more secrets are uncovered. Good news though! There’ll be more Jackson/Danny, Lydia/Allison stuff. Because they're awesome. <3 Although advanced warning for mildly traumatising situations and character death. *hugs you in preparation*

Hope you enjoyed the chapter! More coming soon. :)

xxx
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Stiles finds himself at Haven hospital for the second time in as many days.

Leaning against the wall of the private examination room, he watches as Adam Hale takes one of Peter’s hands and clasps it between both his own, eyes closed and head tilted a little to the side in concentration. The air in the room stirs, rich and sweet-smelling like damp soil, and Stiles feels the hairs on the back of his neck stand on end as his skin breaks out in goosebumps. Druid magic never stops being awesome, but it also tends to weird him out a little.

It’s cool to see the elder Hale sibling at work, though. Adam looks the part, too, dressed smartly in the leafy-green Healer tunic and lightly brown pants that the Druid-trained staff of Haven seem to favour. Stiles can see the dark, curving edges of tattoos peeking out from beneath his short shirtsleeves, although whether their Pack markings (every member of a large Pack would carry the family crest somewhere on their person) or Druid clan tattoos (from his grandfather’s side, presumably), it’s hard to say. It’s a question for another time, when the threat of crazed cult assassins isn’t hanging over their heads with quite so much intensity.

“How is he?” Derek asks from the doorway, having stepped out a few minutes ago to update Talia on the situation, the Hale matriarch having gone with her husband to collect Liam’s parents from the Memorial hospital on the other side of town.

“How is he?” Derek asks from the doorway, having stepped out a few minutes ago to update Talia on the situation, the Hale matriarch having gone with her husband to collect Liam’s parents from the Memorial hospital on the other side of town.

“Everything checks out okay,” Adam replies, opening his eyes and sending his younger brother a reassuring half-smile.

Peter nods, clearly pleased to have been proven right. “I told you there was no need to fuss,” he gripes, but there’s no real heat behind the words. “I didn’t even lose consciousness.”

“Dude, you fell down the stairs,” Stiles points out, letting Derek pull him over to a nearby chair so that he can be tugged down sit in the Alpha’s lap, wincing at the pressure it puts on his bruised side.

“On top of me, you may recall.”


Derek’s arms close around him from behind, and although Stiles can’t see the Alpha’s face, he has a feeling the Dom’s glaring at his Uncle. He huffs a quiet laugh, lips twitching as he pats the muscular forearm looped around his midriff.

“I’m fine, Derek. It’s just a bruise,” he reassures quietly. “I’ve gotten worse scrapes tripping over my own shoelaces.”

The Alpha’s hand slides beneath his shirt, warm fingers pressing against the curve of his hip, and immediately the ache diminishes to a low background throb. Stiles settles his hand over Derek’s in silent thanks and leans back against the Dom’s chest more comfortably.

“Thankfully, none of you seem to have suffered any lasting damage,” Adam tells them. “Although
temporary aconite poisoning is certainly nothing to sneeze at. You may still experience a few lingering side-effects over the next few hours; increased fatigue, aching joints, mood fluctuations – that sort of thing. Don’t go running any marathons until you’ve slept it off.”

“Well damn,” Peter says, deadpan. “There go my plans for this evening.”

The Healer ignores his uncle’s sarcasm and instead scoots his rolling stool a few inches to the right to place him in front of Liam, who’s tucked up against Peter’s side, one of the Dom’s arms wrapped securely around his shoulders, legs dangling over the side of the examination bed. The teenager’s hardly uttered a peep since the police arrived to cordon off his parent’s house and escort them all to *Haven*, limiting himself to monosyllabic answers and the occasional shake of his head. Stiles is ninety percent sure the teenager’s still in shock.

Hell, who’s he kidding? They all are. Perhaps with the exception of Peter, but then it’s hard to get a true reading on the older Wolf through all that *sass*.

“How are you holdin’ up, kiddo?” Adam asks quietly, a hand resting on Liam’s knee as the other closes gently around one of his wrists. “Still feeling okay?”

Liam nods, lips twisting in what’s probably supposed to be an attempt at a smile, but falls woefully short of the mark. He’s paler than usual, and he has this faint look of fragility about him, like a misplaced comment might be enough to shatter the tenuous control he has on his emotions, and Stiles just wants to wrap the poor kid up in a bear-hug and make it all go away.

“An ancient anti-Werewolf cult is trying to kill me,” the teenager says after a beat, his voice worryingly hollow. “So yeah, I guess I’ve had better days.”

Derek’s arms tighten anew around Stiles’ waist, and over on the bed Peter’s tugging Liam closer against his side, his expression darkening.

“We’ll find them,” the Dom promises, low and firm. The ‘*and tear them limb from limb*’ remains unsaid, but it’s heavily implied. “I won’t let them hurt you.”

“The analysts should be able to pull physical evidence from the aconite pouch,” Adam adds, thumb brushing gently over the inside of Liam’s wrist. “Alan’s got contacts; he should be able to determine where the Wolfsbane originated from. There can’t be a lot of weapons dealers who have the facilities to refine pure aconite into crystals.”

“Much less rig it all up in a slow-release, pressure-sensitive mechanism,” Deaton agrees, stepping into the room and closing the rune-inscribed (and presumably soundproofed) door behind him. “I have to admit, it’s impressive work. Small enough to be easily concealed along the inner rim of a window without preventing it from closing, but potent enough to act as an effective weapon. Had the window been left open for an extended period of time, a mild to moderate breeze would have been sufficient to carry a small dose of aerosolised aconite into the room. Over time, without adequate ventilation, the toxin would likely reach a lethal concentration.”

“So the pouch wasn’t activated until this afternoon?” Peter surmises. “When we opened Liam’s window.”

The Druid nods, moving to stand at the foot of the bed. “That seems to be the case, yes. Which suggests that whoever planted it there must have done so fairly recently, otherwise Liam would have already experienced the initial effects of aconite poisoning.”

Derek suddenly goes rigid behind him, and a tense sort of silence descends upon the room. Stiles
realises all eyes are on Liam, and after a quick glance in the teenager’s direction, it becomes abundantly clear why; he may not possess the heightened instincts of a Werewolf or the supernatural inclination of a Druid, but it doesn’t take a person with enhanced senses to see the guilt that the teenager’s exuding. Liam has a pinched sort of look on his face, the expression of a kid who knows his assembled Dominant packmates aren’t going to like what he’s about to say, his posture tense and his shoulders hunched up almost to his ears.

“Liam,” Derek says, and while his concern is audible, there’s an unmistakable note of warning too. A ‘what are you hiding from me, little boy’ tone. Stiles’ stomach clenches in sympathy.

“How was I supposed to know it was Wolfsbane?” the teenager begins plaintively. “It’s not like I’ve come across the stuff before. I didn’t know it could make you feel like that.”

Peter’s brow creases, a hand coming up to squeeze the back of Liam’s neck, giving him a gentle shake. “Feel like what?”

The boy shrugs, his gaze averted. “I dunno. Hot. Cold. Weird. Like the air was so thick I could choke on it. Everything ached all the time, I couldn’t sleep.” He glances towards where Stiles and Derek are seated, his expression glum. “That’s why I’ve been crashing at the Den so much these past couple of weeks; I always seemed to sleep better when you and the others were there. I thought I was just missing the Pack, or freaking out about my college results, or something.”

“Weeks,” Adam echoes faintly, eyes wide. “You’ve been experiencing symptoms for weeks and you never thought to tell someone about it?”

Liam’s shoulders hunch up a little more, as though he’s trying to make himself as small as possible. “I didn’t want to worry anybody.”

Peter sighs, his expression grim. “It’s a little late for that, cub.”

Stiles is sat frozen in place, a sour sort of nausea twisting at his stomach as he listens to Liam’s confession, because he’s heard it before. Less than forty-eight hours ago, as a matter of fact. When it was just the two of them in Derek’s apartment, Stiles heaping an extra serving of sausage onto the teenager’s plate as they sat chatting at the breakfast nook in the kitchen.

“Up until a week ago I never had any problem sleeping,” the Beta had told him quietly, thumb tracing patterns in the condensation on his glass. “Now I’m lucky if I can go a couple of hours without waking up.”

He remembers Liam telling him about his unusual symptoms, about needing to get up and walk the cramps out of his legs all the time, about how the air was so thick that sometimes he felt like he was drowning it – “which is stupid, I know, but it really freaks me out.”

Holy shit, Liam had told someone. He’d told Stiles. And Stiles, in his infinite wisdom, had agreed to keep it a secret between the two of them.

He’s a fucking idiot.
Stiles knows he’s not alone in the kitchen but he doesn’t turn around, even when Isaac finally decides to break the tense silence.

“Okay, ‘fess up. What’s eating at you?”

Ignoring the other Sub, he continues viciously scrubbing at the mixing bowl, getting soap suds all over his arms. There’s really no need to do the dishes by hand (the Hales have one of those super fancy LunarLife dishwashers that come with, like, a million different buttons and settings) but there’s something inexplicably calming about cleaning stuff when he needs something to keep himself occupied. Usually he cooks, but there are already six batches of cookies and three trays’ worth of blueberry muffins lining the worktops, still warm from the oven, and Scott might actually follow through with his threat and bodily remove him from the kitchen if he keeps it up.

He’d hoped that baking would settle the uneasy, restless buzzing beneath his skin, but it had only been a temporary solution to a far bigger problem. A part of him knows no amount of chores and distractions will make that feeling go away, but an even bigger part of him is electing to ignore that particular nugget of wisdom through sheer determination.

Truth is, he’s restless because he feels guilty. And he’s guilty because he’s been keeping something from Derek. His negligence could’ve gotten Liam killed, and the Alpha still has no idea that Stiles had any part in it. And what’s more, he knows the Dom’s already taken his youngest Beta into the soundproofed library to have a lengthy discussion about his recent error in judgement, which just makes the whole thing seem even worse, because it feels like Liam’s been lumped with facing the consequences all on his own while Stiles gets let off of the hook, and that just doesn’t sit right with him.

He desperately wants to find the Alpha and confess everything; to own up to his colossal mistake so that he can get the absolution he needs. But he’s also desperate that Derek doesn’t learn the truth, because he might be angry or upset or (God forbid) disappointed, and Stiles just can’t deal with that right now.

“Hey.” Isaac presses up against his back, long arms winding around Stiles’ midriff as he rests his cheek against the human’s hair. “Ignore me all you want, dude, but I’m not leaving. Not until you tell me what’s going on with you.”

Stiles sighs, posture sagging with it as he leans back against the Beta’s chest, instinctively seeking comfort in the familiar contact. “Sorry. It’s been a long day, y’know?”

And fuck, but it has been. The Kinsley Square riots, finding out about the Enforcers, uncovering a freaking Wolfsbane trap in Liam’s bedroom, waiting anxiously for a couple of hours in Haven for teenager to finally get the all-clear after the boy had admitted that his aconite exposure had been over a period of two weeks rather than two minutes. Not to mention the arduous task of explaining everything to his Dad (including how he knew about the Enforcers mark to begin with, when it was technically classified information). Thankfully Jordan had been there to diffuse things a bit, and Peter
had calmly assured the Sheriff that he’d been the one to positively identify the cult symbol from the photograph on Stiles’ phone, so it hadn’t been necessary to drag Danny’s name into the mire. It had still earned him one of his father’s looks (weariness and exasperation and reluctant resignation all cobbled into the same expression), and a quiet promise that they’d talk about this later, which never boded well for Stiles.

It’s getting late now, the summer sky darkening to a hazy canvas of orange and red and deep blue as the sun starts to set, dotted sporadically with little wisps of white cloud. On another night he’d call it beautiful, but right now it’s just a reminder that he needs to sleep soon; his brain desperately needs to switch off for a good six hours in order to process all the shit that’s gone down today. He feels exhausted, drained both physically and emotionally, and all he really wants is to crawl into Derek’s arms for a goddamn cuddle. Too bad even looking at the Alpha is enough to make him feel horribly guilty at the moment.

He won’t say he’s been hiding in the kitchen for the past couple of hours, not exactly, but he’s certainly used his baking as a valid excuse not to go looking for Derek up until now.

Isaac rubs his cheek against the top of Stiles’ head and hugs him tighter. “You smell sad,” he complains, discontented. “Stop it.”

The faux-petulance is enough to coax a reluctant smile out of him, and Stiles finally turns in the Beta’s hold to hug him back properly, letting Isaac take most of his weight because he knows it won’t faze the Werewolf in the slightest.

“The Pack’s worried about you,” Isaac tells him after a few beats of silence, nuzzling along Stiles’ temple in the instinctively tactile way he usually does when either Stiles or Scott are out of sorts. “It’s the first time they’ve seen you so quiet. Scott had to practically sit on Brett and Mason to stop them from bothering you. Said we needed to give you some space to process stuff.”

Stiles feels a renewed wave of affection for his overgrown puppy of a best friend, and leans back an inch or so to glance up at Isaac knowingly.

“Yeah, dude, ‘cause you’re giving me so much space right now,” he snarks.

Isaac pouts at him, and looks frustratingly adorable, as usual. It’s one of the many reasons why Stiles has never been able to stay mad at the Beta for more than five minutes. Sneaky, curly-haired, baby-faced bastard.

“But thank you for coming to find me,” he adds, and means it. Wallowing in his own self-pity wasn’t really getting him anywhere, after all, and the hug feels pretty darn awesome.

“Welcome,” Isaac mumbles against his hair, sounding pleased. “So. You gonna tell me what’s really got you all worked up, or do I need to bring in the big guns?”

By ‘big guns’ Stiles assumes he means Scott, who’ll take one look at him and probably work the whole thing out for himself without needing to ask, because somehow he always just knows. They’ve been together for as long as he can remember, inseparable from the moment Stiles first shared his snacks with the Beta during morning recess on their first day at kindergarten, and secrets just aren’t something that exist between them. Like, ever. And while Scott’s as soft-hearted as they come, and the only ‘big guns’ he’s packing are those killer biceps that Stiles appreciates for purely aesthetic reasons, the Dom’s still a pro at wrangling the truth out of him without so much as lifting a finger. Seriously, the guy has superpowers.

“I screwed up,” he admits reluctantly, mumbling the words into the Beta’s collarbone (Stiles is a
fairly tall guy, but he’s pretty sure Isaac’s part Elf). “Made a stupid judgement call and kept a bunch of stuff to myself, stuff I should’ve told Derek ages ago. Maybe this whole mess could’ve been avoided if I’d just-

He cuts himself off, the guilt turning his gut sour again, and sighs glumly into the Werewolf’s t-shirt. “It’s making me sick to my stomach.”

“You feel sick?”

Stiles freezes in Isaac’s arms, a cold sort of weight sinking down from his chest to settle somewhere around his navel as he glances quickly towards the door to the kitchen. Derek’s already closing the distance between them with long, brisk strides, his face the picture of concern.

Isaac gives him another tight squeeze and brushes a chaste kiss against his cheek. “Tell him, dude. It’ll be alright.”

The Beta nods to Derek as he slips past, the Dom reaching out to brush his fingers against the side of Isaac’s neck in what seems to be a purely instinctual move, as his full attention is still focused on Stiles.

Derek has a hand pressed against the Sub’s forehead as soon as he’s close enough, brow creasing as warm, worried eyes lock with Stiles’. “What’s wrong?”

And it’s so comforting and so tender and Stiles so doesn’t deserve it, he’s hard-pressed not to give in to the sudden tightening of his throat and the hot sting behind his eyes. Instead he clamps down on his treacherous, overly sensitive emotional response and takes a deep, steadying breath, closing his eyes briefly as he leans into Derek’s touch, allowing it to soothe his nerves a little.

“I’m okay,” he insists after a pause, tucked up against his Dom’s chest.

“You don’t smell okay,” Derek murmurs, concern making his tone a little sharper than it ought to be. Stiles feels the Alpha’s fingers close over the back of his neck and squeeze. “Talk to me, Stiles. I can’t help you if you don’t tell me what’s wrong.”

Stiles shifts uneasily, keen to obey what sounds like an order (however gently spoken it might’ve been) but reluctant to pour his heart out to the Alpha in the middle of the kitchen where anyone might suddenly walk in on them.

“Can we go somewhere else first?” he asks hesitantly. “Somewhere a little more private?”

Derek pulls away an inch or so to look at him, his fingers playing idly with the short strands of hair on the back of Stiles’ neck as he regards him quietly for a moment, before leaning in to press a brief, tender kiss to his mouth.

“C’mon,” he murmurs, taking one of Stiles’ hands and lacing their fingers together. “The library’s still empty.”

It’s only a matter of minutes before Stiles is comfortably ensconced in the safety of Derek’s lap, shoes kicked off so that he can tuck his toes up against the soft leather of the armchair, head resting on the Dom’s shoulder as Derek keeps a hand curled securely over the nape of his neck, his other arm wrapped snugly around the Sub’s waist. It’s the cuddle Stiles has been craving all day, the one he’s been waiting for ever since this whole mess began with the attack on the support centre yesterday, and it’s so worth all his internal torment. He’s got a pretty healthy libido, but given the choice between a quickie beneath the sheets and time spent curled up in his Dom’s lap, cuddles are always gonna win, hands-down.
“There’s something you were going to tell me,” the Alpha says after a few minutes of blissful silence, and suddenly that squirmy feeling is back in his gut again.

He hunkers down further in the Dom’s hold, mumbling, “You’re not gonna like it.”

“Maybe so,” Derek agrees calmly. “But a truth I don’t like is better than a truth left unsaid.”

Stiles frowns bemusedly into the Dom’s shirt. “Dude, that’s not even a saying,” he accuses. “You totally just made that up.”

“Did not,” the Alpha counters, kissing his brow, but Stiles can hear the smile in his voice, feel it against his skin as Derek kisses him again. “Just because you haven’t heard of it before doesn’t make it any less legitimate.”

The Sub tilts his head up to arch an eyebrow at him, reluctantly amused. “I haven’t heard of it before because it doesn’t exist.”

“It could be an old Werewolf proverb.”

“It could,” Stiles agrees, poking the Dom’s shoulder with his index finger. “But it’s not.”

Derek’s lips twitch into a wider smile, his face full of warmth and fond amusement as he shrugs, surrendering the argument. “Sounded pretty close to one though, right?”

“Yes, thing, Yoda,” Stiles agrees. “Gee, Sir, I don’t know about you, but I’m really feeling at one with the Force now—”

He breaks off with a very dignified and manly yelp as Derek nips lightly at his throat, laughing as he tries to push the Dom away. Derek smiles at him, the corners of his eyes crinkling just like always andJesus Christ, Stiles loves him so much it hurts. Suddenly he doesn’t care about the consequences anymore. He wants to confess everything, to bridge that invisible chasm that’s formed between them and make things right. He wants to be good.

“Liam did tell someone about his symptoms,” he finds himself saying, in a voice that’s surprisingly calm and even. “He told me, the other day at breakfast, before any of this stuff started happening with the Enforcers. I tried to convince him to talk to you about his symptoms. You did what you thought was right. You couldn’t have known it was Wolfsbane poisoning.”

He curls the fingers of his left hand into the soft material of Derek’s WPDS shirt, his face pinched. “I shouldn’t have kept it to myself. Maybe if I’d told someone sooner...” He presses his lips together, swallowing past the sore lump in his throat. “I’m sorry, Sir.”

Derek’s fingers card through his hair gently. “Look at me.”

Stiles reluctantly raises his head from the safety of the Dom’s shoulder to glance up at his face, and feels his brow crease a little at the gentle expression he finds there.

“Wait, you’re not mad?”

“I’m not mad,” Derek confirms quietly, thumb stroking over the Sub’s cheekbone. “Liam admitted that you’d already tried to convince him to come talk to me about his symptoms. You did what you thought was right. You couldn’t have known it was Wolfsbane poisoning.”

“I should’ve,” Stiles mumbles, even though he knows he’s being unfair on himself.
“I knew he was having trouble sleeping right from the start,” Derek tells him, sighing wearily. “I chose to put it down to nerves, given that his college grades were due to come out this week. If anyone here’s been negligent, it’s me.”

“But I knew about all the symptoms,” the Sub insists, because he can’t understand why Derek’s being so fucking forgiving. He’s supposed to be mad. He’s supposed to agree that Stiles had made a mistake and do something to help him fix it. “About the achy joints and the temperature changes and everything.”

Derek smooths his fringe back. “And you told him to come to me about them. You made the right choice. That he elected to ignore your advice was a mistake on his part, not yours.”

“But-”

“Liam’s old enough to make his own decisions,” the Alpha continues softly. “You’re not responsible for ensuring that he makes the right ones. I am.”

“But you punished him for it,” Stiles points out, because that much is a no-brainer. Liam had looked so miserable on the drive back from Haven, Stiles had been half tempted to spank the kid himself just to alleviate his guilt a little.

“He made a mistake in choosing to keep something hidden from me, something that concerned his wellbeing; that’s why he ended up over my knee.” Derek’s arm tightens around his waist in a gentle squeeze. “Your only mistake was thinking that I’d blame you for his actions.”

For some reason the Dom’s unflappable calm and gentle tone don’t soothe the buzzing beneath his skin. Instead, it grows sharper, until the mounting frustration in his chest because a big ball of anger and hurt and something in him just snaps.

“Stop being so fucking reasonable!”

Derek blinks at him for a moment, surprise registering briefly before a pensive look crosses his face and he tilts his head a little to one side, considering.

“Oh,” he says after a beat and his expression smooths out again, a wry smile tugging at his lips. “So that’s how it is.”

“That’s how what i-gah! Derek!” Stiles gives another very manly and dignified squeak when he suddenly finds himself lifted bodily and flipped over, secured across Derek’s lap in one smooth, effortless motion.

Finally, a small voice in the back of his mind sighs, which makes no sense whatsoever, because Stiles doesn’t want a spanking, thank you. Not now, not ever. He hates them.

“You didn’t do anything wrong,” the Dom says, his left forearm braced across Stiles’ lower back as his right hand rubs over his jean-clad rear. “But you don’t want me to keep telling you that. You want me to put things right.”

“Not like this,” Stiles insists plaintively, but even he knows it’s a lie. It’s what he’d been angling for, however subconsciously, when he’d refused to accept the Dom’s reassurances. God dammit, why is he so fucking pushy?

“It’ll be over soon,” Derek reassures, and that’s all the warning he gets before the first swat lands.

It’s over his jeans and underwear (a first for his Dom, usually Derek tugs everything down before
beginning), and it’s clear after the first few swats that the Alpha’s not putting a lot of force behind his swing. It barely even stings at all, which is weird, because the noise and the impact and the growing warmth are all still there.

Still, discipline is discipline, and Stiles’ tolerance for the stuff has always been abysmally low, so it doesn’t even matter that the pain isn’t really registering because the whole process of being bent over his Dom’s lap and held still by an arm around his waist while Derek spanks him is enough to make his eyes burn and his throat close up all on its own.

He whines in the back of his throat, fingers clutching at the fabric of Derek’s pants, face screwing up as moisture wells in his eyes, tears threatening to tumble over his lashes if he blinks.

“I know,” Derek soothes, but keeps on spanking, if the noise-and-impact-without-pain can even be called that. “I know, baby. It’s okay.”

Well, that makes it even worse. He can’t be nice and spank Stiles, the hell is that all about?

“I’m sorry,” Stiles whimpers, an audible hitch in his breathing.

“Shhh,” the Alpha soothes again, his rhythm unaltering. “That’s it. Almost there.”

Derek tugs him forward an inch or two to pull him further across his lap, dropping one leg to angle his charge so that the next spans fall against the back of the Sub’s thighs where they kiss the curve of his cheeks, and oh hell no, not there.

A sob bursts out of him with startling force, and just like that the floodgates open, and there’s just no stopping the tears that follow. He sniffs and whimpers his way through perhaps a half-dozen more spans before he’s righted again with dizzying abruptness, scooped up and cradled close to Derek’s chest as the Dom brushes chaste kisses all over his brow and cheeks.

“You did so good,” he murmurs, kissing the tears-trails away. “Shhh, you’re okay. We’re done here.”

Stiles clings to him, pressing his face into the front of Derek’s shirt as the Dom’s arms wind around him, rubbing his damp cheeks against the soft fabric as his shaky breathing begins to settle.

Derek smoothes a hand over his hair gently, kissing his temple. “Feeling better?”

Stiles nods, sniffing a little. Truth be told, he feels strangely...calm. Without the usual post-spanking discomfort, it’s easier to focus on the lack of a leaden weight in his chest, on how light and contented he feels beneath the sore throat and damp eyes.

“Thanks,” he murmurs, lifting a hand to scrub at his face. “You were right, I...I needed that.”

Derek smiles and drops another kiss against the corner of his mouth. “Any time.”
Happy Birthday to this fic! Which is officially over a year old now, holy crap. That's cray-cray!

Hope you enjoyed the chapter. As promised, we saw a little more Sterek than we have in previous chapters.

Warning for the next chapter, folks - EVERYTHING GOES TO SHIT AND BAD STUFF HAPPENS. I wanted to give you a little nugget of Isaac/Stiles fluff and Sterek cuddles before I made people sad/mad with the intense stuff. <3

Aaaaalso.....I may have gotten distracted from updating this fic because I'm 14K words into writing a Stiles-sees-demons-and-earth-spirits AU where he's a badass exorcist/medium who protects Beacon Hills and also befriends a giant Wolf spirit in the woods who belongs to the Hale Pack and also Derek is smitten. WHOOPS. Looks like another multichaptered fic is on the horizon. :/ My bad.

As always, love to hear your thoughts! :) xxxx
Chapter 20

The Hale household has quietened considerably by the time Stiles leaves the library in search of the rest of Derek’s pack, yawning against the back of his hand as he pulls out his cell phone and thumbs through his inbox. He’s unsurprised to see a few unread messages from his Dad (and a couple from Jordan) asking how he’s holding up. He only spoke to his father at Haven hospital a few hours ago, but the Dom’s always been a worrier, as far back as Stiles can remember.

*I’m fine,* he texts back, and at least this time the reassurance doesn’t feel like a lie. *Gonna hit the hay soon, I’ll call you in the morning. Don’t drink too much coffee, you know what it does to your blood pressure. Love you.*

Following the low murmur of voices, he finds the Betas in the smaller living room towards the back of the house – the one with the large French windows that open up onto the rear porch, overlooking the backyard. Stiles pauses at the threshold and takes in the room at a glance, the tension in his posture relaxing a little when it becomes clear that the sleeping arrangements will be fairly similar to the mass sleepover they’d held at Derek’s apartment last night. It’s been one helluva day, and the prospect of cuddling up to a group of super-tactile werewolf pups is an appealing one.

They’ve pushed all the furniture to the walls and divested the couches of their cushions, laying them out on the floor and padding up the gaps with blankets and duvets to create one giant, squishy floor-mattress in the centre of the room.

The lights have been switched off, and most of the Betas have already settled down there for the night, curled around each other in a snuggly-looking puppy pile. There’s some kinda Studio Ghibli movie playing on the large flatscreen TV that’s mounted on the far wall (the ‘wolves only seem to be half-watching it, but Stiles appreciates the attempted distraction), with an assortment of drinks and snacks laid out on trays around the blanket-den, and it all looks cosy as hell.

Stiles wants in.

Scott pushes himself upright when he spots the Sub lingering in the doorway, extending a welcoming arm towards him. Stiles goes willingly, shoving his phone back into his pocket and kicking off his shoes near the pile of clothes by the door. He briefly contemplates the benefits of stripping down to his underwear like the others have done, but to be honest, he doesn’t have the energy to spare. He’s fucking *exhausted.* Besides, he isn’t a Werewolf, so the skin-to-skin contact won’t affect his hormonal balance the same way it would one of the Beta’s.

“Hey,” Scott murmurs, tugging him down onto the cushions as soon as he’s within arm’s reach, wrapping him up in a tight hug. “Feeling better?”

Stiles nods, leaning into the embrace gratefully, lips curling into a smile as Isaac scoots closer on Scott’s other side to bump their foreheads together. He briefly contemplates the benefits of stripping down to his underwear like the others have done, but to be honest, he doesn’t have the energy to spare. He’s no longer drowning in his own guilt; but discipline sessions always totally drain him, and now that it’s over all he wants to do is sleep. And cuddle. Sleepy cuddles are a definite must right now.

“Where’s Derek?” Boyd asks, pushing himself up on Isaac’s other side to wrap an arm around the younger man, chin resting on the Sub’s shoulder. Isaac sighs sleepily and leans back against the Dom’s chest, eyes heavy-lidded.

“He went to check on Liam’s parents,” Stiles answers, glancing around for the teenager as he speaks.
He hasn’t seen the kid since they got back from Haven, but then between the Hale family and Liam’s own parents, the teenager’s barely had room to breathe for all the fussing. Not that Stiles can fault them for it; even the thought of what could have happened to the Beta if he’d slept in his bedroom another night...fuck. It’s enough to turn his stomach. Someone had been trying to poison the kid for weeks, and they’d all been completely oblivious.

Pushing the dark thoughts aside, he lets Erica tug him gently away from Scott’s embrace and towards the centre of the pack pile where Brett and Mason are waiting to sandwich him in a hug between them. Closing his eyes, Stiles leans into the contact gratefully, soaking up their easy, tactile affection like a dry sponge in water. He’s always felt a little clingy after a spanking but damn, right now he wants to wrap himself around all the Betas at once and never let go. Maybe it’s just his nesting instincts starting to kick in – they’re Derek’s Betas after all, and as Derek’s bonded, the pups are technically his, too. With everything that’s happened to the pack these past few days, his defensive urges don’t really come as a huge surprise.

“You smell happier,” Erica comments, pressing her nose against his temple, blond curls tickling the side of his face as she cuddles up closer to him. “Your scent was way off when you got back from Haven. And you didn’t talk for, like, a solid hour.”

“Sorry,” Stiles murmurs against her shoulder, and means it. He thought he’d been a little more subtle about his inner turmoil, but then there’s not a lot you can do to mask chemical imbalances and fluctuating body scents from a werewolf’s sensitive nose. “Kinda had a lot of stuff on my mind. I didn’t mean to worry anyone.”

“Hey, it’s cool,” Boyd reassures quietly, warm fingers curling over Stiles’ shoulder in a gentle squeeze. “You went through some serious shit today, you’ve more than earned the right to freak out. Ain’t nobody here’s gonna hold it against you.”

The Sub manages an almost-there smile, warmth pulsing in his chest. “Thanks, man.”

Someone kindly turns up the volume on the TV so that it’s more suitable for a human’s auditory range, and after that there’s not much noise from the pack, other than the faint whisper of skin on skin as the Betas nuzzle closer to each other, and the occasional sleepy sigh or contented rumble as they start to doze.

Stiles’ eyes feel itchy, his lids heavy, but he blinks away the fatigue stubbornly, determined to stay awake until Derek and Liam return. If Liam returns; there’s always a possibility that the teenager might want to stay with his parents after everything that’s happened, but Stiles kinda hopes that he doesn’t because he knows he won’t be able to sleep otherwise. He needs to have the pack all here, together, safe and protected where he can see them.

Scott’s warm hand strokes soothingly up his spine, the Dom leaning in close to whisper against his ear. “You okay?”

Stiles nods, carefully rolling over without waking up Brett (who’s dozed off beside him) and inches closer to his best friend so that he can rest his cheek against the ‘wolf’s bare chest. Isaac’s fast asleep on the Dom’s other side, head pillowed on Scott’s shoulder and a lanky arm wrapped snugly around his waist, lips slightly parted. Smiling at the sight, comforted by the familiarity of it all, Stiles reaches out to lightly card his fingers through the other Sub’s curls. Isaac gives an adorably sleepy little grunt of approval and nuzzles closer, only stilling when Scott turns his head to press his lips against the boy’s hairline.

It gets a lot harder to fight his growing fatigue after that. Most of the Betas have already dropped off, with Boyd and Scott being the only ones that Stiles knows for sure are still awake. Scott because the
Dom keeps stroking neck and shoulders soothingly (and it’s really fucking nice, but Stiles almost wishes he wouldn’t because it’s making him super sleepy), and Boyd because the glow of his cell phone is the only light in the room now that the movie’s ended and the TV’s been switched off. Stiles is ninety-nine percent certain the Dom’s playing Candy Crush, but he’s too tired to check.

He’s just on the brink of drifting off when he hears the door click open, and feels the Betas stir as one around him. Blinking his eyes into focus, he lifts his head from his Scott-pillow to peer through the gloom towards the entrance, something finally loosening in his chest as he sees Derek draping his shirt and jeans over the arm of the couch and nudging Liam further into the room.

“Hey,” Stiles murmurs, pushing himself up onto his elbow and reaching for the Sub, tugging Liam down beside him and into a hug as soon as he’s close enough. “You okay, bud?”

The teenager nods, hands fisting briefly in the back of Stiles’ t-shirt as he breathes a shaky sigh against the Sub’s shoulder.

There’s a third figure over by the door, and Stiles recognises Peter’s slighter build even in the dim light. The older wolf briefly tugs Derek closer by the scruff, the Alpha ducking his head a little so that his uncle can touch his forehead to Derek’s temple, before Peter nudges his nephew towards the puppy-pile in the centre of the room and slips quietly over to the armchair by the French windows, his gaze fixed on the darkened backyard and the looming forest beyond. Stiles feels a pulse of gratitude for the Dom’s protectiveness – with Derek beside him he’d feel satisfied, but with another ‘wolf awake and alert and on the lookout for danger, he feels safe.

A warm hand settles over the nape of his neck as Derek crouches down beside the nest of pillows and blankets, his smile tired but full of affection. Stiles returns it, and leans in to kiss the Dom gently, scooting back a little to make room for him. The other Betas have already moved over, squishing closer together so that their Alpha can join them, but Derek takes a moment to rake his eyes over his assembled pups, sparing a brief smile and nod of gratitude towards Boyd, who nods back and finally switches his phone off, promptly rolling over to curl around Erica and Isaac.

“Go to sleep,” Derek whispers, laying down on the outer edge of the cushioned nest beside him, stroking a hand over Stiles’ hip.

The Sub nods, pausing when he feels a warm body snuggle up to him from the other side. Craning his neck around, he spots Liam trying to smother himself between Stiles’ shoulders and smiles a little in the dim lighting, reaching back to squeeze the teenager’s forearm gently. When the Sub glances up at him in sleepy confusion, he jerks his head a little.

“Switch places with me,” he whispers.

Liam looks slightly puzzled by the request but obliges, climbing over Stiles to settle down between him and Derek instead. The Alpha pulls his youngest Beta closer to him, raising a mildly questioning eyebrow at his partner as he does so, but Stiles only smiles faintly and scoots closer to the pair, spooning Liam from behind and resting his chin on top of the Sub’s hair, tossing an arm over his waist.

The Sub gives a sleepy hum of contentment and reaches for Stiles’ arm to hug it tightly to his chest, and the older Sub is almost overwhelmed by the fierce pulse of protectiveness that suddenly flares up in his chest at the action. He doesn’t consider himself a particularly violent person, but right now he would willingly kill a man for so much as looking at Liam the wrong way.

Definitely nesting instincts, that’s for sure.
He hears a quiet breath of laughter, and glances up to see Derek smiling at him, warmth and humour softening the crinkles around his eyes as he leans in to press a kiss between Stiles’ eyebrows. The Dom clearly understands what he’s going through – hell, Derek’s probably been fighting similar instincts all day, what with him being the Alpha and all. Stiles doesn’t envy him in the slightest; it must be so fucking exhausting, being worried all the time. He doesn’t know how Derek manages to function at all, let alone co-manage a business.

“Sleep,” the Dom whispers again, and bumps his nose against the Sub’s forehead.

Curling himself just a fraction tighter around Liam, Stiles does just that.


He awakens again an undiscernible length of time later, absolutely roasting, and immediately regrets his decision to sleep in his jeans and t-shirt.

There are too-hot werewolf bodies snuggled up to him on all sides, and while Stiles appreciates the tactile contact, he’s also about ready to cook in his own skin. There’s a cool breeze coming from somewhere, and he lifts his head from the duvet to peer in the direction it’s blowing from, squinting through the darkness towards the French windows. One of them has been cracked open a few inches, and the cool night air it’s letting in is much appreciated.

Slowly, carefully, trying not to disturb the nest of sleeping pups or wake his mate, Stiles levers himself upright and crawls out of the furnace of werewolf bodies, tip-toeing out onto the back porch and running a hand through his sweat-damp hair once his feet hit smooth wooden panelling, tipping his head back with a smile as the breeze cools his burning skin.

“You should be asleep.”

Stiles doesn’t startle at the voice, but only because he’d already spotted the werewolf lurking in the far corner against the porch railings, and the words had been spoken so softly that they can scarcely be heard above the whisper of the wind teasing the leaves of the nearby trees.

He shrugs, moving across the porch to lean against the wooden rail beside the Dom, his sock-clad feet almost silent against the decking. “So should you. But here we are.”

Peter dips his head in a shallow nod of acknowledgement, his gaze still trained on the treeline in the distance. Silence lingers between them for several minutes, but not the awkward, uneasy muteness of strangers with nothing to say to one another; rather, it’s the comfortable silence of mutual
understanding, where nothing else needs to be said. They each already know why the other is out here at god-only-knows what hour in the morning. And Stiles appreciates the company; his instinctive need for tactile affection has been sated (for now), but he still isn’t keen on the idea of solitude after everything that’s happened to the pack recently. The Dom’s unobtrusive presence is comforting.

“My nephew seems inordinately fond of you,” Peter comments eventually, his tone mild and his voice still hushed.

Stiles’ lips twitch as he glances sideways at the ‘wolf. “You sound surprised.”

Peter tilts his head in what could perhaps be interpreted as a half-assed shrug. “He’s never shown much interest in settling down. He was so invested in his work at the Centre; in expanding his pack and training his Betas. I imagine you were an unexpected development.”

“Kinda took me by surprise, too,” Stiles admits, then huffs out a quiet laugh. “And I mean that literally.”

Peter glances up at that, curious. “Oh? He never did tell me how the two of you met.”

“I crashed my Jeep into his Camaro.”

“Well, that’s certainly one way to break the ice.” The Dom cracks a smile at his own joke, gaze flickering out across the backyard as the wind stirs up a rustling sound near the treeline. There’s another momentary lull between them before he continues, quieter still. “You’re good for him, you know. You’re calm and sharp-witted, but more importantly, you’re every inch as stubborn as he is. When’s the wedding?”

Stiles ducks his head to hide his smile, warmth stirring in his chest. “Haven’t got a date pencilled in yet, but I’ll let you know.” He picks at a loose splinter of wood on the rail. “I wanted to say ‘thank you’, by the way.”

“Thank you?” Peter echoes.

“For telling my dad that you’d been the one doing all that research on the Enforcers,” Stiles elaborates, glancing sideways at him. It had spared him the awkwardness of trying to fabricate an explanation on the spot in order to keep Danny’s involvement a secret. “I kinda suck at bare-faced lying.”

“So I’ve noticed,” Peter critiques, amused. “We’ll have to work on that.” He cocks his head a little to the side, brow arching again. “Unless Derek’s made that one of his ‘rules’?”

Stiles gives an apologetic grin, shrugging, and the Dom heaves a put-upon sigh.

“I suppose that’s what I get for raising him too well,” he says, resigned. “I really ought to have corrupted him a little more.”

“You can’t be that much older than him,” Stiles counters, and belatedly remembers that the Dom has a teenage daughter. To be fair, Peter looks early thirties at most, certainly a good deal younger than Talia and Alex (and hey have the whole ‘werewolf-mojo-keeps-me-young’ thing going on, so that’s saying something).

“I’m flattered,” Peter quips, amused. “But in a way, you’re right – I was only eleven when Derek was born. Kid followed me around everywhere, though, right up until I left for college, so it’s fair to say I had a hand in raising him. Spoiled him rotten, of course, but that’s between you and me.”
The mental image of Derek as a teeny-tiny ‘wolf pup toddling after his reluctant teenage caretaker is freakin’ adorable, and he opens his mouth to say as much, only to startle suddenly as his cell phone begins to buzz in his back pocket.

Pulling it out, he stares at the ‘Unknown Number’ alert across his screen for a moment, wondering what kind of advertising company would be calling him at this hour, before swiping his thumb right to accept and pressing the device to his ear.

“Hello?”

For a moment there’s nothing on the other end, just silence, and Stiles half expects to hear the quiet ‘beep’ of the call being ended. But then he hears it – the hitching rasp of faint, shaky breathing. Stiles feels himself frown a little, and sees Peter lean in a step closer, before a voice finally comes through.

“He’s coming.”

It’s quiet and tremulous, barely louder than a whisper, but it’s also achingly familiar.

“Lydia?” he breathes, feeling his heartbeat begin to quicken. “What-?”

“The left shoe. Promise me…promise me you’ll check it.”

Stiles glances down at his bare feet, bemused. “Lyds, I don’t understand. What’s going on?”

“They’re coming, please, you have to hurry.”

He clutches the phone so tightly the plastic creaks. “Who’s coming? Lydia, where are you?”

“I’m sorry,” the Switch replies, her voice trembling. “I can’t stop it. I can’t.”

And then she screams.

It’s deafeningly loud, even through the cell phone’s tinny speakers, shrill as a whistle and bloodcurdling, piercing him right to his heart. He yanks the phone away from his ear reflexively, flinching, a shiver of cold fear running through him.

“A banshee?” Peter breathes, face pinched, and Stiles can only imagine how much more piercing the screaming must be for a Werewolf.

There’s a scuffle from the other end of the porch as Scott comes stumbling out of the open French doors, eyes wide in panic, Derek and Isaac only half a pace behind him.

“Is that Lydia?” the Dom asks, crossing quickly towards him.

Stiles nods, and glances down at the cell phone sharply when the screaming abruptly cuts off. Call Ended 03:12. He stares at it until the screen goes dark, his breathing shallow and rapid, before thumbing it on again and pulling up his contacts, hitting the second name on the list. It’s a tense fifteen seconds while it rings, and he’s too wrapped up in his own fretting to even notice that the rest of his Pack have gathered around him in a tight semi-circle, looking worried and battle-ready.

“Stiles?”

“Allison,” he breathes, relief hitting him like a freight train, and sags back against the warm wall of muscle behind him as Derek wrap an arm around his waist supportively. “Are you okay?”

“I think so,” comes the fatigue-slurred reply. “What’s wrong, baby?”
Stiles feels like he’s going to vibrate out of his skin from nervousness. “Is Lydia with you?”

“Yeah, she’s…” There’s a horribly long pause, and Stiles can hear shuffling like the sound of bedcovers being thrown back. “Lydia?”

Her voice is louder now, sharper, more alert, and Stiles can do nothing but listen mutely and wait as the Switch moves about the house, searching for her wife.

“She’s not here,” Allison tells him eventually, sounding a little out of breath, her voice tight but otherwise composed. “And the front door’s wide open. There’s no sign of struggle, but her keys and her purse are still here. Fuck, and her shoes. Dammit, Lydia.”

“Shit.” Stiles glances towards his best friend. “Scott, call my dad. We need to get a search party out.”

“How did you know?” Allison asks, and Stiles can tell by her breathing that she’s moving again. “How did you know she wasn’t here?”

“Lydia called me,” he reveals. “Just a minute ago. Unknown number, so her cell phone must still be at home. Nothing she said was making any sense, and then she started screaming.”

“Another vision?” Allison guesses, her voice growing tense.

It’s no secret that the gift of premonition runs strong through the Martin family bloodline. It certainly isn’t the first time Lydia’s wandered off like this in the middle of the night, and she’s always returned unscathed on previous occasions. There isn’t usually a murderous, human-supremacist cult on the loose at the same time, though.

Stiles nods grimly, even though she can’t see him. “Seems that way. Look, don’t panic; Scott’s on the phone to my Dad, he’ll have officers on the lookout for Lydia in, like, thirty seconds. We’ll find her, she can’t have gone far. Remember last time? She only went to the park.”

“I need to look for her,” Allison insists, and Stiles can hear her stomping her way into her boots, the ripple of fabric as she hastily pulls some clothes on.

“Hey, no, you need to stay right where you are,” Stiles tells her, sharing a panicked look with Isaac. “Allison, it’s not safe—”

“I’ll call you back, Stiles,” she promises, and promptly hangs up.

Stiles bites off a curse and frowns down at the ‘Call ended’ message on his screen, before quickly thumbing Jackson’s nickname into the keypad and swiping call to dial up his cell phone.

“Your dad’s got three cruisers on the lookout for Lydia,” Scott tells him, phone in hand as he emerges from the house again. He sees Stiles’ pinched look and frowns a little. “What?”

Stiles shakes his head grimly, free hand squeezing Derek’s arm to his chest as he waits for Jackson to pick up. After a torturously lengthy period of time, the line finally crackles to life.

“Dude, what?” Jackson mumbles, clearly still half asleep. “Smiddle of the night, this better be good.”

“Lydia’s gone missing,” Stiles tells him flatly, because there’s no time to break it to him gently. “We think she’s having another vision walk. My dad’s sent out officers to find her, but Allison’s decided to go chasing after her on her own.”
“Allison did what?” the other Sub asks, sounding more alert now. “The hell is she-”

“You live, like, five minutes away from her house,” Stiles interrupts, talking quickly. “Can you and Danny go after her and make sure she doesn’t do anything stupid like go into fucking labour?”

“Danny’s pulling an all-nighter at the library,” Jackson replies, and Stiles can hear him moving about the bedroom, presumably stumbling into clothes. “But I can go. I’ll take her back to my place, if she’ll let me.”

“Sit on her if you have to. Just mind the baby.”

“Yeah, no shit.” Jackson curses as something crashes to the floor in the background. “I should go. Call me if you hear anything about Lydia, okay?”

Stiles feels his tense muscles relax fractionally. “You got it. Thanks, man.”

“We should go, too,” Isaac says as Stiles hangs up, tugging on Scott’s hand urgently. “We know her scent, it’ll be easier for us to track her down while the trail’s still fresh.”

“No,” Derek interjects, quietly but firmly. “I don’t want you wandering the streets at this hour, not when someone’s been targeting the pack. Let the police handle this.”

Stiles cranes his neck around to look up at the Alpha. “We can’t just sit here and wait, Der.”

“Yes you can,” the Dom insists, not unkindly, and gives his waist a gentle squeeze. “It’s not safe for you out there.”

“It’s not safe for Lydia, either,” Scott insists, with a stubborn sort of set to his shoulders that he inherited directly from his mother’s side of the family. “C’mon, Derek, please. She’s our friend.”

Derek glances between the three of them slowly, before closing his eyes briefly and exhaling a short, sharp sigh through his nose.

“Alright,” he agrees eventually. “But Peter and I are coming with you.”

Stiles turns to throw his arms around the Alpha’s neck in a grateful hug.

That’s exactly what he’d been hoping for. With Derek’s tracking skills and Peter’s years of experience, they’re sure to find Lydia in no time.
Hello, my dear readers! If you've stuck with this story, thank you ever so much, although I'd certainly understand if you'd lost interest after my brief TW hiatus. I'm afraid I got rather caught up in the Kingsman fandom. But I have returned! With a slightly shorter chapter than usual, but I wanted to give you something this week rather than make you wait another fortnight for the big action-packed chapter. Plus I really wanted some pack cuddles and nesting-momma Stiles.

Oh, and I now have a Tumblr! Feel free to come and say hello! :)

As always, thank you for reading, and let me know your thoughts! xxx
The drive to Lydia’s house seems to last hours, although in reality (at least according to the clock on the dashboard that Stiles spends a significant portion of the journey glancing at), it takes them exactly nineteen minutes.

The Sub fidgets restlessly the whole way there, silently urging Boyd (who’s driving the snazzy silver Porsche up ahead) to put his foot down and go a little faster, even though he knows they’re already pushing the legal limit as it is. Isaac’s hand will drift over periodically to squeeze his knee, a gesture that’s both grounding and reassuring, but Stiles can tell by the Beta’s thin-set lips that the other Sub’s just as worried as he is. It doesn’t help that Scott’s not in the car with them, either – he’s riding shotgun with Boyd in order to give the Dom directions to Lydia’s house; and since Isaac’s go-to coping mechanism during stressful situations is to plaster himself against Scott’s side like gluedrenched koala, the reason for his current malcontent is fairly self-explanatory.

With this in mind, Stiles lays his hand over the slender one gripping his knee and squeezes back as hard as he can.

At least they now make a fairly sizeable search party; initially only Peter and Derek were supposed to be joining them to help track down Lydia, but the rest of the Pack (once roused from sleep by the commotion on the back porch) had insisted on coming along too. Derek’s firm “no” had quickly softened to a “you don’t have to” before the stubborn insistence of his Betas had forced a reluctant sigh out of him and a murmured “alright, but stay close”.

The only exception to this rule had been Liam, for whom the Alpha’s stern “no” had remained unchanging no matter how much the Sub had tried to wheedle his guardian into caving.

“You’re not coming with us,” had been Derek’s final words on the matter, his voice low and firm even as he tugged the Beta close for a brief hug, hand cupped over the back of the Sub’s neck. “I need you here, where it’s safe.”

Liam had sagged against the Dom, all the fight going out of his posture, and from Stiles’ vantage point where he lingered in the doorway, he’d seen the Sub’s fingers clench in the back of Derek’s shirt.

“But I can help,” the teenager had tried faintly, the hint of a whine in his voice. “I’m a good tracker, you know I am. Scott and Isaac are freaking out, Stiles’ heartbeat is all over the place – how am I supposed to just sit here and wait? Lydia’s their Pack, Der.”

Derek had sighed, his gaze flickering over to where Stiles stood waiting, and for a moment he’d looked close to giving into the Sub’s pleas. But then he’d set his jaw, tightened his arms around the Beta, and dropped a kiss against the kid’s hair.

“Go on. Back inside, pup.” The Alpha had nudged a very pouty-looking Liam back towards the
front porch with a prompting tap to his rear, before turning on his heel and striding towards where the rest of the Pack had already begun piling into Boyd and Derek’s cars, the tense line of his shoulders suggesting that, despite his words, he wasn’t overly happy about leaving one of his cubs behind.

Stiles had caught Liam gently by the arm, a faint ache stirring in his chest at the younger Sub’s crestfallen expression. He’d given the Beta a wincing, sympathetic sort of smile, quietly promising:

“We’ll be home before you know it. And I’ll text you with updates, like, every ten minutes. Honestly, you’re gonna be so sick of me by the time we get back.”

Liam’s answering smile had been a small, wavering thing, but it had still been there. “Thanks, Stiles.”

Now, though, he’s starting to regret not trying harder to persuade Derek to let the kid tag along with the rest of them; Liam’s younger than him, and a Sub, and his bondmate’s youngest Beta, and all those elements (combined with Stiles’ most recent spike in nesting hormones) have led him to feel particularly protective of the younger man. If he were here in the car, Stiles might’ve been able to channel all his nervous energy into focusing on Liam’s needs, and it’d serve as an effective distraction from the turmoil of unpleasant emotions that are currently eating up his insides.

“Hey,” Isaac murmurs, turning his hand over to lace their fingers together briefly, leaning against Stiles’ side. “We’ll find her, dude. She can’t have gone far. She normally just wanders through the park for a couple of hours and falls asleep someplace random. We’ll all be laughing about it tomorrow, you’ll see.”

Stiles squeezes the Sub’s hand in return, nodding silently. God, he hopes the Beta’s right.

They’ve been at Lydia’s house no more than five minutes when Stiles’ phone suddenly starts vibrating in his pocket.

“Dad, hey,” he answers after a brief glance at the screen, hope stirring in his chest. “Did you find her?”

“I’m afraid not, son,” his father replies. “We’ve got a situation emerging downtown, I’ve had to divert all available units to respond.”

“What? But what about Lydia?” Stiles drags a hand through his hair restlessly. “Dad, you know how
spaced-out she gets after a vision, she can’t be out here on her own. Anything could happen to her.”

The Sheriff sighs heavily over the line, the sound almost lost amidst the garbled yelling and blaring sirens in the background. “I know, kiddo. Believe me, I’d much rather be out there looking for her with the rest of you, but I’m dealing with four separate arson attacks over here. The whole neighbourhood’s in chaos, I’ve had to call in additional help from across the county border as it is.”

“But Dad-”

“I’ll dispatch another team to help search for Lydia just as soon as we’ve got the situation under control,” John reassures, “but right now that’s the best I can do. I’m sorry.”

Stiles tugs at his hair agitatedly. “No, it’s-” He gusts out a short, sharp sigh and shakes his head, even though the Dom can’t see him. “It’s not your fault. Just…just promise me you’ll be careful out there, okay?”

“I promise,” his father answers quietly. The noise in the background grows louder still, and John mutters a low curse. “I need to go, son. Listen, Parrish and I both have our cell phones at the ready in case you need us, so don’t hesitate to call. Let us know if you find anything, alright?”

“Will do.”

“Atta boy. Stay safe, kiddo.”

Stiles’ lips twitch up at the corners, despite the leaden weight that’s sitting uncomfortably his gut. “Yeah. You too, Dad.”

He hangs up and heaves another sigh, dragging a hand down his face tiredly, then drops down to sit on the low wall that borders Allison and Lydia’s front lawn, both hands clenched tightly around his cell phone. He glances towards the house, where the front door gapes wide open, amber light spilling out from the hallway and onto the porch, casting shadows on the stone path that curves elegantly between the tailored flowerbeds. The rest of the Pack are still inside, searching for any sign of intrusion, familiarising themselves with Lydia’s scent – that is, with the exception of Mason (his only non-Werewolf Packmate) who’s leaning against the wall a few feet away from Stiles, thumbs moving rapidly over the screen of his phone.

“I’ve put out a ten-fifty-seven to the WPDS Centre,” the other Sub tells him without glancing up from the screen. “And I’ve uplinked a profile photo from Lydia’s twitter account - we’ve only got a small handful of surveillance outposts across the city, but if the Centre can forward it to TrafficStop, they’ll be able to pull footage from all the CCTV networks downtown. At least that might help to narrow down our options a little.” He finally lifts his head to peer across at Stiles. “What did your dad have to say?”

Stiles thumbs through his list of recent contacts to find Jackson’s number, swiping right to call the other Sub. “He’s had to pull back the search party. Some big emergency across town’s taken priority, but he’ll have officers back on the case as soon as things calm down.” A thought occurs to him suddenly and he turns to face the other Sub. “Hey, think you can jump online and see if any networks are talking about a fire in Beacon Hills?”

Mason gives him a weird look, but obligingly fishes his phone out again. “Yeah, man, no problem.”

Fidgeting as he listens to the dial tone, Stiles peers up towards Lydia’s house again, knee bouncing restlessly. He appreciates that the rest of the Pack are being so thorough about all this, but they really need to hurry the fuck up. Lydia could’ve fallen in a ditch somewhere and broken her leg, for all
they know.

“Hi, this is Jackson-”

Stiles almost jumps at the voice. “Jax, hey, any news on-”

“Sorry, I can’t come to the phone right now,” the recording continues pleasantly. “If it’s an emergency, you can contact my Dom on nine-two-five-”

“Shit.” Stiles hangs up, frowns down at then screen, then hits redial. “Come on, man.”

“Hi, this is Jackson. Sorry, I can’t-”

He hangs up again. “Fuck.”

“What’s wrong?” Scott asks, silhouetted in the doorway to the house. Seeing Stiles expression, he hops down from the porch and crosses over to them quickly, long legs eating up the distance in only a handful of paces. “Is it Lydia?”

Stiles shakes his head, brow furrowed. “Jackson’s not answering his phone. And haven’t been able to reach Allison at all since we left the Hale’s.”

Scott’s brown eyes fill with concern. “You think something might’ve happened to them?”

“I don’t know, man,” Stiles murmurs, and hits redial again. “But I don’t like it.”

It’s not like Jackson to ignore a bunch of missed calls like this. Sure, once upon a time he might’ve done it just to annoy Stiles, but it’s been years since they got over that frigid animosity that had plagued their earlier high school years and became tentative besties. And besides, given the severity of the situation they’re in, Stiles would’ve assumed that Jax would keep his phone close to hand in case somebody rang with an update. Something about the Sub’s sudden silence just doesn’t sit right with him.

"Hey, did you find anything in her shoes?" he asks distractedly, as he listens to the soft trill of the dialling phone.

Scott heaves a short, sharp sigh and shakes his head. "Must've checked about a hundred pairs. There was nothing special about the left ones. But Isaac's going through Allison's shoes too, just in case. Maybe he'll find something."

Stiles nods wordlessly, listening to the recorded voicemail message a second time.

“-seven-seven-two,” Jackson’s voice recites cheerfully. “Or you can leave me a quick message and I’ll get back to you as soon as I can.”

He waits for the monotone beep before taking a breath. “Jackson, hey, it’s Stiles. I’ve tried calling you, like, a bunch of times, but I guess you must’ve left your cell behind or something? Dumb idea, bud, even for you. I need you to not do that next time there’s an emergency, okay? Dick move. You have no compassion for the delicate state of my nerves right now. And you better not have gotten yourself into trouble, because if you wind up missing I’m gonna thump you so hard when I find you.”

Stop panicking. You don’t know for sure that something’s happened, maybe he left his phone on silent, maybe it ran out of charge.
“Look, just... just call me back when you get this, okay?” he manages, his voice growing tighter. “I’m worried about you, man.”

Scott nudges up against him, curling an arm around his shoulders in a comforting side-hug. Stiles leans into the contact gratefully as he pockets his phone again, gusting out another sigh. There’s a nervous sort of energy thrumming beneath his skin, an uneasy itch that no amount of pacing is going to soothe. Sitting here doing nothing is driving him crazy, they should be out there looking for his friends already, goddammit.

“Stiles?”

If not for Scott’s steadying arm, he might’ve tumbled backwards off the wall in surprise at the sudden shout. As it is, he startles violently, hand pressed against his breastbone, heart thundering beneath his palm like a tribal drum as he twists around to face the new arrival as they come sprinting up the road.

“Danny!” He swings his legs over the brickwork to hop down onto the sidewalk in front of the Dom, yanking him into a quick, tight hug. “Man, am I glad to see you.”

“Likewise.” Danny squeezes him in return, chest heaving as he tries to catch his breath. After a moment, he slides his hands up to grasp the Sub by his biceps, holding him at arm’s length, his expression grim as he shifts his gaze back and forth between Stiles and Scott. “Can one of you please tell what the hell is going on? All I got was this thirty-second voicemail from Jackson telling me that Lydia had gone missing, and that he was setting off with Allison to look for her.”

“She had another vision,” Stiles explains. “Called me out of the blue about forty minutes ago from an unknown number. She wasn’t making any sense, you know how she gets, and then she... well. Screamed.”

The crease in Danny’s brow deepens. “Shit. I knew something was wrong; I’ve had this bad feeling all night, it’s why I checked my phone in the first place. And now Jackson isn’t answering my calls.”

“Neither’s Allison,” Isaac adds grimly from Scott’s elbow, cell phone in hand, before turning to where the rest of the Pack have gathered on the lawn to listen curiously. “Der, there’s a chance we might be dealing with more than one missing person here.”

Derek nods as he approaches, brushing his fingers briefly through Isaac’s brown curls before vaulting effortlessly over the garden wall to stand beside Stiles.

“Friend of yours?” the Alpha queries softly, hand settling at the small of his back, and Stiles leans into the contact instinctively.

“Danny, this is Derek,” the Sub introduces after a brief pause in which the two men eye each other neutrally. “Derek, Danny. He’s Jackson’s Dom.”

Derek inclines his head, his expression softening to something warmer at the introduction as he offers Danny his hand. “I’m sorry we couldn’t meet under better circumstances. I hear your boyfriend hasn’t been responding to any of your recent calls?”

“Husband,” Danny corrects quietly, clasping the Alpha’s hand in a firm shake. “And no, not for the past forty minutes or so. He left me a voicemail a little while ago, but I haven’t been able to reach him since then.”

The Alpha nods again, his demeanour serious. “We’ll find him,” he promises quietly, then turns to address Stiles. “Did Lydia and Allison live alone?”
“Yeah, why?”

“Peter tracked a third scent marker,” Derek tells him grimly. “The imprint’s recent, they must’ve been here within the past half-hour at least.”

“What?” Stiles’ gaze snaps up to the older Hale, who’s leaning against the garden wall with arms crossed over his chest, brow furrowed. “Who?”

“Human male,” Peter replies. “Biologically dominant. Mid-thirties, at a guess. Picked the lock on the front door, went upstairs to the main bedroom and bathroom, and then looped back around the same way he came in. Presumably he left when he realised the house was empty.”

“You think he was after Allison or Lydia?” Stiles asks, stomach twisting at the thought.

Derek’s warm fingers stroke over the back of his head and down to squeeze his nape. “We can’t say for sure.”

“Regardless of their intentions, your friends were already gone,” Peter reassures. “That, at least, is something we can be glad of.”

“Not really,” Scott mutters, plastered against Isaac’s back and frowning down at the sidewalk. “She’s an Argent; the bastard wouldn’t have stood a chance against her.”

“She’s an Argent?” Peter echoes, his gaze flickering back and forth between Stiles and Derek. “Allison Argent?”

Beside Stiles, Derek has inexplicably grown still, his shoulders tensing, and Stiles guesses the Alpha’s heartbeat or scent or whatever must suddenly spike, because all the Betas are staring at him worriedly.

“It could be coincidental,” Derek suggests, but he doesn’t sound particularly convinced by his own argument.

“Or,” Peter counters neutrally, “it could be the work of the same bastards who trashed the support centre and used Argent’s van in a drive-by attack to set fire to your Betas.”

The Pack as a whole flinches, and Derek’s eyes bleed red for a fraction of a second before returning to their usual hue. “Shit,” the Alpha grunts. “We need to warn Chris.”

“Does somebody wanna explain why Allison’s surname is such a big fucking deal?” Stiles asks, brow furrowed as he glances between the two of them.

Derek shakes his head quickly, the muscles in his jaw twitching. “It doesn’t matter. Bottom line is, they’re missing and we need to find them.”

“But…”

“But now, Stiles,” the Alpha murmurs, and it’s the soft, almost pleading quality to his voice that makes the Sub swallow down the half-dozen questions he’s itching to ask.

Still, he files them away for a later date. Whatever’s happened in his Dom’s past to give the name ‘Argent’ such a weight to it was clearly something fairly significant, and Stiles wants to know. Still, Derek’s right – now isn’t the time for stories. Three of his friends are missing, and there’s this horrible sense of dread brewing within him that nervously insists they’re running out of time.
Chapter End Notes

An update?! Say whaaaat?

For those of you who voiced your concerns that this story was being abandoned, I assure you that this isn't the case. My muse is simply being stubborn and persistently writing new WIPs in other fandoms, thus temporarily neglecting this fic.

I'm aware that this chapter was significantly shorter than my usual 6K-12K limit, however I'm taking the advice of a fellow author and posting the action-heavy stuff in shorter, quicker updates in an attempt to keep my muse from backing out mid-chapter, as it has done these past few months. I already have parts 2 and 3 planned out in detail, and hoping my brain will find it less stressful/daunting to handle it in bites rather than one huge chapter.

Thanks for sticking with me, guys! Hoping to have the next "bite" posted in a week. <3

xxx
Donut Heaven is open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, a fact Stiles had been particularly happy to discover just over six years ago; that diner had kept him fed and caffeinated during several nasty bouts of pre-finales insomnia back during his senior year of high school. Its extended opening hours understandably makes it popular with the Beacon Hills police department, and although Stiles is certain their annual revenue must’ve gone down by a half after the cardiologist put his father on that low-fat, low-sodium diet, he has a sneaking suspicion that most of the junior cops still go behind Stiles’ back and buy the occasional bacon-maple special for the Sheriff.

But none of that matters right now; perhaps the most crucial fact about Donut Heaven is its location. Situated on the corner of Ridley Street directly opposite the entrance to Ashgrove Park, it’s more than likely that Lydia would have walked right past the diner if that’s where she’d been headed.

“You think maybe someone saw her?” Isaac asks, catching Stiles by the crook of his arm as they approach the eatery.

“Maybe,” he agrees, but doesn’t allow himself to get his hopes up.

So far the scent-trail has led them on a long, disappointing wild goose-chase through the neighbourhood, suggesting that Lydia had wandered around aimlessly for a significant length of time before she’d even placed the call to Stiles. She could have been missing for hours before any of them knew about it, and given that it’s stupid o’clock in the morning, they haven’t stumbled across any possible witnesses, either. It’s infuriating.

Peter brushes past Stiles to jog the last few feet over towards the diner’s entrance, leaning down to sniff at the door. “The scent’s stronger here,” he tells them without glancing up, crouching down further, the tips of his fingers brushing the surface of the sidewalk. “And it’s only an hour old, at most. She definitely leaned up against the glass, right here.” He indicates an area of the door at waist height. “Maybe she was only taking a break, who knows, but it increases the likelihood that someone inside might’ve seen her.”

Stiles nods and reaches back to catch hold of Derek’s wrist. “Only one way to find out for sure. C’mon.”

The young woman behind the counter glances up from her dismantled cell phone when their group enters the eatery, quickly swiping up the pieces and shoving them into the pocket of her colourful Donut Heaven apron, plastering on what Stiles can immediately identify as her ‘dealing with customers’ smile (he knows it all too well; it’s his default facial expression whenever he’s on reception duty at the hotel).

“Hi there,” she greets cheerfully. “Welcome to Donut Heaven, my name’s Anjani. What can I get you?”

“Actually, we were hoping you might be able to help us find someone,” Stiles says, stepping up to the counter, phone in hand. He’s already pulled up a picture of himself and Lydia, the Switch smiling
happily as she holds up her hand towards the camera to show off her engagement ring. “My friend Lydia went missing earlier this evening, we think she might’ve stopped by here a little while ago.”

Anjani peers at the phone for a brief moment, then tucks a lock of dark hair behind her ear and steps back a couple of paces to look through the side-door that presumably leads to some sort of kitchen area.

“Yo, Milo!” she shouts. “Can you come here for a sec, hon?”

There’s a brief pause, then the fucking tallest dude that Stiles has ever seen emerges from the side doorway (he has to duck down just to get through, holy shit), although as he approaches and the overhead lights glint off his bright silver hair, his height becomes significantly less alarming. Presumable he’s got Moonwalker’s blood in him – likely pretty far back in the family tree given how human the rest of his features seem to be, but it certainly explains his size and colouring. The young Walker leans into Anjani’s side, one huge hand settling on her slight shoulder.

“You okay?” he asks, his voice several octaves lower than anything Stiles had been expecting. The man’s gaze flickers towards the assembled group before coming to rest on Derek, and after a brief pause he tilts his head a little to one side as a show of respect, drawing Stiles’ attention to the collar around his throat that had previously gone unnoticed. “Alpha Hale? Somethin’ the matter, Sir?”

“They’re looking for that girl, Lydia – the one from before,” Anjani tells him, passing Stiles’ phone to the tall Sub.

Milo glances at the screen for all of two seconds before nodding. “Banshee, right? Not that we realised until she started screamin’ an’ all. She came by about an hour ago, actin’ like she was drunk or somethin’, y’know? So I figured I’d get her some water, sit her down, try an’ work out if she had someplace safe to go, or someone who could come pick her up. But she kept goin’ on and on about her style of shoes, or somethin’ – I didn’t really understand any of it, especially since she wasn’t wearin’ any damn shoes – but then she asked for a phone, so I let her use the one in the back.”

Stiles’ heart must be pounding loud enough for all the ‘wolves to hear its sudden uptick, but he doesn’t care. Finally they’re getting somewhere.

“She was talking about me,” he says hurriedly. “I’m Stiles, I’m the one she called. You didn’t happen to see where she headed off to after she, uh, did the screaming thing?”

“I followed her as far as the park gates,” Anjani answers, passing the phone back to him. “I tried to persuade her to come back inside and wait for someone, but I don’t think she even knew I was there. I wanted to follow her a little while longer, but I couldn’t leave Milo on his own, not with what’s been happening to enhanced folk these past few days. So I came back. Last I saw, she was heading up the path along the hill towards the playpark.”

Milo tugs her back against his chest in a backwards hug; the top of her head barely reaches his sternum.

“We tried callin’ the cops, just to let them know she might need some help gettin’ home,” the Walker continues. “But like I told the others, that scream of hers busted up our cells pretty bad. I even had to disconnect the phone in the back, she shorted out the power socket.”

“Others?” Danny echoes, sharing a quick glance with Stiles as he steps up to the counter, a faint crease in his brow, his gaze intense. “You’ve had other folk asking about Lydia?”

Milo nods. “Sure, man. This young couple came by in a fancy Porsche about fifteen minutes after
your Banshee friend left. The girl seemed pretty upset; hell, for a moment there I thought she’d gone into labour or somethin’. They both headed off in the car again when Anjee told ‘em where the girl had run off to. Then there was a cop who checked in about ten minutes after that to ask about a missing person, but he got called away pretty quick.”

Stiles curses again under his breath. If only his Dad had been able to wait another ten minutes or so before pulling all his officers back to Central – there had been a cop right on Lydia’s tail for a little while, and if shit hadn’t gone down on the other side of town, they probably would’ve found her by now.

Derek seems to realise that Stiles is internally bashing his head against a metaphorical wall, because he presses up closer behind the Sub and gives his hip a gentle squeeze.

“Thanks for all your help,” the Alpha says sincerely, and inclines his head towards the pair on the other side of the service counter. “I’ll be sure to stop by tomorrow evening for my usual. Say hi to your dad for me, Milo.”

“You got it, Sir.” The silver-haired Sub offers them a wave, and the group begins to filter back out through the door onto the silent, streetlamp-lit road.

“Jackson’s still not picking up,” Danny comments grimly, phone pressed against his ear as he peers towards the shadowy park gates across the street. “He and Allison can’t have been all that far behind Lydia when they got here; maybe they already found her.”

“That would explain why they aren’t answering their cells, right?” Isaac suggests, a hopeful sort of note in his voice. “Banshee screams mess with technology, maybe she had another vision or something.”

“Why’d they take the car, though?” Erica asks, in the process of twisting her long, blond hair up into a bun at the back of her head, leaving a couple of curly strands hanging down to frame her face. “The park’s only sixty feet away, why didn’t they ditch it?”

“Maybe they took a short-cut,” Mason suggests, attention still glued to his cell phone even as he lets Brett zip up his jacket against the cool night air. “There’s a parking lot just off Hartley Avenue, it’s right behind the playground – I take my kid sister there all the time. If they wanted to catch up to Lydia and knew she was headed in that direction, it’d make sense to drive there first.”

Danny turns as though to immediately head in that direction, but both Stiles and Scott catch hold of him simultaneously, halting his progress.

“Dude, I know you’re worried about Jackson,” Stiles murmurs and Scott nods his agreement, brown eyes soft with sympathy as he squeezes the Druid’s arm. “But running off on your own isn’t the smartest idea right now.”

“He’s right,” Peter agrees, stepping up behind the trio to lay a comforting hand on Danny’s shoulder. “It isn’t safe to be flying solo, even if you’ve got the earth spirits on your side.” He gives the younger Dom a significant look that Stiles interprets as a silent confirmation that Peter perhaps understands the extent to which Danny downplays his true Druid powers. Fucking telepath, that ‘wolf. “Stick with us a little longer, we’ll help you find your boy.”
Unfortunately, following Lydia’s tracks proves to be more difficult than they’d initially anticipated.

“I don’t get it.” Isaac glances back and forth between the two trails that branch off from the main path up ahead, one headed over the hill towards the playpark and the other curving back down, presumably through the woodland area they had just passed. “How can her scent be coming from both directions?”

Peter’s crouching down on the patch of grass between the two paths, fingers skimming over soil and leaves, nostrils flaring as he sniffs the air. “She must have doubled back on herself.”

“And there’s no way of knowing which route she eventually set her heart on?” Stiles guesses despondently, flexing his hands, about ready to start pulling his hair out in frustration.

The Dom shakes his head, mouth set in a thin, grim line. “Both sets of tracks are fresh, it’s impossible to tell which is more recent – the difference between them might be less than fifteen minutes.”

Stiles bites back another curse and just about manages to refrain from taking out his frustrations on a particularly unfortunate branch nearby. Thankfully, the buzz of his cell phone provides a welcome distraction, and he pulls out the device to bring up Liam’s latest text.

_Is she in the park?_ the message reads. _Was the donut guy right?_

Sighing softly, Stiles types back a quick reply to summarise their newest unexpected roadblock. As promised, he’s been keeping the younger Sub appraised of their progress, and the whole experience has been surprisingly therapeutic. It’d be counterproductive to voice his frustrations aloud to the rest of the search party, especially with Danny still fretting about Jackson, but typing them out via text has been a great way to vent some of those negative feelings, and Liam’s unshakeable optimism has helped to perk him up at every turn.

_Dude, there’s a lot of you,_ comes Liam’s answering text a few moments later. _Maybe you could split into teams or something?_

“Maybe we should split up?” Isaac suggests suddenly, as though reading his Packmate’s thoughts. “We’d cover more ground that way.”

“Agreed.” Peter stands, brushing soil from his hands as he approaches the group. “There’s enough of us that we’ll still have safety in numbers, Derek.”

“I track best in the woods,” Scott pipes up, moving closer to bump up against the Alpha’s side. “So do Erica and Brett. Why don’t we head that way, back down the hill? If the trail goes cold or doubles back on itself, we can catch up to the rest of you after.”

Derek glances towards the darkened path in question, looking torn for a moment, then heaves a short, sharp sigh and nods his consent. “Alright,” he agrees, one hand coming up to rest against the side of Scott’s neck. “But Boyd goes with you, he’s the better fighter. The rest of us will head up that way towards the playground. Signal us if you run into any trouble.”

Scott nods and ducks out from underneath the Alpha’s hand, crossing over to Isaac to peck a quick kiss against his temple before hurrying off down the path towards the woods with his assembled team.
“Derek?” Mason glances after the departing group, then back towards his Alpha. “You mind if I…?”

The Dom reaches out to smooth a hand over the Sub’s short, dark hair. “It’s alright. Go with Brett.”

The human flashes Derek a grateful smile, nods towards Stiles, then dashes off to catch up with the rest of his Packmates.

“You’re the only one closely familiar with Jackson’s scent,” Peter comments quietly, and Stiles glances over to see the ‘wolf settle a comforting hand on the back of Isaac’s neck as the Beta peers off into the gloom after his Dom.

Isaac takes a deep, steadying breath and squares his shoulders, visibly wrenching his gaze away from the second path. “I know. It’s okay.”

It’s clearly not okay (and Stiles can empathise, he’s not keen on the idea of being split up from Derek given all that’s happened to the Pack over the past few days), although Isaac hides it well. He doesn’t protest, though, when Derek tugs him into a quick sideways hug and drops a kiss against his hair.

“It won’t be for long,” the Alpha promises quietly, then turns to seek out Stiles, extending a hand towards him. “Come on. The sooner we find your friends, the sooner we can call the others back.”

The huge, shadowed playground has just begun to loom in the far distance (a disjointed mess of darkened angles on the horizon), when Danny suddenly crumples to the ground right in the middle of the path.

“Whoa!” Stiles manages to catch the Dom’s arm and slow his descent a little, but it doesn’t keep Danny from crying out when he hits the dirt.

Derek is there in a split second, crouching down at the younger Dom’s side, grasping Danny by the shoulders to ease him into a sitting position. “Danny? What’s wrong?”

“I don’t know. It’s my leg, it- aah!” The younger man spasms and presses both hands against his upper thigh. “Fuck!”

Stiles fumbles to pull his cell out to give them better visibility. In the harsh white glow of the phone’s flashlight, Danny looks like shit, his skin almost grey in colour, his face creased in pain.

“Dude, what happened?” Isaac crowds in close, eyes wide and worried as he reaches for Danny’s fingers as though to pry them away from the wounded area. The moment their hands touch, thick black veins work their way up the Beta’s forearm and he sucks in a sharp, startled gasp.

“Fuck, is it broken?” Stiles demands, blood pulsing loudly in his ears as he grips Danny’s shoulder.
He’d seen the Dom fall, the limb couldn’t have taken that much impact – it hadn’t even twisted underneath him, the Druid had landed on his ass rather than his leg.

Danny shakes his head, his breaths coming out in shallow, ragged gasps. “It’s not me,” he grits out, and the height of fear in his voice makes something cold twist up tight inside Stiles’ chest. “It’s Jackson, he’s- fuck!” The Dom hunches over his leg a little further, eyes clenched tight shut. “He’s hurt.”

Peter, who’d been in the process of feeling along Danny’s lower leg as though looking for breaks, glances up sharply. “You’re soul-bonded?”

The Druid nods, still panting. The Dom doesn’t seem capable of words at the moment, so Stiles feels compelled to answer for him.

“Danny’s an apprentice under the High Council,” he tells the two Hales quickly. “Scott put him in touch with Deaton, and the Doc helped him and Jackson perform the ritual a couple of months back. The bond’s legal.”

“I wasn’t suggesting otherwise,” Peter reassures calmly.

Stiles winces, realising he’d jumped the gun a bit there in assuming that the Dom would suspect illegal activity. In all fairness, Danny does often dabble in a lot of things that might not be considered strictly lawful, but when it comes to his Druid apprenticeship, he does everything by the book. Besides, the soul-bond ritual is fucking dangerous if it isn’t performed correctly (one of the reasons why it’s illegal to be attempted without the presence of a member of the High Council), and Danny would never risk Jackson’s safety like that.

“It’s never been this strong before,” the Druid manages, and when his eyes come up to meet theirs, the fear and panic in his gaze is enough to make the Sub’s heart beat faster still. “He’s hurt bad, Stiles.”

Derek reaches out to grip the younger Dom’s shoulder. “Can you stand?”

Danny drags a shaking hand through his hair, then nods and reaches beneath the collar of his shirt to tug out the pendant that hangs about his neck by a thin leather cord. Gripping it tightly in one clenched fist, the Dom closes his eyes and takes several deep, slow breaths. Stiles feels something shift in the air around them, a barely-perceptible sort of stirring that turns his skin to gooseflesh and sends a shiver down his spine.

Then the moment passes, and Danny’s tucking the pendant away again, the creases of pain gone from around his eyes. He accepts Isaac’s helping hand and heaves himself to his feet, swaying for only a moment before squaring his shoulders.

“Jackson’s not in the park,” he says, with only the faintest hint of a tremor in his voice. “I don’t know where he is, but I do know that much.”

Stiles has been friends with Danny long enough to trust the Dom’s gut feeling on most things. Back in elementary school, their third grade class had gone on a field trip up in the mountains to look at geological rock formations, and halfway there Danny had sat down in the middle of the path and told everyone that they shouldn’t go any further. The young boy had convinced Jackson, who’d convinced Lydia, who’d dragged Stiles and Scott down too, and the five of them had sat there a full hour and refused to move, much to their teacher’s growing frustration. Eventually the class had been forced to head back down to the bus so that they wouldn’t be late getting home; Stiles had been kept behind at the school office with Scott and the others and made to wait for his Dad to come and pick
him up, inwardly blaming Danny for getting him into trouble for nothing. Only when his Dad had arrived, he’d been white-faced and thin-lipped, and his hands had been shaking faintly as he’d snatched his son up off the bench and into his arms. It had been a full week before Stiles had learned the truth – that the information centre at the end of the trail that he and his class had been due to visit was now buried under fifteen feet of rock and mud, swept halfway down the mountain by a huge landslide.

Ever since that day, he’s has been careful never to doubt Danny’s instincts.

“I’ll call my Dad,” Stiles says, already hitting the dial button and pressing the device to his ear. “If we’ve got evidence that Jackson’s hurt and officially MIA, it’ll become a priority alert. Even if he can’t spare a unit, he can put out an APB in the meantime, get people on the lookout for him.”

“We should still check out that parking lot Mason was talking about,” Derek suggests, although he needn’t have bothered – both Isaac and Danny are already jogging off up the path towards the shadowed playground in the distance.

Stiles tries to keep up, but without his phone’s flashlight, the trail suddenly becomes significantly more treacherous, and he trips over his own feet in the darkness more than once. It takes him almost face-planting into a tree to realise that his fucking shoelaces have come undone, by which time he’s already hit redial half a dozen times in an effort to reach his father. And seriously, what is with this new trend of not answering your cell? It’s fucking annoying.

There’s an open, grassy area at the end of the trail beyond the treeline, and Stiles can just about make out the darker shapes of four people halfway between himself and the playground, although they seem to have come to a halt. They’ve all turned to face the treeline to the far right of the huge field (to Stiles’ eyes, it’s nothing but a wall of darkness, but perhaps their ‘wolfy senses are tingling, or something), and as he watches, Isaac breaks away from the group and goes sprinting off in that direction.

“Lydia!” the Sub yells, and Stiles’ heart lurches up into his throat.

“Isaac, wait!” Derek cautions, his voice just loud enough for Stiles to make out, and sets off at a run to catch up with his Beta, Danny and Peter on his heels.

Stiles trips over his laces again in his haste to follow them, and this time the momentum carries him to the dirt, phone flying out of his hand to skitter across the path and beneath a bush as he hits the ground hard.

“Fuck,” he hisses, scraped palms making themselves immediately apparent as he rolls over and pushes himself up into a sitting position. “Son of a bitch.”

Tying his shoes hurriedly (take that, asshole), he begins to feel along the foliage beneath the bush for his cell phone, squinting in the darkness, swearing under his breath when twigs and dry leaves aggravate the sting in his scuffed-up palms.

“Stiles!”

He swears his heart jumps clean out of his chest at the sudden voice behind him, and he almost pitches headfirst into the bush as he flails, turning around quickly to stare up at the new arrival in shock.

“I heard you fall,” Liam says breathlessly, the words coming out in a rush as he drops down into a crouch, worried eyes scanning him for injuries. “Are you okay?” He tugs Stiles’ hands up by the
wrist and gives a quiet, displeased whine at the sight of the bleeding palms. “Aw man, you’re hurt.”

Stiles finally manages to stop gaping at the teenager long enough to find his voice.

“Dude, what the hell?” he hisses, trying to keep his voice hushed – Derek’s going to find out eventually, but there’s no harm in trying to delay the inevitable. “You were supposed to stay at home.”

“I couldn’t just sit there and do nothing,” the younger Sub gripes, adjusting his hold so that he can curl his fingers gently against Stiles’ palm. The burning sting immediately vanishes. “Laura and Adam got called into work; there’s been a whole bunch of arson attacks on the other side of town, it’s all over the news. Dad’s gone too, the emergency department’s running escalation protocols, they’re calling in all the local medics. Everyone back home’s doing what they can to help, I couldn’t just stand back and watch.”

On the one hand, Stiles understands the kid’s motivation, and kinda doesn’t blame him for wanting to help (in Liam’s shoes, he would’ve done the exact same thing), but he also knows Derek had wanted the Beta to stay behind for a good reason, and he isn’t going to be happy when he finds out the Sub chose to disobey him.

“Here.” Liam leans over to snatch up Stiles’ phone out of the undergrowth. “You dropped this.” The teen watches him carefully as he passes it back. “C’mon, dude, don’t be mad at me. Please?”

Damnit. Those eyes are worse than Isaac’s

Stiles heaves a quiet sigh and scrubs a hand through his hair. “I’m not mad,” he reassures, allowing Liam to help him to his feet. “Well, okay, I’m a little mad – did you seriously ask me all those questions about the search just so you knew where to find us?”

Liam gives a guilty little shrug, fiddling with the Sub-band on his wrist. “Not from the start. I really was gonna stay at home. But then everything kicked off and I just got tired of doing nothing, y’know?”

Yeah. I know,” Stiles admits, because boy is he familiar with that feeling. Stems from being the son of a Sheriff and watching his father get called out to emergency after emergency when he was too young to be able to do more than hug the man goodbye and hope for the best. He sighs again and shoves his phone back into his pocket. “Derek’s not gonna be happy about this, dude. You know that, right?”

He’s never seen the Dom properly lose his temper about something; Derek’s so calm most of the time, he wonders if the man’s even capable of really blowing his fuse. Hell, his whole family’s got that Zen vibe going on, maybe it’s just genetics at play. Something that makes him biologically slow to anger or something. Stiles can’t imagine what ‘pissed off’ even looks like on a Hale.

“Liam.”

Oh. Probably something like that.

“Hi, Uncle Peter,” Liam utters meekly, wincing, shoulders hunched as he glances towards the other ‘wolf.

Peter crosses the distance between them in a few brisk strides, looming over the younger Beta, his expression stern as he squeezes Liam’s nape and gives him a gentle shake, like a wolf picking up a cub by its scruff.
“I take it you have a good explanation for being here?” the Dom asks, in a voice that’s deceptively cool and even.

“Um…” Liam ducks his head, shifting from foot to foot, then glances up meekly at his uncle. “No?”

Peter glares at him a moment longer, then heaves a resigned sigh, his expression softening marginally. “At least you’re honest.” He gives the youth another gentle shake. “Not that it’ll save your hide when Derek finds out.”

Stiles and Liam wince in unison.

“Well, I suppose there’s no sense in sending you home again,” the Dom comments, and glances over his shoulder, back towards the open grassy area. “Come on, we need to catch up with the others. And stay close.”

Stiles has to jog to keep up with Peter’s long, brisk strides. “Why’d Isaac run off like that? Did he find Lydia?”

Peter shakes his head, reaching out to catch Stiles with one arm as the Sub trips over an uneven patch of grass, but he doesn’t slow his pace.

“The scent trail’s stronger beyond the treeline,” the Dom explains. “Isaac was standing downwind from it when something moved in the woods. But it wasn’t Lydia.”

Stiles doesn’t quite like the phrasing behind that statement. “Um. What was it?”

“Something else. Someone else.” Peter pauses, hand pressed flat against Stiles’ chest to halt him as he sniffs the air. “Whoever it was ran as soon as they realised we’d heard them.” He stiffens, then moves suddenly to place himself directly between the Subs and the treeline. “Although they didn’t run far, it seems.”

A chill running down his spine, Stiles pulls his phone out of his pocket, ready to dial 911 at the first sign of trouble. He peers around the Dom cautiously, but in the gloom he can barely differentiate the trees from their shadows, let alone spot their unexpected visitor.

“Have they seen us?” he whispers, reaching out without looking to grab hold of Liam’s wrist, anchoring the youth at his side just in case the younger Sub gets any sudden ideas.

Peter’s silent for a moment, then shakes his head, voice low as he replies, “Not yet. They’re not enhanced; human male, Dominant.” He gives a low, rumbling growl and seems to broaden his stance to further shield them behind him. “He’s armed.”

Liam presses in closer to Peter’s back, standing on tip-toes to peer over his shoulder. “We need to warn Derek,” he whispers urgently.

The Dom has gone completely still – for a long minute he hardly seems to breathe – as he stares into the shadowed treeline.

“No,” Peter murmurs after a moment, and the tone of absolute serenity is far more frightening than anything else Stiles has encountered so far this evening. “We need to run. Now.”

In a flash of movement, he’s twisting around and seizing both Liam and Stiles by their forearm, dragging them along behind him as he sets off towards the playground at a dead sprint, the soft grass cushioning the sound of their footsteps as they run.
Peter doesn’t stop until they’ve ducked behind the bulk of a climbing wall, grasping Stiles by the shoulder to urge him into a crouch.

“Stay down,” he murmurs, utterly unaffected by the recent exertion, whereas Stiles is thoroughly winded and fighting to catch his breath.

Liam inches closer to the Dom’s side. “Uncle Peter, what about De-”

“Quiet,” Peter hushes him quickly, still low and calm, and the Beta falls silent, crouching shoulder-to-shoulder with Stiles behind the wall. A long, tense minute passes before the Dom finally relaxes his stance. “They didn’t see us. You should be safe here.”

Stiles frowns up at him. “What? Dude, we can’t stay here.”

“Yes you can.” This time, the Dom’s tone brooks no argument. “You’re going to call your father and tell him there’s an armed man trying to hunt you down, and you’re both going to wait here until the police arrive.”

“But-” Liam tries to protest, only to quieten under a stern look from his uncle.

“This isn’t up for negotiation,” he tells them, but softens the sting of the words with a gentle hand in Liam’s hair. “I need you safe.” Fingers brush lightly through Stiles’ hair as well. “Both of you. Derek won’t be pleased if something happens to-”

Peter’s heads snaps up sharply, the movement sudden enough to make Stiles jump.

“What it is?” he asks, his voice hushed.

A muscle in the Dom’s jaw twitches, hands clenching into fists. The silence of the night is suddenly shattered by a low, distant howl. Both Peter and Liam react instantaneously, postures tensing, eyes glowing a fierce amber in the dim light, and features sharpening in a partial-shift.

“Derek,” Liam breathes, eyes wide and fearful, surging to his feet.

An ice-cold vice closes around Stiles’ lungs and he scrambles up after the pair. “That was Derek?”

“He’s in trouble,” Peter says, low and urgent. He turns his piercing gaze on Stiles. “Call your father. Now.”

“But if Derek’s in trouble-” Stiles tries to argue, only to be pinned by the Dom’s burning amber gaze.

“Then he’ll want you both as far away from danger as possible,” Peter says firmly. “Stay. Here.”

And then he’s gone, sprinting off into the night. Stiles bites out a low curse, kicks the climbing wall in frustration, and drops down to sit next to Liam as he pulls out his phone with shaking hands.

His father’s phone rings through to voicemail again, and he’s so frustrated he could smash the fucking thing to pieces, but thankfully saner thoughts prevail. Instead he pulls up Deputy Parrish’s number from his emergency contacts list and hits dial.

“C’mon,” he whispers, peering around the edge of the climbing wall to make sure they’re still alone. “C’mon, c’mon, pick up…”

And audible click, then, “Parrish here.”

“Oh thank fuck,” the Sub breathes. “Jordan, it’s me.”
“Stiles?” The officer’s tone immediately shifts from cheerful professionalism to parental concern. “What is it, bud? Did you find Lydia?”

Shaking his head, even though the other Sub can’t see him, Stiles takes a steadying breath and rushes to explain, “Lydia’s still missing, but she’s not the only one – we can’t find Jackson and Allison, either. We’re pretty sure Jackson’s been injured somehow, but Danny doesn’t think he’s in the park anymore, and the Pack’s trying to track down Lydia’s scent but it’s all over the place, and now there’s an armed dude in the woods hunting us and I think something’s happened to Derek, you gotta send us backup—”

“Hey, whoa, slow down,” Jordan urges, and Stiles can tell by his breathing that he’s moving. “Take a deep breath for me, bud. That’s it. Now, tell me that last part again.”

Fighting to get his fear and anxiety back under control (he’s this fucking close to a panic attack, he can feel the familiar pressure threatening to crush his lungs), Stiles does as instructed, gripping onto Liam’s arm when the Beta nudges up against his side.

“We were following Lydia’s tracks through Ashgrove Park,” he explains, still speaking quickly but the words far less garbled now. “Derek and the others had gone on ahead, we were supposed to be catching up. Then Peter said there was someone behind the treeline, someone armed. I think he attacked Derek.”

Saying the words aloud makes the panic cloy even hotter in his throat, and he has to fight to keep his breathing even.

“We’re in the playground,” he adds, voice tight. “Me and Liam. Peter told us to wait here and call for help. Jordan, please, you gotta send someone, I think the others are in danger.”

“Hold on, kid, I’m coming,” the Phoenix reassures, and Stiles hears the sound of a car door slamming shut before a muffled radio crackles to life, and then Jordan’s talking again. “Central, this is Parrish. I need a 10-34 to Ashgrove Park: three potential 207’s and a confirmed armed assailant, casualties probable. I’m en route to the scene, requesting further assistance.”

Hearing the emergency call being put out helps to ease the panic building in his chest; for a few moments, Stiles can breathe easy again.

“I’m ten minutes out, tops,” Jordan promises, and Stiles can hear the wail of the patrol car’s sirens in the background. “Stay where you are, keep yourselves hidden. I’ll come find you, okay?”

Stiles agrees, and manages to bring himself to hang up, because asking Parrish to stay on the line with him seems childish. He stares at the Call Ended message on his screen, squeezing the phone hard enough that the plastic casing creaks, before pulling up his recent contacts and thumbing Allison’s name again. If he has to sit here and wait, the least he can do is keep trying to contact his missing friends.

Beside him, Liam suddenly jerks upright, eyes still burning amber in the darkness but his attention now drawn in another direction.

“What?” Stiles whispers, heartbeat picking up again. “What is it?”

Liam glances down at the phone in Stiles’ hand, then back towards the opposite side of the playground. “I think,” he murmurs, “I can hear a ringtone.”
Chapter End Notes

Bad shit's about to go down, ya'll. Buckle up for the ride.

(Also, feel free to yell at me in the comments, I know that was a cruel place to end the chapter.)
Thanks for reading! :)
xxx
Liam glances down at the phone in Stiles’ hand, then back towards the opposite side of the playground. “I think,” he murmurs, “I can hear a ringtone.”

Stiles is on his feet in a flash. “Dude, what? Where?”

“Somewhere over this way.” Jumping up, the Beta brushes past him and moves quickly around the towering jungle gym to vault effortlessly over the coloured fence that borders the playground, setting off down the gentle grassy slope beyond at a brisk jog.

Stiles follows behind, jumping the fence with considerably less grace than the teenager, nearly losing his footing on an abandoned jump rope that’s laying hidden in the grass as he hurries to catch up. He almost collides with the younger Sub when Liam comes to a sudden halt.

“It’s stopped,” the Beta says, and reaches back to tug on the side of Stiles’ shirt frantically. “Dude, call her again, it must’ve gone to voicemail.”

Stiles obligingly hangs up and hits redial, heart in his throat as he watches the ‘wolf. Liam tilts his head to one side, listening intently, before his gaze suddenly snaps over to the left and he heads off in that direction. He leads Stiles towards a nearby path that seems to head further down the hill, fenced in on either side by a row of trees, and it isn’t long before the faint, purring trill of a ringtone becomes audible even to human ears. With a thrill of both hope and fear shooting down his spine, Stiles quickens his pace to match the younger Sub’s gait until they’re both running.

At the bottom of the hill, the footpath opens up onto a spacious parking lot, deserted save for a single car…a very familiar-looking silver Porsche, its front doors thrown wide open and the inner light still on.

“Jackson!” Stiles yells, sprinting across the asphalt towards the vehicle, blood pulsing loudly in his ears as panic begins to set in. “Allison!”

Please no, please no, please no…

Finding the vehicle empty comes as one helluva relief, and Stiles sags against the side of the car to catch his breath, eyes raking over the spotless leather interior. There’s no blood, no bullet holes, no obvious signs of a struggle. Thank fuck.
“Stiles.” Liam touches his elbow to get his attention, then holds out an iphone towards him. “I think it might be Allison’s.”

He doesn’t need to look at it twice to know the Beta’s right. Taking the device and turning it over in his hands (the screen’s slightly scuffed, but other than that it’s pristine), he heaves a short, sharp sigh.

“At least we know they were both here,” he mutters, shoving the phone into his back pocket to keep it safe. “Where did you find it?”

The teenager turns as though to gesture towards the spot in question, but suddenly his posture tenses, gaze snapping towards the entrance to the parking lot. In a flash, he’s seized Stiles by the wrist and is dragging him behind a row of nearby bushes to hide them from sight.

“Someone’s coming,” Liam whispers.

Stiles can hear it now, the low rumble of an approaching vehicle. He crouches down a little further, holding his breath as the sound grows louder, and watches in silence as a BHPD patrol car with its headlights switched off suddenly turns into the parking lot. Stiles lets out his breath loudly, relief soaring through him.

“It’s Parrish,” he says, grinning, as the patrol car comes to a halt near Jackson’s abandoned Porsche. The driver’s-side door opens and a uniformed figure steps out, and Stiles is already jumping up from behind the bush to close the distance between them at a run. “Jordan!”

The officer turns at his shout, bringing Stiles up short with a pang of disappointment, because that isn’t Parrish.

“Oh,” he says, losing some of his enthusiasm. “Deputy Haigh.”

The cop’s stares at him a moment longer in apparent surprise, before his features soften in a warm, friendly smile. It’s perhaps the nicest expression Stiles has ever seen grace the Dom’s face, and it looks ten different kinds of wrong on him.

“Stiles,” Haigh greets, coming around the car slowly. “What’s going on? What are you doing out here at this time of night?”

The Sub feels his brow crease a little. “Dispatch didn’t tell you?”

“They’ve kinda got their hands full with those arson attacks across town,” the deputy answers, and opens the back door to his car. “Hop in, kid, I’ll take you home.”

Stiles shakes his head quickly. “Forget about me, you gotta go help Derek and the others. They’re in danger, somebody in the woods attacked them, Peter says the dude was armed and—”

“Dispatch already sent a couple of units to help your friends,” Haigh reassures, one hand raised palm-outwards to stay the Sub’s panicked rambling. “They’re okay. Come on, buddy, it’s not safe for you out here – how about I take you back to the station? Your dad’s worried about you.”

“He’s lying.”

Liam emerges from the bushes nearby and comes to stand at Stiles’ elbow, a frown creasing his brow, his gaze distrusting as he regards the officer.

“About the other units,” the teenager elaborates. “And about Derek.”
Haigh sighs, a hint of frustration creeping into his expression. “I’m only trying to calm things down,” the Dom tells them quietly. “Stiles looks about ten seconds away from a panic attack. I just want to get the both of you someplace safe, alright?”

There’s a whole shit-ton of alarm bells going off in the back of Stiles’ mind. Why had the deputy’s headlights been off? If dispatch hadn’t sent him, what the fuck was he doing in the park at 3am, when the rest of the force had been sent to deal with the arson crisis on the other side of town? And why the fuck was he being so nice all of a sudden? He’s never so much as smiled at Stiles before, and now he’s acting like they’re best pals or something.

“How did you know where to find us?” he asks slowly, inching closer to Liam and putting himself half a pace in front of the Beta to shield him from the Dom. “I only spoke to Jordan a few minutes ago, and he never mentioned us to Dispatch.”

“Well, shit.” Haigh adjusts his stance marginally, his expression shifting to something far less friendly, and then suddenly he’s levelling a gun straight at the pair of them. “You had to make things difficult, didn’t you, Stiles? You weren’t supposed to be here. And I’m not allowed to leave witnesses.”

Liam growls, eyes glowing amber in the darkness, and moves as though to step in front of the other Sub.

“I wouldn’t do that, if I were you,” Haigh warns in a quiet, conversational tone. “You might be able to survive a bullet to the chest, wolfboy, but Stiles here? Not so much.” He gestures to the open car door with his free hand, slowly side-stepping away from the vehicle, keeping his gun trained on the pair. “Get in, both of you. And drop your cell phones while you’re at it.”

Reaching into his side-pocket, he pulls out his own phone, wincing as the device clatters noisily when it hits the floor, followed soon after by Liam’s. Allison’s cell phone is still nestled snugly in his back pocket, safe and sound, and he prays to any spirits who might be listening that it won’t start ringing as he raises his empty hands slowly and inches towards the car.

“Wait.”

Stiles freezes, the cell burning a hole in his back pocket, heart hammering against his ribcage. But Haigh’s attention is focused on Liam now, his gun trained on the young Beta.

“You’re that Dunbar kid everyone’s been on about, aren’t you?” the deputy surmises, lips twisting up at one corner in a delighted half-smirk. “Shit, man, looks like I finally hit the jackpot. Bagging you two might just be my ticket to retirement.” He gestures with his gun again. “Stiles, car. Now. Otherwise your little friend here’s going to need to do some serious healing.”

The Sub obliges, but deliberately takes his time about it. He only needs to delay the cop by a couple more minutes – just long enough for Jordan to get here, or for Peter to come back and find them. *Come on, please. I know I should’ve stayed put, I know I screwed up, but please, please let something go right, just this once.*

There’s a sudden, sharp hiss, and Stiles turns in the backseat of the patrol car just in time to see a cloud of fine mist disperse in front of Liam’s face. The Beta coughs violently, stumbling back a few paces, hands grasping at his throat as he sucks in loud, wheezy-sounding breaths. He sways on his feet for a moment, black veins webbing out across the skin his lips and snaking up his cheeks before fading into a sickly pallor. Then he crumples to the ground in a boneless heap.

“Liam!” Stiles yells, moving to get out of the car, but Haigh’s already hauling the youth up by the
back of his jacket, gun pressed to the wolf’s temple.

“Unless you want his death on your hands, I suggest you slide on over to the other seat, kid.”

Mouth dry, panic cloying in his throat, Stiles complies silently, watching with his breath held as Haigh drags the Beta up the patrol car, shoves him roughly into the backseat and slams the door closed behind them, heading around to open the trunk instead. The kid moans, slumped facedown across the seat.

“Liam?” Stiles fumbles to pull the youth closer, to turn him over so that his head’s resting in the older Sub’s lap. “C’mon, buddy, talk to me. Liam!”

When Haigh yanks the driver’s-side door open to grab something from the underwheel compartment, Stiles leans forward to thump a fist against the reinforced grating that separates them.

“The fuck did you do to him, asshole?”

“Relax, Stilinski,” Haigh drawls. “I just spritzed him with a little wolfsbane, that’s all. The boss invented it – calls it chloroform for dogs. Were’s are so fucking sensitive to the stuff, it’s unreal. Keeps ‘em quiet until we can cage and collar ‘em.” He straightens up, lighter in hand. “The kid’ll live. Probably.”

The door slams shut again and Stiles tries not to let his breathing quicken, tries to keep himself calm despite the weight of fear sitting square on his chest, hand cupping Liam’s cheek as the Beta sucks in uneven, hitching breaths. This is bad. This is bad, this is bad, this is bad.

He watches cautiously through the window, free hand slipping behind him to fish Allison’s cell phone from his back pocket, heart in his throat as he watches the deputy stride past the window. Haigh moves towards Jackson’s Porsche, red gas can in hand – fuck, he’s going to burn the evidence, cut off the scent trail at its source – and Stiles takes advantage of the Dom’s momentary distraction, unlocking Allison’s phone (the passcode’s been the baby’s due date these past eight months) and dialling the BHPD’s reception desk number from memory, holding the device to his ear and ducking down a bit to hide it from sight, gaze fixed on Haigh as the man begins to douse the inside of Jackson’s car with gasoline.

“Beacon Hills police department, how can I help you?”

Stiles could almost cry at the familiar voice. “Greg! Greg, it’s me, it’s Stiles.”

“Stiles?” the senior officer echoes, concern lacing his tone. “What’s wrong?”

“I don’t have a lot of time to explain, so you gotta listen close,” the Sub tells him urgently, words tumbling out almost too fast to make sense. “Deputy Haigh’s gone nuts, he’s got me locked in his patrol car. I’m in the parking lot behind the playground, just off Hartley Avenue. Greg, he…he’s done something to Liam, Liam Dunbar – one of Derek Hale’s betas, he’s here with me. Haigh gassed him with some kinda wolfsbane spray, he’s out cold.” He watches the Dom kick the Porsche’s passenger door shut. “I think he might also have something to do with two missing persons; Allison Argent and Jackson Mahealani. We found Jackson’s car abandoned in the parking lot, but Haigh’s about to torch the evidence right in front of me. I don’t know where he’s taking us, he hasn’t said, but he means business, man. I need-”

Haigh suddenly turns back towards the car, and Stiles is forced to tuck the phone away out of sight, but the deputy moves straight past Stiles’ door and around to the trunk, presumably to dump the empty gasoline canisters. Letting out the breath he’d been holding, Stiles lifts the phone to his ear
“-iles? Stiles, we’ve got officers two minutes out from your location, stay on the line with me, buddy.”

“I can’t, I’m sorry,” the Sub hisses frantically, and hangs up when he hears the trunk slam closed, quickly switching the phone on silent and reaching down to slip the cell into his sock just before Haigh strides passed his door again, sparing his captives only a brief glance before drawing his arm back and throwing the lighter towards the fuel-drenched Porsche.

The Sub watches mutely as bright flames ripple over the silver hood of Jackson’s car, and within seconds the entire vehicle is ablaze, lighting up the parking lot with a fierce yellow glow.

Fuck. *F*uck. This is really happening.

Deputy Haigh climbs back into the patrol car just as the wail of police sirens begin to sound from somewhere nearby.

“Shit,” the Dom curses, fumbling with his keys in the ignition before throwing the car into gear and executing a sharp U-turn to speed off towards the exit.

The flash of coloured lights and the screech of breaks signal the arrival of another patrol car, and Stiles feels his hopes soar when a familiar figure leaps out of the vehicle and rushes towards them.

“Jordan!” he shouts, thumping on the window, and the older Sub’s gaze snaps towards him, eyes flickering bright with the reflection of the flaming inferno behind them that was once Jackson’s Porsche.

Parrish’s hand goes to the holstered gun at his belt, but Haigh is half a second faster, throwing the door open and levelling his own weapon at the younger deputy, firing off three rounds in quick succession. Jordan stumbles back a couple of paces before his legs give out, sending him crumpling to the ground, a wet, scarlet stain blooming vividly near the shoulder of his beige uniform.

“No!” Stiles yells, and thumps his fist against the reinforced grating behind Haigh’s seat as the Dom closes the door again and peels off down the road. “Fuck you! You fucking bastard!”

“Shut up,” Haigh grits out, gun still clenched in his hand as he rests it on the steering wheel. “He’ll be fine, he’s one of them. It’s not like I shot him in the head.”

Stiles presses his lips together tightly, eyes stinging, forcing the panic and grief back down again. The man’s right – Jordan’s a phoenix, his healing powers can surpass even an Alpha’s if he needs them too, and with a fire so close to hand…he’ll be okay. He’s gotta be okay.

Refocusing his attention on the unconscious Beta in his lap, Stiles runs faintly trembling fingers through Liam’s hair, brushing his fringe back. “That stuff you hit Liam with, how long does it last?”

Haigh spares them a brief glance in the rear-view mirror. “Long enough. He’ll wake up just in time to be hand-delivered to my employer, and then he’ll be begging me to dose him up again. You think I’m a bastard?” He breathes a quiet laugh. “Just you wait.”

Stiles glares back at the Dom, but Haigh’s eyes have already returned to the road. Instead, he curls a little further around Liam, and shifts his gaze to the window to keep track of where they’re going. If the opportunity arises to make another phone call, he wants to be ready to rattle off a list of clear directions.
“Harris?” the deputy says, phone pressed to his ear as he takes a sharp turn, almost tumbling Stiles sideways across the backseat. “Yeah, it’s me. Did you find the girl?” A pause, then, “What do you mean they’ve got her? Who’s ‘they’?” The Dom slams his hand against the wheel hard enough to make Stiles flinch. “Fuck! This is exactly what we wanted to avoid, Harris. If she sees something in one of her psychic episodes and blabs about it to the Hale pack, the whole plan’s ruined. Go after them.”

Another sharp turn, and Stiles has to brace his feet hard against the floor and tighten his arms around Liam to keep them from sliding.

“I don’t give a fuck who’s dead and who’s not,” Haigh snaps. “If Torres and Carter got their throats ripped out, that’s their own dumbass fault for taking on an Alpha in the first place. Dan’s team were supposed to act as a distraction, not actively engage with the Pack….look, we don’t have time to clean up their shit, alright? I’ve already had to torch the evidence Murphy left behind, and now I’ve got the cops right on my tail. I need someone to meet me at the lookout point – and tell ’em to bring the van, I’ve got company. It’s not the Banshee they wanted, but I think the bosses will be happy all the same.”

The deputy hangs up, tosses the phone onto the passenger’s seat, and steps on the gas, taking Stiles further away from the city with every passing second; further away from Derek.

………………………………

“Dude, what the fuck?” the burly, heavily tattooed Dom shoves Haigh hard enough to make him stumble back a pace. “You were supposed to bag us the Banshee, not the Sheriff’s fucking son. And who the hell’s this other kid?”

“Hale’s youngest Beta,” Haigh answers, his voice equally as sharp. “You remember, the one you were supposed to take care of weeks ago?” Tattoos seems to lose some of his bravado, a muscle in his jaw twitching. “Yeah, that one. So don’t give me shit for picking up after you.”

The deputy yanks the car door open and takes a step back, his firearm cradled confidently in both hands. “Out of the car, Stiles. Hands where I can see them. You’re going to walk over to that van over there and get inside. And hurry it up, we haven’t got all night.”

Stiles glances down at the unresponsive Beta in his lap, arms tightening around him briefly. “Deputy…this isn’t you. I know you don’t really want to do this.”

“You willing to bet your life on it?” Gun cocking warningly, the Dom adjusts his stance. “Get out of
the fucking car, Stilinski.”

There won’t be much he can do to help Liam if he’s bleeding out all over the place, so Stiles carefully shifts out from underneath him, laying the Beta down across the backseat as he slowly exits the car, hands raised. The cell phone in his sock is an uncomfortable but reassuring pressure against his ankle-bone, and he prays to any deity that might be listening that it doesn’t fall out as he begins to walk towards the black van.

“No sudden movements,” Haigh warns, gun poking Stiles painfully between the shoulders. “Mitch, don’t just stand there staring, grab the kid already. Parrish probably has half the force out hunting me down by now.”

“You sure he’s not gonna jump up bite me?” Mitch asks doubtfully.

“For fuck’s sake, man.” The deputy heaves an exasperated sigh, and Stiles hears the Velcro on his belt-pouch ripping. “Here, gas him again if it makes you feel any better.”

“No, wait! Don’t.” Stiles turns sharply, only to find the barrel of Haigh’s gun levelled straight at his face. He freezes, hands still raised, and can only watch as the tattooed Dom shakes the small silver canister and leans into the car, the sharp hissss of the aerosol spray cutting through the silence of the night.

Haigh shoves at his shoulder roughly, sending him stumbling towards the van again. “Pull another dumbass stunt like that and I’ll put a hole in you, right here, right now. Leave you on the side of the road for Parrish and your dad to find in a couple hours’ time. Think we both know your old man’s ticker wouldn’t survive the shock of it, which makes it all the more tempting, trust me. So shut the fuck up and get in the goddamn van.”

Stiles swallows, fear and nausea churning in his gut, hands shaking a little as he fights to keep from balling them into fists, forcing himself to keep walking. God, his dad must be losing his shit right now. Jordan, too. And Derek…fuck, Derek. Stiles hopes his Dom’s alright; hopes the Alpha was the one who managed to skewer those fuckers out in the woods, and that the rest of the Pack aren’t hurt.

Blinking back hot tears of frustration (he isn’t about to give Haigh the satisfaction of seeing him cry), Stiles climbs into the van, nose wrinkling at the bleach-like stench of industrial strength scent-blockers as he settles awkwardly on the hard floor. Mitch trudges over, an unconscious Liam slung over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes, and tumbles the teenager down into the van without any pretence at delicacy.

“The door won’t open from the inside,” Haigh tells him, gun still levelled at the pair of them. “But just in case you get any ideas.” He reaches behind him to pull something from his belt, then tosses it at Stiles’ feet. “Cuff yourself to the kid.”

Glaring at the deputy silently, Stiles nevertheless reaches for the restraints, snapping one cuff quickly around his left wrist before carefully fastening the other around Liam’s.

Haigh lowers his gun and sends the Sub a condescending smile. “There’s a good boy.”

Stiles maintains the glower right up until the moment the van doors slam shut and plunge him into total darkness. The rear of the vehicle is totally sealed off from the front, no windows or sliding shutter to provide light or air, and Stiles can hear his own breathing begin to quicken in the suffocating silence.

“Fuck,” he hisses, uncuffed hand fist ing at his hair as a familiar tightness begins to form in his chest.
“Fuck, fuck, fuck. Come on, not now. Not now.”

The front doors to the van close, making the floor shudder beneath him, and Stiles jerks at the sound, yanking on the chain of the cuffs and prompting a hoarse, raspy-sounding wheeze out of the teenager attached to the other end.

“Liam,” Stiles murmurs, feeling in the darkness for the Sub’s shoulders so that he can heave the Beta up against him a little more. “C’mon, buddy, stay with me.”

The kid’s breathing sounds even worse after his second dose of the aconite spray, each inhale audibly laboured, the muscles of his abdomen see-sawing beneath Stiles’ hand. It’s like being back in middle school all over again – that horrible sense of dread and panic he’d felt whenever Scott’s asthma had gotten particularly bad during the winter, leaving him gasping for breath and coughing so hard his lips would tinge a dark red-blue. Stiles had taken to carrying a spare inhaler in his own backpack (Scott was forever misplacing his, the adorkable dumbass), and had learned how to turn a paper cup into a makeshift spacer so that his friend got enough of the medicine when his breathing was bad enough to warrant it. The Dom had mostly gotten his asthma under control by the time they graduated high school, but it had still been a relief when he got accepted into the WPDS program and had opted for taking the Bite.

Stiles hadn’t thought he’d ever find himself in that situation again, but apparently he’d been wrong. Liam’s breathing is freaking him the fuck out, and there isn’t anything he can do to help it; no spacer, no inhaler, no nothing. Shit.

“C’mon, man, don’t do this to me,” he murmurs, and flinches suddenly when the van’s engine roars to life, bracing his free hand against the floor to avoid losing his balance as the vehicle starts to move. Gritting his teeth, he wraps his arms as best he can around Liam’s torso and starts to inch backwards – a feat easier said than done, with one wrist closely tethered to the Beta’s. But after a good deal of heaving and tugging and wiggling, he’s managed to move himself over to press his back up against the wall of the van, Liam reclining against his chest, the teen’s upper body propped up a little to aid his breathing. Not that the horrible wheeze sounds any less laboured.

“It’s gonna be okay,” he promises, keeping his voice hushed even as he bends his leg back far enough that he can reach into his sock and retrieve Allison’s cell phone. “I’m gonna get us outta this, you hear me? We’ll be home before you know it.”

Thanking his lucky stars that Haigh hadn’t thought to search him, he quickly pulls up Allison’s contacts and scrolls through to find Scott’s number. It’s a tense few moments as he listens to it dialling out, his cuffed arm wrapped securely around Liam’s waist, keeping track of the teen’s raspy, heaving breaths.

“Allison,” Scott’s wonderful, beautiful, concerned voice chirps in his ear “Oh, thank god.”

Just hearing the Beta’s voice is enough to make the situation very, very real, and Stiles feels his eyes beginning to burn as his chest tightens anew.

“Scott, it’s me,” he croaks.

“Stiles!” Scott’s tone somehow manages to sound simultaneously relieved and frantic. “Guys, it’s Stiles, he’s okay!” Multiple voices in the background burble incomprehensibly, too faint for him to make out over the phone, but Scott’s voice is perfectly clear as he continues. “Holy fuck, dude, you scared the shit out of us. Parrish said you’d been kidnapped by Deputy Haigh, he’s got half the force out on a manhunt. How did you escape?”
“I didn’t,” Stiles answers, and despite his relief at hearing that Jordan’s doing alright, he can’t quite keep the tremor from his voice. “They’ve got us cuffed in the back of a van, heading god-knows-where.”

“Are Ali and Jackson with you?”

Stiles shakes his head, even though the Dom can’t see him, and takes a steadying breath. “No, it’s just me and Liam.”

“Liam’s with you?” Scott asks, sounding surprised. Then his voice grows both louder and more distant as he shouts, “Guys, stop searching! Liam’s with Stiles!” He’s sounding a little more breathless now, like he’s running. “Jordan could only see you in the backseat, so we weren’t sure. Stay on the line with me okay, buddy? I’m gonna go find…Derek! Dude, it’s Stiles, he’s on the phone!”

Heart suddenly beating faster in his chest, Stiles holds his breath and clutches Liam a little tighter against him, listening to the fumbling, rustling sound of the phone changing hands before another familiar voice rings out.

“Stiles?”

The Sub closes his eyes against the renewed threat of hot, prickling tears. Just that one syllable is enough to shatter the tenuous hold he has on his emotions – the raw fear and concern in Derek’s voice alone would undo him any day, but add to it the fact that Stiles is fucking terrified and barely keeping himself together…well, his response isn’t exactly unexpected. Just inconvenient.

“Derek,” he breathes, and his voice breaks halfway through the word, his throat aching fiercely.

“Stiles, where are you?” the Alpha presses, low and urgent.

The Sub swallows thickly and takes another careful breath. “Haigh drove us northbound along Ridgeway,” he recites, having memorised the route in preparation. “Then took the main road past the Meadows and headed straight on up towards the county line. He ditched the patrol car a couple of miles past that old gas station, near the water plant. We’re in the back of a black van, I don’t know what the plates are, fuck, I didn’t even look, I didn’t think-“

“Hey, shhh, it’s alright,” Derek reassures, and Stiles realises his breathing has quickened again to near-hyperventilation. “You did great, Stiles. We’ll come find you, I promise. Just sit tight for me, okay?“

The Sub nods again, forcing himself to take deeper, slower breaths. “Yes, Sir.”

“Good boy,” the Alpha murmurs, and despite the gravity of his situation, the words have an immediate calming effect on him, the tightness in his chest easing tenfold. “Are you hurt?”

“I’m fine,” Stiles replies, his voice hushed, wrapping his arm more tightly around the teen reclining against his chest. “But they sprayed Liam with some sort of aerosolised wolfsbane, he’s been out cold ever since.”

“Wolfsbane?” Derek echoes, audibly alarmed.

“He was doing okay until they gave him the second dose,” Stiles adds, voice trembling. “Now it’s like he’s having an asthma attack or something.”

There’s a muffled sort of fumbling sound again, then suddenly another voice is on the line.
“Stiles, it’s Peter,” the Dom says, tone grim but calm. “I need you to hold the phone closer to Liam for a moment.”

The Sub obeys without question, holding the cell phone just shy of touching Liam’s chin, forcing himself to wait a full five seconds so that the teenager can take several laboured, wheezy breaths, before pressing the device back to his ear.

“Did you get it?”

“Mm,” Peter confirms, sounding even grimmer than before. “How’s his breathing now, compared to how it was immediately after that second dose? Better or worse?”

Stiles is silent for a moment, thinking on it, listening to the whistle-wheeze-rattle of each ragged gasp, the way Liam seems to be using every muscle in his torso to facilitate the effort.

“Worse,” he answers. “Definitely worse.”

“He’s not healing,” Derek’s fainter voice surmises, worry lacing his tone. “If he doesn’t purge the toxins, he could-”

“It won’t come to that,” is Peter’s firm reply, before he softens his tone again. “Stiles, I need you to listen me very carefully. The aconite in Liam’s lungs is going to burn him from the inside out unless his body manages to purge it, but he’s going to need your help in kickstarting that process. I imagine you’re familiar with the concept of inducing healing in a Werewolf?”

Stiles’ mouth goes dry, stomach twisting as full comprehension of what Peter is asking him to do hits home. He’s never witnessed it in person, but he’s seen it enough in TV dramas and movies; where the supernatural hero or heroine gets poisoned and/or grievously injured to such an extent that their healing factor doesn’t automatically kick in, and a side character/love interest is required to jumpstart it for them, usually in a horribly vivid and dramatic manner amidst tears and anguish.

“You want me to hurt him?” he reiterates, his voice faint, feeling sick to his stomach at the mere thought of it. “I…I can’t-”

“You can,” Peter insists, calm but firm. “I’ll walk you through it, Stiles, it’ll be over before you know it. I need you to lay his hand flat on the floor…”

Following the Dom’s instructions, Stiles holds the phone between his ear and shoulder as he carefully moves the younger Sub’s hand to rest palm-down on the floor of the van. He lifts his other hand to cover Liam’s mouth, the Beta’s arm a dead weight where it dangles from the other cuff, and he takes a few deep, shaky breaths to ready himself.

“Get a good grip,” Peter coaches calmly. “And pull. Keep pulling until you feel something give.”

Eyes clenched tight shut despite the fact that he can’t make out anything at all in the darkness, Stiles grits his teeth and pulls back on the Sub’s index finger, bending it back towards his wrist, bracing himself for the sound the joint will make when it goes. The very second he hears the sickening shnick of breaking bone, Liam comes to life against him, his whole body seizing up as he sucks in a sharp breath through his nose and lets it out in a muffled scream of pain against Stiles palm.

“Sorry, sorry, fuck, I’m sorry,” Stiles breathes, eyes burning, keeping his hand firmly clamped over the Sub’s mouth as he quickly pushes the finger back down into alignment again. “It’s okay, buddy, you’re okay. It’s done.”

But Liam’s coughing now – deep, wet, hacking coughs that make him spasm in Stiles’ hold, and the
teenager lurches to one side so suddenly that Stiles has to fumble to turn the cell phone’s backlight on so that he can seek out the Sub in the darkness. The beam of the light lands on the Beta just in time for him to cough up a shit-ton of thick, black liquid, the substance pouring from his mouth like water from a faucet, pooling on the floor of the van.

“Oh my god,” Stiles yelps, panicked, reaching for him. “Oh *fuck*, is that supposed to be happening?”

“*Is he coughing up black fluid?*” Peter asks urgently. When Stiles burbles something to the affirmative, the Dom heaves a sigh of relief. “*Don’t worry, that’s a good thing. It’s the pre-sealant fluid that his body’s created to flush out the aconite; he might’ve drowned in it without that kickstart. Well done, Stiles.*”

The Sub sets the cell phone to one side for a moment in order to rub the Beta’s back as he continues to cough up an alarming volume of liquid, murmuring soft encouragements as the teenager chokes and retches for what feels like an age. Finally, after several agonising minutes, the coughing subsides and he’s able to pull Liam back towards him, helping the kid settle back against his chest as he sits propped up against the wall of the van. The younger Sub slumps in his hold, exhausted, shaking like a leaf and panting for breath but no longer sounding like a chronic asthmatic on the verge of respiratory arrest.

“Oh,” the Beta whimpers after a moment, cuffed hand curling around Stiles’ tightly where it rests on his chest. “Dude, that…that hurt.”

“I know, I know, I’m sorry. You’re gonna be okay.” It’s a reassurance both to himself and the teenager in his arms. “Here, you wanna talk to Derek?”

Fumbling for the cell phone with a trembling hand, he holds it up to the kid’s ear, tucking himself up closer to the younger Sub’s back so that he can hear it too.

“Der?” the teen slurs between ragged breaths. “M’sorry. Should’a listened t’you.”

“*Shhh, it’s alright,*” Derek reassures, but Stiles can hear the tightness of worry and grief in his voice. Knowing how horrible the past five minutes have been for him, Stiles can only imagine how Derek must have felt, being forced to listen to it when he was powerless to comfort his Beta. “*This wasn’t your fault, Liam, you hear me? You’re not to blame. And I swear, I’m going to find the men responsible for all this and make them pay for what they’ve done to you.*”

Liam coughs wetly, turning his head to one side to spit out another glob of the thick, black liquid. Stiles tightens his arm around him, only to freeze up when he feels the van beginning to slow, the floor shaking beneath them as they drive over uneven ground.

“We’ve turned off the main road,” he says, bringing the phone back to his own ear. “The ground’s too bumpy to be asphalt. Maybe-” He swallows the rest of his sentence as they come to a sudden, lurching halt. “Fuck. We’ve stopped.”

“*Hide the phone,*” Derek urges. “*Keep it on you as long as you can; we might be able to track it.*”

The rumble of the engine cuts off, and Stiles’ breathing quickens as he hears the front van doors open. “They’re coming.”

“I’ll find you,” Derek promises. “*No matter what happens, I’ll find you, okay? Just do whatever they ask, don’t give them a reason to hurt you.*”

Stiles can hear Haigh talking outside, and has just enough time to whisper a hurried “*I love you*” before he’s shoving the cell phone back into his sock and wrapping his arm around Liam again.
“Pretend you’re still out,” he hisses frantically to the exhausted teen. “You don’t want another dose of that aconite spray. And you’re not strong enough to fight them, not at the moment. Save your strength, okay?”

Liam gives a shaky nod and squeezes his hand one last time before letting himself go lax in Stiles’ hold, feigning unconsciousness.

And just in time, too. The van’s rear doors are yanked open suddenly, and Stiles squints against the pale light of the coming dawn, arms tightening around Liam’s torso as ex-deputy Haigh moves to stand in the opening, gun raised as he smiles at the Sub blandly.

“Welcome to your new home, Stiles.”

Chapter End Notes

Stiles is about to find out who's really behind all the shit that's been happening in Beacon Hills recently, and he isn't going to like the answer. Let's hope Derek gets there sooner rather than later...

Thanks for reading, guys! Let me know your thoughts down below, you know I always appreciate feedback. Well, MOST of the time. And that's another issue I'm going to address here and now - if you choose to leave a comment complaining about the length of time between updates, it's gonna get deleted. I'm tired of replying to them. Bottom line is, I have a full-time job and real life commitments, and writing a decently lengthy chapter (of satisfactory quality) takes a good 24-48 hours of solid work, which I seldom have the time for. Additionally, I'm not getting paid to write this, so I do have to prioritise the job that actually puts food on my table. I won't apologise for that, it's part of being an adult and having responsibilities.

Additionally, while I always gladly welcome constructive criticism (concrit), please do take note of the words 'constructive' and 'criticism'. To the anonymous reader who left me not one, not two, but THREE lengthy reviews in which he/she complained about all the things they would do differently and was rather cross with me for apparently not writing the story the way they wanted me to - you can take your 'concrit' and shove it up your arse, darling. I deleted your comments because I couldn't be bothered pandering to your temper tantrum, but if you'd like to have a rational conversation about legitimate constructive suggestions, feel free to try again.

To everyone else who reviewed - you're awesome and I love you. <3 I write this story for you guys. xxxxx
The van’s rear doors are yanked open suddenly, and Stiles squints against the pale light of the coming dawn, arms tightening around Liam’s torso as ex-deputy Haigh moves to stand in the opening, gun raised as he smiles at the Sub blandly.

“Welcome to your new home, Stiles.”

“Hands where I can see ‘em,” Haigh warns, gun trained on the pair as he takes a step to the side so that Mitch can move past him. “And don’t try anything funny, kid.”

“Fuck, that’s disgusting,” Mitch complains, giving the pool of congealed, tar-like black gloop a wide berth as he climbs into the back of the van to unlock the cuff from around Liam’s wrist. “Thought you said this stuff wouldn’t kill him?”

Stiles feels the Beta tense in his hold, and gives the younger Sub a tight, reassuring squeeze around his midriff, silently urging him to stay quiet. The last thing the youth needs is another dose of that aconite spray. Stiles isn’t keen to go breaking any more fingers in the near future.

Haigh’s brow is furrowed slightly as he glances from Liam’s black-stained lips to the puddle on the floor.

“He’s still breathing,” the Dom answers after a pause, sounding a little less confident in himself than before. “Pretty sure that’s just part of how they react to the wolfsbane. C’mon, Mitch, don’t be such a kneeler, it isn’t gonna hurt you. Just grab the kid and let’s go, okay? We’re late enough already.”

“I’m not the one who decided to pick up strays along the way,” the other man grunts, grabbing Liam by the forearms to drag him over to the edge of the van.

Stiles winces at the rough treatment, but consoles himself with the knowledge that the Beta will heal quickly. Additionally, he knows that for every bruise and scrape their captors inflict on the teen, Derek will pay it back tenfold when he finally catches up with the kidnappers.

“Move it, Stilinski.”

Teeth gritted to keep his temper in check, Stiles inches himself carefully out of the van under Haigh’s watchful eye, turning around to face the vehicle when instructed and grimacing in frustration when the deputy promptly yanks his arms back to secure him.

“You don’t have much hope of escaping, but I’m not taking any chances,” the Dom tells him flatly, fastening the open cuff around his other wrist and tightening them both to such an extent that Stiles knows no amount of wriggling or thumb-dislocation is going to get him out of them. Damn.

At last he’s allowed to turn around (aided unnecessarily by Haigh’s meaty hand on his shoulder giving him a firm shove in the right direction), and he finally gets a good look at his ‘new home’. He can’t help but stare for a long moment, wide-eyed, as the decaying grandeur of Beacon Hills First
"National Bank" looms up before them.

Fuck. He knows exactly where he is – in the middle of fucking nowhere.

Tucked away just inside the County border, it’s little wonder this place has never been bought or refurbished or reused; there’s nothing around here but woods and farmland for a good five miles on all sides. First National had been built way back, when the county’s funding had still been in the hands of people who lacked the common sense to use it wisely. He remembers learning about it in school when they were studying the history of Beacon Hills county – about the Twin Town that never was. Hundreds of thousands of dollars had been channelled into building the bank, with the intention of making it the central landmark for a new, less supernaturally diverse town away from the Druid clans and ancient Werewolf Packs that existed primarily in the central band of the ‘Hills. But they’d failed to take into account the fact that the surrounding forests and farmlands were protected by that same populace, and that no amount of money or empty threats could convince them to relinquish their sacred territory.

And so the bank has remained unoccupied and derelict ever since. Nobody’s stupid enough to buy it, and nobody wants to put up the money to have it taken down either. Nature’s doing a good enough job on its own, anyway – the surrounding woodland seems a lot closer and denser than it had just over a decade ago, when Stiles had first snuck out to explore the place with Scott way past curfew (it’d been pretty fun, right up until the moment his Dad had come to find them and drag their sorry asses home). Wall-creepers have begun to wind their way around the giant stone pillars that line the grand entrance, and half a dozen or so trees have extended their branches to partially shield the grandiose building from view. Another twenty years and this place will be all but buried by the forest. Good riddance.

“Move,” Haigh grunts, and gives him another prompting shove, hard enough to make Stiles stumble forward a few paces.

He throws a glare over his shoulder but, mindful of the gun still trained on him, decides not to tell the deputy where he can shove it. Mitch has moved on ahead, Liam draped over his shoulder in a fireman’s carry, and in the dim light of early dawn the Beta looks even worse than he had before, arms dangling limply above his head, black liquid dripping from his nose and mouth to spatter the ground ever time he’s jostled. Stiles fervently hopes it’s just the kid’s superior acting skills, but from this angle, he looks convincingly unconscious.

“What the hell?” There’s a young man coming down the stone steps of the building and approaching them at a brisk pace, rifle strap slung over his shoulder and another two handguns strapped to the thighs of his camouflage cargo pants. Classy. “Are you for real? The boss is gonna go nuts when she sees this.”

Mitch knocks his shoulder against the man without breaking his pace. “Don’t look at me, Murphy. Ask our resident criminal expert over there.”

Haigh’s hand clamps down on Stiles’ shoulder and steers him resolutely past the newcomer.

“Dude,” Murphy hisses, stalking after them. “She said she didn’t want anyone else involved except the Banshee; you know how she feels about witnesses.”

“You didn’t leave me much choice,” the deputy gripes. “These two stumbled across your little crime scene at the park. Why the hell didn’t you torch the kid’s car when you swiped him?”

The younger Dom runs his fingers over the strap of his rifle twitchingly as he shrugs. “It was a sweet ride, man. Those babies don’t come cheap; I thought maybe I could, y’know, go back and grab her if
we had the time.”

“You’re a moron,” Haigh grunts.

“Kid, if you do your job right, you won’t need no second-hand set of wheels,” Mitch chips in. “By this time next week, you’re gonna be rich enough to buy your own Porsche.”

Murphy grins at the prospect. “Hell yeah.”

Stiles stops listening to them after that – he’s too busy staring at his surroundings as they enter the bank and pass through the grand entrance hallway.

This place is fucking huge, even bigger than he remembered, and unlike the exterior of the bank, someone’s clearly gone to great lengths to clean things up a bit. It’s all elegant carvings and marble pillars, unlit chandeliers hanging from the high ceiling, the grand staircase rising from the centre of the room to lead up to the next floor. And while the building had been almost entirely empty ten years ago (likely ransacked of any sellable furniture long before he was even born), storage crates now line the edges of the room, neatly stacked. Stiles can’t begin to hazard a guess as to what they contain, but he doubts it’s party balloons.

He can see shadowy figures patrolling the balcony above the entrance hallway, and as they move deeper into the heart of the building, they pass at least another half-dozen men, all armed to the teeth.

Fuck. Clearly whatever’s going on here is far bigger than any of them could have imagined. When they’d found the Enforcers symbol and tallied up the dots, he’d convinced himself that this was the work of a select few; dynamic extremists using public acts of violence to garner attention to their cause. But now Stiles calls to mind what his father had told him the night before, about the arson attacks all across Beacon Hills that had kept the BHPD occupied while the Pack searched for Lydia. He’d initially entertained the possibility that the sudden disappearance of his friends was unrelated to those fires, but now he’s beginning to suspect that the two occurrences are more closely linked. Whoever’s behind the operation at First National certainly has the manpower to pull of something like that.

They turn a corner onto a wide, dimly lit corridor lined with large, circular vault-doors. The party comes to an abrupt halt, Haigh gripping Stiles’ bicep hard enough to bruise.

“The hell happened here?”

Stiles glances up from where he’s been scrutinising the thick bundling of wires that have been taped to the floor to one side of the corridor, and his breath catches in his lungs as he stares in horror at the sight before him.


There’s a sizeable puddle of it not six feet ahead of him, what looks to be a couple of pints at least pooling out across the grimy marble, congealing on the cool surface. There’s a long, scarlet streak leading away from the puddle and further down the corridor – clearly the victim was dragged that way, still bleeding – which disappears into an open vault door a little way ahead.

“The girl wasn’t cooperating,” Murphy answers, his tone unaffected, striding straight through the crimson puddle like it’s stagnant water. “We helped her see things from our perspective.”


No. No, no, no, no, it isn’t…it can’t be…
The closer they get to the open vault, the tighter Stiles’ chest becomes. He can smell it in the air now - that sickening coppery stench of cold blood – and images of long-dead deputies keep flashing to the forefront of his mind, the panic so thick in his throat he can barely breathe. It’s a miracle he still has strength and coordination to stumble forward a few steps when Haigh shoves him again. He doesn’t want to go any further. He doesn’t want to see the body he’s certain will be waiting for him in that vault. He wants to wake up, he wants to wake up-

“Stiles!”

At the shout, his gaze snaps up from the still-wet bloodstains marking the metal lip of the vault entrance and across to the far side of the surprisingly spacious room beyond, eyes landing on a pale, wonderfully familiar face from between the bars of one of the security cages against the rear wall there.

Relief sweeps through him at seeing her, almost enough to make his knees go out from underneath him. “Allison!

“Are you okay?” She kneels up, hands gripping the bars, pressing herself against the side of the cage in order to see him better. “Did they hurt you?”

He shakes his head, feet moving on autopilot when a firm hand on his shoulder steers him towards her. “The blood...Ali, are you-?”

“I’m fine,” she answers quickly. “They didn’t touch me. But they shot Jackson.”

Horror renders him speechless for a moment, and by the time he’s remembered how to draw breath, Mitch has swiped a card through the electronic lock on the cage next to Allison’s and tossed Liam inside like a ragdoll. Before he has chance to voice a protest at the rough treatment, Haigh’s shoving Stiles hard, sending him stumbling inside after the Beta. Unable to counterbalance the shove with his hands still cuffed behind his back, he goes careening forwards, managing to twist at the last moment to take the brunt of the fall on his left shoulder and hip rather than his face.

“The boss’ll be by to talk to you soon,” Murphy says, as the door to the cage is slammed closed and the sharp bzzzt of the security lock seals him in. “I suggest you play nice until then. You don’t wanna end up like your friend.”

Stiles waits just long enough for the three Doms to depart through the open vault door before levering himself up painfully onto his knees and scooting forward to press himself against the bars of the cage. The two cells are close enough together that Allison is able to reach through to grip onto the fabric of his t-shirt with her bloodied hands.

“Lydia,” the Switch says urgently, her eyes sharp, her fingers trembling slightly with the strength of her grip as she holds onto him. “Where is she? Did the hunters find her?”

The Sub shakes his head quickly. “I overheard Haigh on the phone to someone, cursing them out because they hadn’t caught her in time. It sounds like Derek and the others found her first. Don’t worry, I know she’ll be safe with the Pack.”

Allison calms visibly, posture sagging as she leans further against the bars, closing her eyes for a moment. “Thank god.”

Stiles peers past her towards the prone figure on the other side of the cell, heart seizing up all over again at the sheer volume of blood staining the floor there. “Is...is he-?”

“He’s alive,” Allison is quick to reassure, half-turning to glance back towards the injured Sub
without relinquishing her hold on Stiles. “But the bullet nicked an artery in his thigh; he’s lost a lot of blood.”

Too much blood, Stiles thinks but doesn’t say. Because it’s everywhere, and Jackson’s skin (usually so enviably tanned and healthy-looking) is pale and waxy, almost grey in colour. The only sign that he’s still with them is the rapid, shallow rise and fall of his chest. His jeans and shoes have been removed, a thick leather belt cinched tightly around the top of his left thigh and a blood-saturated makeshift bandage (Allison’s cardigan, by the looks of it), obscuring the injury itself from sight. But in contrast to the pallor of his cheeks, Jackson’s entire left leg has gone a horrible pasty-purple colour from his thigh downward, clearly starved of the necessary oxygenated blood supply. The tourniquet may have saved his life by preventing further blood loss, but it’s obvious that if they don’t get out of here soon, Jackson’s going to lose his leg.

“Danny felt it,” he whispers, throat tight as panic and grief threaten to rob him of his voice again. “When Jackson got shot, he felt it. I…I knew he was gonna be hurt, but I didn’t think it’d be this bad.”

“Hey. Hey.” Allison grips his chin, forcing his gaze away from Jackson and locking it with her own. “Listen to me, Stiles. We’re going to find a way out of here, okay? I promise.”

Her calm tone is like a balm to his frazzled nerves, and his next breath comes easier, the tightness in his chest receding, his head clearing a little. And with a clearer head comes the recollection of what he’s managed to sneak into the bank in his pocket, so far undetected.

“Are there cameras in here?” he asks urgently, dropping his voice to a whisper.

She shakes her head, glancing towards the open vault door. “Not as far as I can tell. Every so often a guard will walk down the corridor, but they seem pretty confident in the security locks on these cages.”

“Good.” Stiles shuffles with some difficulty, cuffs chafing at his wrists as he moves, to press his right leg as close to the bars of the cage as possible. “I hid your cell phone in my sock when Haigh grabbed us. I managed to call Derek and give him rough directions, but once they stuck me in the van it was mostly guesswork. Still, it’s better than nothing.”

Allison pulls the device from his sock and moves to sit with her back to the vault door to hide the phone from view. Her bloodied thumbs move quickly over the screen, before she bites out a quiet curse.

“There’s no reception down here,” she murmurs. “I didn’t think there would be, not with how thick these walls are.”

“But they can still track the GPS, right?” Stiles hedges.

She heaves a short sigh, her expression pinched. “I don’t know. And we need to hide this – if Kate finds out you’ve smuggled it in…”

“Kate?” Stiles echoes. “Who’s Kate?”

But Allison’s already turning to crawl back over to Jackson’s unmoving body, sliding the phone beneath the bunched-up jacket being used as a makeshift pillow beneath his head.

“Stiles?”

At the weak, croaky voice behind him, Stiles turns, almost losing his balance as he automatically tries
to reach out towards the Beta. Liam has managed to roll himself onto his side, and as Stiles watches, he coughs up another mouthful of the thick, black fluid, his pale face etched with pain.

“’I’m here, bud,” Stiles hurries to reassure, shuffling closer as quick as he can, pressing up against the Sub and wishing he still had the use of his hands so that he could pull the youth into a hug. “You’re okay.”

Liam curls closer to him, shivering a bit. “Where are we? S’cold.”

That alone is concerning – if anything, werewolves tend to run hot in all weathers. God knows coaxing Scott and Isaac into winter coats at college had been near impossible, even when it was ten below outside. But the effects ofaconite poisoning are varied and unpredictable. Even though the Beta’s coughed up all that black gloop, he’s far from being alright.

“We’re being held inside the First National Bank,” he tells the Sub quietly. “But don’t worry, Derek’s on his way. We’ll be outta here soon.”

Allison’s managed to move back over to the bars of the cage, one hand pressed to her swollen abdomen protectively as she settles down to sit. “Liam?” she asks concernedly, eyeing the black staining the Sub’s mouth. “God, Stiles, what did they do to him?”

“Doused him with aerosolised wolfsbane,” Stiles answers. “It knocked him out cold for a good twenty minutes, fucked with his breathing. I think the worst is over, but it’s still in his system.” Liam’s eyes are drooping closed again and Stiles has to look away before the tightness in his chest threatens to return. Instead he focuses on Allison again. “Who’s Kate?”

“That’d be me, sweetcheeks.”

They both startle at the voice, Stiles glancing up so sharply it makes his neck twinge, and he stares in surprise at the drop-dead-gorgeous blond who’s leaning in the open doorway to the vault. She smiles at him, warm and wide and genuine, and moves closer to the cages, sinking into a slow crouch, all controlled grace.

He shifts to put himself a little more in front of Liam. “Who are you? What do you want with us?”

Her smile widens a little at one corner even as she reaches out to press a finger to his lips to silence his questions, her perfectly manicured fingernail painted a deep crimson and glinting in the light of the powerful standing lamp over on the other side of the vault.

“Now, now, let’s not rush introductions,” she chides softly. “I’ve been waiting an awfully long time to meet you, Stiles.” She slides the pad of her finger over his bottom lip, then cups his cheek briefly, her fingers cold against his skin. “You and I are going to have a nice, long, intimate chat. We have a lot to discuss.”

She withdraws her hand and pushes herself to her feet, then glances over her shoulder towards Mitch, who’s lingering behind her in the doorway.

“Bring him. And if the wolf gives you any trouble, kill it.”
If anyone wants visual reminders of what the First National Bank looks like, I drew inspiration from these pics.

Come find me on Tumblr! :)

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for the overwhelmingly positive feedback from the last chapter, I’m so grateful to everyone who’s stuck with me and my sporadic updates. I hope you enjoyed the chapter. 😊

Things are getting serious now, and not gonna lie, it ain’t gonna be sunshine and roses for a couple more chapters, there’s some serious shit up ahead. I’ll be putting all potential triggers in the notes for the next chapter, but I promise in advance that Stiles and the others will be okay. Mostly okay. So-so. *hides behind laptop* Apologies.

More coming in a couple of weeks! :) xxxx
“Bring him. And if the wolf gives you any trouble, kill it.”

With that grim threat hanging over him, Stiles remains stationary as Mitch swipes the keycard through the lock on his cage door, shaking his head slightly when Liam tenses beside him.

“Don’t,” he cautions, and fights a wince as the guard heaves him up by the back of his shirt. Liam’s eyes lock with his, shining amber and fearful, and Stiles manages to muster up a flicker of a reassuring smile. “It’ll be okay, buddy, I promise. I’ll be back before you know it.”

I hope.

The echoing clang of the cage door being slammed shut behind him makes his ears ring, but he refuses to flinch, keeping his chin raised and his expression blank as Kate watches him from the entrance to the vault, a playful sort of smile ghosting at her lips.

She crooks a finger at him, and when Mitch gives him a prompting push from behind, he has no choice but to follow.

After being led some distance down an adjacent corridor, he’s shoved roughly through a set of double doors into what appears to be the syndicate’s central control hub. Unlike the rest of the bank, this place seems to be in regular use; there are boxes stacked neatly along the edges of the room, and several fold-out tables have been erected along the rear wall, a row of laptops and server connectors laid out across the surface, wires snaking in between them like vines. There’s an antique-looking oval table directly in the centre of the room, metal chairs surrounding it, and evidence of a meal recently eaten in the lone mug and empty takeout carton laying abandoned at one end.

“Have a seat, Stiles,” Kate says, crossing over to a stack of storage crates near the row of standing lamps. “Collins, get rid of those cuffs, they won’t be necessary in here.”
Mitch pushes Stiles towards the chair at the head of the table. “Are you sure that’s a good idea, Boss? I don’t think—”

“I’m not paying you to think, hotshot,” Kate interrupts coolly. “I’m paying you to follow orders.”

Stiles hears the man huff out a short, annoyed sigh – but then there are hands on his wrists, and a moment later the restraints fall away. He immediately brings his arms around to relieve the ache in his joints, rubbing at his chafed wrists.

“That’s better.” Kate jerks her head towards exit. “You can go. Close the door behind you.” When Mitch hesitates momentarily, she rolls her eyes at him. “Trust me, I’m more than capable of handling a Sub without you here to protect me. Leave us.”

“Yes Ma’am.” Mitch’s meaty hand clamps down on Stiles’ shoulder, pushing him to sit in the chair. “Just holler if you need me.”

Kate waits until the thick wooden doors have closed behind the guard before turning her gaze towards Stiles, a sweet, apologetic-looking smile curling at her painted lips.

“I’m sorry about that,” she says, and sinks smoothly into a crouch beside one of the storage crates. “I hope my boys weren’t too rough with you?”

It’s so ridiculous an understatement that Stile can’t help but reply, in a tone positively dripping in sarcasm: “No, not at all. I just love getting kidnapped at gunpoint and held against my will by a bunch of psychopaths.”

“Psychopaths?” The Dom echoes, audibly amused, still rummaging around in the box. “That’s a little overdramatic, don’t you think? I imagine they prefer to think of themselves as…enthusiasts.”

“Sure.” Stiles takes advantage of her temporary distraction to get a better look at his surroundings, searching for something that might be used as a weapon should an opening arise. “Whatever helps you sleep better at night.”

His gaze zeroes in on an unsheathed box cutter, sitting inconspicuously on crate nearby. That might just do it. All he needs now is a window of opportunity, and maybe he can—

“Don’t even think about it,” Kate warns in casual, unaffected tone. “You saw what happened to your friend back there when he tried to play the hero; you’re smarter than that.”

Caught in the act, Stiles tenses, glancing back towards the Dom and half expecting to find a gun levelled at him. But instead, Kate’s holding a water bottle and a couple of energy bars, which she brings over to set down on the table.

“You’ve had a busy night,” she says, and gently brushes his fringe back as she perches on the edge of the table in front of him, long fingers carding through his hair in a way that makes his whole scalp tingle unpleasantly. “Go ahead and eat – we can talk when you’re done.”

Stiles gives the bottle of water a dubious look. The seal seems unbroken, but he’s not about to assume that means it’s safe; Kate and her associates strike him as the type of assholes who’d happily resort to drugging someone to get what they want.

“No thanks.” He leans back in his chair just far enough to duck out from beneath her hand, fighting to keep his face neutral. “I’m not hungry.”

She taps him beneath the chin lightly, her smile unwavering but her eyes hardening a little. “I wasn’t
asking, sweetheart.”

Stiles makes no move to take the items, holding her gaze steadily, a stubborn set to his mouth.

He doesn’t see her hand move, but a split-second later a resounding slap echoes throughout the room and a burning sort of pain erupts across the left side of his face, head snapping to the right sharply with the force of it.

_Ow. Motherfucker._

Cheek throbbing, eyes hot and stinging, he glares up Kate mutinously.

“I really wish you hadn’t forced me to do that,” the Dom sighs, her hand gentle now as it comes up to cradle his burning cheek. “I don’t want to be your enemy, Stiles. And I don’t have to be; if you do as you’re told, this’ll all be a lot easier for you.”

“And if I don’t?” Stiles asks, and by some miracle his voice doesn’t waver.

“Oh, sweetheart. You aren’t the first Sub I’ve had to break in.” Kate’s smile almost seems _fond_ as she traces her fingertips over the redness on his cheek. “That was just a warning, baby. The next one won’t be.”

Stiles resists the urge to flinch back when she leans in closer, hands curling into fists in his lap as she gently pinches his chin and tilts his head up, painted lips brushing against his own.

“Now, let’s try this again, shall we?” Another feather-light kiss, and the fingers on his jawline tighten ever so slightly. “Eat your breakfast, Stiles.”

Stomach twisting sickeningly at the unwelcomed intimacy of it all, Stiles fights to keep his face impassive, even as he reaches for one of the energy bars. There’ll be time enough to flip the fuck out about all this later on – right now, he’s alive and relatively unharmed, and he needs to do whatever he can to keep himself that way. He can play along as the Obedient Sub if it’ll keep Kate from lashing out at him. And he only has to do it for a little while; just long enough for Derek to find them and rip her fucking throat out.

The mechanics of her request are easy enough. Bite, chew, sip, swallow. Repeat. The cold, sickly sort of weight sitting dead in his stomach might’ve left him with no appetite, but he doesn’t intend to give her the satisfaction of knowing that. Besides, adrenaline can only get him so far – eventually his body’s going to run out of juice, and he’d rather it happen _after_ he’s been rescued, not before.

“Mmm, there. Good boy, Stiles.”

Kate takes the empty water bottle from his lax grip and sets it aside, her gaze locked with his as she fluffs up his fringe idly.

“See how much easier it is to do as you’re told?” she murmurs. “How much better you feel for being good for me? Obedience must come so instinctively to a sweet Sub like you. You don’t have to fight it, baby.” She lightly drags her fingernails over his cheek, a smile curling slowly at the corner of her mouth as his features twitch at the contact. “You’re not afraid of me, are you?”

“No,” Stiles lies, voice cracking faintly. _Dammit._

Kate sighs softly, booted feet coming up to rest on the edge of the chair either side of his thighs to box him in, and despite the size of the room, Stiles suddenly feels extremely claustrophobic.
“I know we got off to a bad start,” she murmurs, cupping his face between her hands, the pad of her thumb stroking over his bottom lip. “But I’m hoping it’s not too late to change that. We have a lot to talk about, you and I. After all, we’ve got a lot in common.”

It’s tempting to bite the probing digit just to wipe that smile off her face, but Jackson’s grey face and purpling leg spring to the forefront of his mind, and he quickly clamps down on the urge.

“Sure we do,” he agrees, in a tone that implies the exact opposite.

Kate’s eyes dance with amusement. “Well, I know we both have a vested interest in Derek Hale. That’s something, isn’t it?”

Everything in Stiles’ brain comes to a sudden, screeching halt, and the food he’s just eaten curdles unpleasantly in his stomach.

“Derek?” he echoes, his blank expression faltering as doubt begins to creep in. “What about him? What’s he got to do with any of this?”

She laughs softly. “Oh, sweetheart.” Her fingers gently tilt his chin upwards, white teeth flashing as her smile widens. “He’s the reason you’re here. I hadn’t hoped to make your acquaintance so soon, not with how fiercely his cubs have been guarding you. But I’m delighted you could join us before all the excitement starts. It’ll make our little chat a lot less…emotionally fraught.”

She brushes his fringe back, holding his gaze as though searching for his reaction. “Derek’s not the ‘wolf you think he is. Everything that’s happened in Beacon Hills these past few weeks is because of him.”

Stiles can feel himself shaking his head, but everything else has gone fuzzy and numb, his ears ringing a little as his chest begins to tighten.

“No,” he denies, his voice firm despite the way his throat is constricting. “No, that’s bullshit. Derek would never- he wouldn’t…” Sucking in a deeper breath in an attempt to quell the turmoil of emotions in his chest, he glares up at the Dom mutinously. “You’re a fucking liar.”

He really ought to have seen the blow coming, but the shock and pain of it still knocks the breath from his lungs, head snapping to the left with the force of her backhanded slap. Silver dots dance before his watering eyes, his lower lip and right cheek throbbing something fierce, warm copper flooding his mouth.

“You were warned,” she tells him, her voice soft and perfectly in control. “I’d start listening, if I were you. Although,” she grips his chin to tilt his head up again, her gaze admiring as she stares down at him, “you’re pretty cute when you bleed.”

Using the sleeve of her jacket, she dabs at the wetness on Stiles’ lips and chin, her touch gentle.

“You’re very loyal to him, aren’t you?” she notes, bringing her thumb to her painted lips to suck off a drop of crimson staining it. “It’s cute. But your daddy really ought to have warned you to steer clear of Derek Hale.”

“Why?” Stiles asks, voice low and hoarse. “Because he’s a Werewolf?”

Kate’s nails dig into his jawline. “No, sweetheart. Because he’s a traitor.” She releases him, leaning back with her hands braced on the table behind her, legs still bracketing Stiles in the chair. “There’s an awful lot you don’t know about Derek Hale, Stiles. To be honest, I’m surprised his family managed to keep me a secret from you – we were together for a long time, after all.”
Stiles swallows, congealing blood tacky on his tongue. “Wait. You used to go out with Derek?”

“Is that so difficult to believe?” Kate flashes him another amused smile. “There was once a time when he was head over heels in love with me, ready to give up his whole life – his family, his Pack, his home here in Beacon Hills, everything – just to be my kept boy in the city.”

At Stile’s disbelieving expression, she gives a nonchalant shrug. “Hard to picture him as the traitorous type, isn’t it? Wolves are supposed to be so loyal to their Packs.” She shrugs again. “But then again, that was almost eleven years ago. The Derek you know is a very different man.”

Eleven years? Oh, fucking hell.

“Derek couldn’t have been older than fifteen back then,” Stiles realises with dawning horror. “He was just a kid.”

“Mm, and a cute one at that,” Kate agrees with a smile, unaffected by his reaction. “Not too shabby in the sack, either.”

Stiles shakes his head at her slowly, disgust welling up inside him. “You sick fuck.”

The responding slap to his left cheek reignites the throbbing ache that had only just begun to abate there, but he’s to pissed to really feel it, narrowed eyes glaring up at the Dom the moment he turns his head back towards her. Kate’s busy inspecting her nails, acting for all the world like they’re talking about her preference in breakfast condiments.

“He was my target, Stiles, nothing more,” she tells him flatly. “I’m an Argent. Our family have been hunters for over four hundred years, dating right back to the first settlers. Unlike my brother, I embraced who I was meant to be; who I was born to be. My father needed a way to infiltrate the Hale family, and Derek was their weakest point. It wasn’t personal; just business.”

Hunters. Good god, it’s even worse than he could’ve imagined.

Prejudice against Werewolves alone is bad enough, but hunting supernatural folk for sport or personal gain is the stuff of horror movies, right up there with the list of medieval fuck-ups alongside fae-baiting and burning Druids at the stake. ‘Sick fuck’ had clearly been an understatement.

“Boys his age, they were always so easy,” Kate continues, her tone light. “So eager to meet up with me after class without their parents knowing. And really, how could they resist temptation? I was a hot college student with a car and plenty of cash – a sweet smile and a tight pair of jeans was usually more than enough to win them over.”

Stiles can picture it all too well. All those shy, awkward, self-conscious teenagers struggling to find approval in their friends and peers, suddenly garnering the attention of an older, drop-dead gorgeous Dom who’d shower them with gifts and affection. Fuck. Those kids hadn’t stood a chance against that kind of systematic manipulation.

“That being said,” the Dom tilts her head to the side, considering, “with Derek, it was a little less straightforward. It took me three weeks just to get him to meet me after school, and even then he was always so nervous about getting caught.”

Kate laughs softly, as though fondly remembering her time as a fucking predator. Stiles wants to punch her in mouth just to smudge her perfect makeup.

“The way he’d blush when our hands touched, I swear I half fell in love with the pup myself,” she adds, reaching out to absentely trace her fingers over Stiles’ collar. “It took me just over four months
to convince him I was his soulmate, but by the end of it, he was practically eating out of the palm of my hand.”

She smiles softly, the expression more genuine now. “Out of all the targets I’ve seduced over the years, he proved to be my biggest challenge. And he should’ve been my greatest triumph.”

“So what happened?” Stiles asks bluntly. “Did Laura catch you with her kid brother and beat the shit out of you?”

Kate’s nonchalant persona seems to waver for a moment, mouth twisting in displeasure as a faint crease forms between her eyes. But the expression is gone a moment later, and she shrugs again.

“I made a bad judgement call,” she admits. “I’d been watching Derek for weeks before I made my move, trying to get a feel for his personality; thought I had him pinned as a Sub for sure. He went down so sweetly, practically purred whenever I touched his hair; how was I supposed to know he’d barely begun his Transition period?”

Stiles’ jaw aches from clenching his teeth so hard.

“He was fifteen,” the Sub grits out. “He was a fucking Neutral, and you coerced him into being your Submissive.”

“And he loved every minute of it,” Kate agrees, that amused smile curling at her mouth again. “I’ll admit, I allowed myself to enjoy the game a little too much. I got sloppy – didn’t say ‘no’ to him as often as I should’ve, let him meet up with me a little too often. His family began to grow suspicious, and eventually Laura Hale tracked him down. I’ll never forget the look on Derek’s face when his sister found us necking behind old Ned’s diner.”

She feigns an expression of exaggerated shock and alarm, mouth open and eyes wide. Then, laughing it off, she tucks a stray lock of blond hair behind her ear.

“Should’ve killed the bitch on sight, but back then I preferred my executions to be a little less public.” The Dom lifts up the lower hem of her top, revealing four jagged white scars running horizontally across her toned abdomen. “Laura gave me these as a parting gift. I never did get the chance to repay her – I skipped town that same afternoon to avoid any legal unpleasantness. But,” here, she heaves a short, sharp sigh, “while I was gone, my dear brother came back to Beacon Hills and tipped off the Sheriff to the whereabouts of our family’s storage bunker. After the cops found the Wolfsbane and lighter fuel, they put two and two together, and it became a state-wide manhunt. I’ve been in hiding ever since. Which, let me tell you, is a drag. There was a time when I couldn’t even go underwear shopping for myself in case the store had high-res security cameras.”

She loosely twirls a lock of hair around her finger, glancing at it with a smile. “This is the first time I’ve been blond since I was twenty-two. It feels good to go natural after all these years.”

Stiles’ brain is buzzing with all this new information, questions and half-formed theories turning themselves over and over in his mind. He can barely believe that someone so callously cold-hearted could truly exist outside of a Disney movie, but the evidence is right there in front of him; Kate had been planning on extracting information from Derek about his home, with the intention of burning his family alive. Just like what had happened to those other families Danny had told him about when they’d been researching the Enforcers – only a couple of those cases had actually featured the mark, but in each case, there had been a teenage son involved, with the cause of death being a Wolfsbane-infused arson attack.

Holy fuck. Kate Argent’s a fucking serial killer.
“Why are you telling me all this?” Stiles asks in a low, wary voice. There’s no way she’s going to let him live after literally spelling out her life confession, surely.

Kate leans in closer, hands framing his face. “Because I want you to understand why I’m here, Stiles. The real reason I came back.” She kisses his mouth softly. “It’s all because of Derek.”

“But…but the Enforcers mark,” Stiles argues. “The Wolfsbane poisoning, the fire at the Switch Centre, the riots—"

“The Enforcers,” she echoes with a mocking laugh. “Oh, Stiles. Do you honestly think I give a shit about my father’s precious cult? I’m an Argent; I’m loyal to him for loyalty’s sake alone, nothing more. ‘Human supremacy’ lost its appeal after hearing that speech every Christmas until I turned eighteen. Still, when my father suggested coming back here to stir up trouble before the election, it offered me the chance to get back at the Hales for what they did to me all those years ago.”

Stiles swallows past the lump in his throat. “That Wolfsbane pouch in Liam’s bedroom,” he murmurs, realisation dawning. “It had nothing to do with his parents owning the Switch centre, did it?”

Smiling, Kate shakes her head. “My father’s plan to burn down the support centre certainly made it easier to hide my true motive. But no, I wasn’t interested in his parents. Liam was Derek’s firstborn Beta pup, too heavily guarded by the rest of the Pack to successfully kidnap without raising suspicion. On the other hand, in killing him too quickly, Derek might suspect he was being targeted and that would’ve made things more difficult for me in the long run. But dying in his sleep…that held a certain appeal.”

She sighs softly. “Only the pup barely stayed at home more than a few nights after I had the Wolfsbane planted; he wasn’t there long enough for it to adequately poison him. I was tempted, for a brief time, to put a sniper order out for him, but now I’m glad I didn’t. Having him caged here is a bonus; there’s nothing quite so damaging to an Alpha’s emotional control as a missing pup, especially when it’s the runt of the litter.”

Kate lightly grips his chin, turning his head a little to the side with a sympathetic tut. “You’re going to bruise something terrible,” she murmurs regretfully. “Your Dom won’t be happy when he sees you.”

Stiles swallows, for once not keen to fight his way out of her grasp. “You mean you’re not gonna kill Derek?”

“Kill him?” Kate actually has the gall to look mildly surprised at the suggestion. “Oh baby, no. No, no, no, I’m not going to lay a finger on Derek. I’m just going to take away everything he’s ever cared about. His family, his Pack, his precious WPDS Centre…all of it.” She touches his cheek lightly. “But don’t worry. I’ll be keeping you alive for a long while yet.”

She finally drops her feet down from his chair and stands, fingers curling over the nape of his neck to pinch uncomfortably, dragging him to his feet.

“Come on,” she urges, flashing him another grin. “There’s something I’d like to show you.”
“Beautiful, isn’t it?”

Stiles can only stand in the entryway to the bank and stare at the device at the foot of the steps speechlessly, heart in his throat and fingers tingling faintly as his breathing quickens, ears ringing and head beginning to spin.

Kate laughs softly at his nonverbal response, reaching across to stroke a hand down his spine, resting it at the small of his back. “Do you know what it is?”

“It’s a bomb,” Stiles breathes, his voice wavering ever so slightly. “You built a fucking bomb.”

“Not just any old bomb, Stilinski,” a vaguely familiar voice corrects from behind him, and a moment later someone bumps into his shoulder none too gently as they pass by. “A broad-dispersal aconite-salycate infusion bomb. One of a kind. My legacy, if you will.”

Stiles blinks at the man in surprise. “Mr Harris?”

“Adrian’s been our principle pyro-technician these past fifteen years,” Kate tells him cheerfully. “His hands are…particularly skilled.”

From the look the chemistry professor sends towards the other Dom, it’s not difficult to conclude that the man’s loyalty to the syndicate is perhaps more superficial than he’d like to let on. Harris is fucking gone on Kate. Not that she seems to be doing much to deter that notion; Stiles wonders just how many of her ‘loyal’ associates are actually just being strung along by her flirtatious charms.

Four armed men move to surround the device, lifting it carefully with a stretcher-type platform, and begin to transfer it towards a white van some thirty yards up ahead. Stiles squints at the vehicle in the morning sunlight, gaze focusing on a familiar dark red BHCNN logo printed on the side.

Beacon Hills Central News Network. The fuck?

“There’s going to be a public statement made by the police and representatives from the Druid council in a few hours,” Kate tells him, wrapping her arm around his shoulders in a friendly manner. “I imagine Derek and your father will be considered too emotionally invested in the case to be allowed to deliver it, which means the task will likely fall to someone with ties in both law enforcement and WPDS work.”

“Laura,” Stiles realises, watching as the men carefully load the bulky device into the back of the van under Harris’ supervision. “You’re going to kill Laura.”

“And several other members of the Hale family, if we’re lucky,” Kate agrees. “The statement will be made from the front entrance of the Beacon Hills WPDS centre – even if Derek’s Pack aren’t there,
his friends and work colleagues will be. Harris is a genius when it comes to integrating Wolfsbane into weaponry – if his calculations are correct, the airborne aconite will neutralise any Were within one hundred yards of the explosion, and poison enough of the city that any Pack leader with more than two brain cells will choose to evacuate their families before the day is out. It’s a win-win all ’round.”

Stiles shakes his head slowly. “You’re crazy,” he whispers. “You’re all fucking crazy.”

“I’d turn you over my knee for that, but we’re running short on time. Maybe later.” Kate turns her head to press a loud, smooching kiss to his temple, then shoves him backwards towards his waiting guards. “He’s all yours, Mitch. I want him exactly how I left him when the rest of us get back, do you understand? And watch your security pass around my niece – Allison’s an Argent through and through, she’s as light-fingered as they come.”

She gives a playful waggle of her fingers in farewell, winks at Stiles, and turns away to head down the stone steps to join her colleagues.

“You don’t have to do this!” Stiles pleads, struggling against the guards as they come up on either side of him, gripping onto his biceps. “Kate! Kate, please!”

The Dom turns, her gaze resting on him briefly before she focuses her attention on Mitch.

“Set up a monitor in the containment vault,” she instructs. “I wouldn’t want our guests to miss out on all the action.”

Stiles fights their hold on him with everything he’s got, for all the good it does him. He screams out after Kate as he’s dragged away, shoes squeaking against the marble floor as he tries to resist them, but the Dom’s already turned away to continue her descent, and his pleas fall on deaf ears.

“… … … … … … … … … … …

“Oh my God.”

Allison has a bloodstained hand pressed to her mouth, face pale and eyes wide in horror. Beside him, Liam is silent, but his grip on Stiles’ hand has tightened to the point of being painful, and his eyes have taken on a pale amber hue.

“I knew Kate and Gerard were planning something big, something public, but…” She shakes her head, drags trembling fingers through her fringe. “We need to warn Laura.”
“When I left, they were just getting ready to head out,” Stiles tells them. “From what I could see of their equipment, I think they’re planning on posing as a BHC news team to get past the roadblock near the WPDS centre. It’s the perfect cover – given what’s been happening in the city these past couple weeks, there’s gonna be a dozen or more networks waiting to broadcast the statement. Nobody’s gonna think to stop them.”

“It’s a weekday,” Liam murmurs, his breathing growing slightly erratic. “There’ll be at least four teams posted at Centre, and maybe dozens of civilian Weres waiting outside to hear the statement. If…if that aconite bomb’s as powerful as Kate says it is, it’s gonna kill a whole lot of people.”

Stiles shifts to wrap his arm around Liam’s shoulders, drawing the younger Sub into a tight sideways hug. “We’re not gonna let that happen,” he promises firmly. “Kate bragging to me about her scheme has given us the time and motive we need to come up with a decent escape plan. We’re going to get out of here and warn Laura about the bomb before they’ve even set the timer.”

“But how?” Liam presses, and thumps a fist against the metal bars joining their two cages together, hard enough to make Stiles wince in sympathy for the pup’s bones. “I’m not strong enough to break through steel, and the cage doors are magnetically locked, how are we supposed to-”

“There’s a swipe card,” Stiles reminds him, with a forced sort of calm that he really doesn’t feel. Because Liam’s right, their situation’s pretty fucking dire when the facts are laid out like that. “From what I overheard Kate saying, it sounds like they’re only gonna leave behind that big muscly guy to guard us, everyone else is heading out in the vans. Right now, it’s only,” he tugs Liam’s wrist up to look at his watch, “six-forty. I doubt anyone’s gonna start giving a statement until closer to nine o’clock, which gives us a window of at least two hours to work with. At some point within that time frame, we need to get our hands on the swipe card.”

Allison glances over her shoulder at Jackson’s prone figure, and when she turns back to face them, her mouth is set in a grim line. “Stiles. I don’t think Jackson’s going to last that long.”

“His heart’s tiring out,” Liam adds in a hushed tone. “It’s been beating so fast, ever since we got here, but now it’s too slow.”

Allison reaches through the bars to squeeze the pup’s knee. “He’s lost a lot of blood, and he’s been compensating for too long.” Her gaze turns to Stiles, her eyes shining a little although her voice remains calm. “He’s got an hour at most.”

“Fuck.” He pinches the bridge of his nose, and breathes deeply to ward off the panic threatening to constrict his lungs. Not now, dammit. “Okay. An hour. We can do this.”

Stiles rubs a hand down his face, wincing when it aggravates his bruises. Tentatively probing his bottom lip with his tongue to feel out the cut, and satisfied that he hasn’t managed to reopen it again, he huffs out a short sigh and tilts his head to rest it tiredly against Liam’s.

“Kate said she wanted a monitor installed in here so that we could watch the massacre,” he says slowly, thinking aloud. “Which means Mitch is going to have to come back in here soon, before things start heating up at the Centre. That may be our one and only chance to get the card from him. We’ll need to think of a way to get him to stand close enough to the cage for us to swipe it.”

There’s a long beat of silence, Stiles’ hand fistled in his hair as he wracks his brains for something that might serve as a distraction without getting himself or anybody else shot in the process. Fuck, he’s tired though. And on edge. And trying so hard not to panic that his stomach’s twisted itself into a thousand knots. Definitely not the best frame of mind for coming up with a cunning escape plan.
“I might have something,” Allison says after a minute or so, her expression grim but determined. “You’re not going to like it, but I think it’s our best shot.”

Stiles and Liam inch closer until they’re pressed up against the bars, Allison leaning in from the other side as she lowers her voice to a murmur.

“Alright. Here’s what I need you to do…”

_TBC_

Chapter End Notes

Trigger Warnings: Violence, manipulation, unwanted physical contact, noncon kissing, mention of past underage, dark themes.

Aaaand that was officially the hardest chapter to write. Phew. Kate creeps me the fuck out, but I hope I did her creepiness justice; I had to tone it down a little from what my brain initially had in mind, because I am weak and dislike nasty people. :P

Also, dear god, SO MANY PLOT POINTS hinging on this chapter, I've literally been planning this since I first started writing this story two years ago and to FINALLY get it written is both a relief and freaking terrifying, because I hope it makes as much sense on paper as it does in my head.

Good news is, you've made it through the toughest chapter. It's far from a smooth ride here on out, but it's certainly going to be less emotionally traumatising. I hope. <3

Let me know your thoughts, and thanks for reading! :)
Chapter Summary

Other potential titles that summarise this chapter: 'The Great Escape' and 'Boss Level'.

Needless to say, shit's about to go down, folks.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

It seems to take half an age for their resident captor to return, by which time all three of them are on edge. Allison has begun pacing back and forth in her own cage while Liam has slowly slipped further and further to one side, until he’s laid with his head in Stiles’ lap.

The teenager’s been putting on a brave face for the both of them, but Stiles can tell the events of the night (and the lingering effects of his extensive wolfsbane poisoning) have taken their toll on him. Add into that the fact that Liam’s a young transitioning Beta who’s been forcefully separated from both his Alpha and his Pack, and it’s a testament to the kid’s level of control that he hasn’t started to Drop sooner. Stiles can feel it, though – a growing, tremulous tension in the teenager’s shoulders – and hates how powerless he is to take that away from him.

So, bereft of all other options, Stiles does what he’s best at doing – he talks.

“Dude, for real? You’ve never visited the Crescent Pools?” he asks, forcing a cheerful tone that he really doesn’t feel. “Like, never?”

Liam shakes his head ever so slightly, clearly unwilling to dislodge Stiles’ hand in his hair.

“Aw man, you’re missing out,” the older Sub insists. “Scott and I used to go every summer when we were kids; my dad would schedule the weekend off and take us camping. You know, when the moon’s out, the water actually glows. You gotta see it, bud.” He gives Liam’s hair a gentle tug. “Tell you what, next time you and the others have a couple of days off, we’ll all head out there together. Bet if we tag-teamed Derek, he wouldn’t be able to say ‘no’.”

A little of the tightness eases from Liam’s posture, and he turns his head fractionally to glance up at Stiles.

“You mean it?”

“Yeah dude, totally.” Stiles flashes him an easy grin. “It’ll be like a big Pack vacation.”

Liam manages a small, faint smile. “I’d like that.” Then he tenses again, holding his breath, gaze snapping back towards the door quickly. “I…Stiles, it’s him. He’s coming.”

Heartbeat suddenly pulsing rapidly in his ears, Stiles glances towards Allison, their eyes meeting briefly. Her gaze fills with unwavering resolve, and she dips her chin in a sharp nod. He returns it, swallowing past the lump in his throat, and eases Liam’s head out of his lap, shifting to sit with his
back against the bars that separate his cage from Allison’s.

“Close your eyes,” he whispers urgently to the Beta. “Make him think you’re still out. We can’t risk him dousing you with that spray again.”

Liam gives a slight nod and does as instructed, going utterly still except for the slow, shallow rise-and-fall of his chest. Stiles tries to match its speed and rhythm, tries to push past the sharp spike of anxiety in his chest that’s threatening to throw him into a full-blown panic attack, tries not to think about what might happen if things don’t go according to plan.

They’re only gonna have one shot at this; they have to get it right.

Footsteps gradually become audible to human ears, the heavy tread of large booted feet approaching them along the corridor beyond the vault. Stiles crosses his arms over his chest to hide the way his hands are curling into clenched fists as his nerves begin to mount, and glances up towards the door when Mitch finally arrives.

“The boss figured you’d all be getting bored, locked up in here for so long,” the burly guard says cheerfully, stepping into the vault with a metal briefcase in one hand and several loops of thick wire draped over his arm. “She thought you might appreciate a bit of visual entertainment to help pass the time.”

Stiles bites his tongue at that to keep from making a bitterly sarcastic retort. His face still hurts from the strength of Kate’s blows, and while the blond Argent had left orders that he not be harmed in her absence, Stiles isn’t willing to put Mitch’s loyalty to the test. The Dom’s built like a pro wrestler, and it’s logical to assume that he’ll pack a bit more power into his punches.

The guard swings the briefcase up and onto a table near the wall of the vault, opening it to reveal a portable monitor and keyboard.

“Signal down here’s pretty shit,” Mitch tells them offhandedly, and shrugs the reels of wire from his shoulder, letting them fall to the floor. “It’s gonna take me a few minutes to rig this baby up, so I don’t want any funny business from the three of you. Fair warning – if that wolf of yours starts howling, I’m gonna put a bullet in its head.”

Stiles doesn’t have to feign the glare he shoots towards the Dom. “He’s still out cold, asshole. You guys hit him twice with that wolfsbane stuff, you’re lucky he’s not dead.”

Mitch huffs a laugh, glancing briefly towards Liam’s prone form before returning his attention to the monitor in the briefcase, “Dosed him up good, huh? It’s a shame – Ben was hopin’ to come back here and have a little fun with the pup while the boss was away.”

Stiles’ stomach churns, both at the thought of someone laying their hands on Liam, and at the realisation that Kate’s left more than one guard behind at the bank. He shoots another quick glance towards Allison while Mitch’s back is turned. She meets his gaze again for a brief moment, then her face crumples in pain and she cries out, one hand clutching her swollen belly while the other clings to the cage for support.

“Allison!” he shouts, and twists around to kneel up, hands gripping the bars that separate their cages. “Fuck, what’s wrong?”

“It’s… it’s the baby,” she grits out, her voice filled with pain and eyes brimming with fear. “I… I think it’s- aah!”

Stiles shoots a desperate, panicked look towards Mitch, who’s regarding the pregnant female with
growing alarm as Allison sags further against the bars of the cage, barely keeping herself on her feet.

“Shit, man, you gotta do something,” he begs. “She’s only a couple of weeks away from her due date, I think she might be going into labour!”

Allison gives another pained cry, arm wrapping further around her midriff as she doubles over. Mitch tosses the tool in his hand onto the table and crosses over to their cages warily.

“Listen, lady, this really isn’t a good time to start pushin’ out a baby,” the guard says, gruff and awkward, and reaches out to grip Allison’s shoulder as she sags further against the bars, trying to push her upright again. “Just keep it together until your Aunt gets back, okay? I’m sure she’ll know what to–”

In a flash of movement, Allison twists away from the guard’s grip and straightens, clamping both hands around the man’s wrist and forearm and yanking sharply with the full weight of her body. The Dom doesn’t even have time to cry out in surprise as he overbalances, his head smacking off the bars of the cell with an echoing, metallic clang.

Mitch drops to the ground, unconscious.

“Fuck yeah!” Stiles crows.

Allison’s immediately sinking to her knees and reaching through the bars to relieve him of both his firearms, sliding one across the floor of the cage towards Stiles, who picks it up and checks the safety before tucking it into the waistband of his jeans. It’s been a little while since he last fired a weapon, but that doesn’t mean he’s forgotten a single minute of Chris Argent’s lessons. If he needs to use it, he will.

“Did you hear what he said?” Liam asks urgently, no longer feigning unconsciousness as he moves to kneel beside Stiles, both of them watching as Allison turns out the guard’s pockets and pats him down. “There’s some other dude called ‘Ben’ guarding the place as well. Our plan didn’t cover that.”

“So we’ll improvise,” Stiles returns levelly, an adrenaline-fuelled sort of calm settling over him. “And that means we’re gonna be relying on those ears of yours, buddy. The signal in this place might be crap, but the corridors echo like nothing else – with any luck, we should be able to avoid running into the other guy altogether.”

Allison suddenly swears sharply, throwing down Mitch’s emptied wallet and sitting back on her heels. “Fuck.”

“What?” Stiles asks, unease twisting in his stomach again.

Allison tucks a lock of dark her behind her ear with shaking, bloodstained fingers. “The swipe card,” she answers shortly. “It’s not here.”

“What?” His previous calm short-lived, the Sub presses closer to the bars and reaches between them to sift through the discarded credit and store cards himself. “No. No, it has to be. We saw him use it half an hour ago!”

“It’s not here, Stiles,” she reiterates, the slight strain to her voice belying her outwardly calm appearance.

Her lips thin in determination, and after a brief pause she reaches for the second firearm and pushes herself upright, wincing as she cups her abdomen. Then, taking several paces to distance herself from
the door of the cage, she raises her arm, gun levelled at the electronic lock. Stiles, realising what she intends to do, shoves both arms between the bars that separate their cages and waves his hands frantically.

“Nononono, wait!”

Allison glances towards him without lowering the gun. “For what? We don’t have a lot of options left, Stiles. And Jackson’s running out of time.”

Stiles’ gaze flickers briefly to where the other Sub is laid out on the floor of Allison’s cage, pale-faced and still, his purple leg growing ever darker by the hour, and closes his eyes to forcefully push the renewed swell of panic back down again.

“There’s no guarantee that shooting the lock will even open the cage,” he argues, keeping his voice low. “What it **will** do is alert every remaining guard in this place to our whereabouts. What if someone contacts Kate, and they decide to detonate the bomb before the public statement? We can’t risk it, Allison. Just…just give me a minute to think.”

He waits until Allison has obligingly lowered her arm again before dropping back to sit cross-legged on the floor, head in his hands, fingers tugging at his fringe.

“C’mon, c’mon, c’mon,” he whispers, racking his brain for a solution to their current crisis. “You got this.”

It just doesn’t make sense. He’d seen Mitch use the card to open his cell earlier; the guard had slipped it back into an attachment on his belt right before he’d tossed Stiles back into the cage following his ‘intimate chat’ with Kate. But now it wasn’t **there**. Kate had told Mitch to keep it someplace safe, though - warned him that Allison was as light-fingered as any Argent, and that he should probably keep it out of sight.

Fuck, where the hell could it be? Surely Mitch would’ve kept it on his person, in case of emergencies. But then the guy never really struck him as the intellectual type…

Swearing under his breath, he scrubs a hand down his face and glances back towards the prone guard, watching as Allison uses the Dom’s own belt to bind his wrists to one of the cell bars.

“Liam, can you reach his feet?” she asks, her voice having returned to its usual calm professionality. “See if you can fasten his laces to one of the bars; I doubt he’ll be out of it for much longer.” She meets Stiles’ gaze briefly. “Maybe we can get him to tell us where the card is? A gun to your temple can be pretty persuasive.”

Stiles nods, and watches as Liam struggles to reach through the front bars of their cage to catch hold of Mitch’s nearest foot and drag it closer so that he can untie the laces of the thick-soled combat shoe.

A lightbulb suddenly comes on in the back of Stiles’ mind.

“Left shoe,” he breathes, hope dawning in his chest.

Allison glances towards him, her brow creasing fractionally. “What?”

“Left shoe,” Stiles enthuses, the words tumbling out in an excited rush now as he grips Liam’s shoulder. “Dude, grab his other foot.”

“Stiles…” Allison begins doubtfully, but the Sub cuts her off.
“Lydia’s call, the one she made from Donut Heaven, she kept going on and on about checking the left shoe,” he explains, fighting not to fidget in nervous anticipation as Liam unties the laces and begins working the boot loose. “She made me promise, and I couldn’t for the life of me figure out what it all meant, but—”

He falls silent, heart in his throat, as the shoe pops off. Liam turns it upside-down and gives it a slight shake, and a thin, black rectangle of plastic clatters to the ground.

“That’s it!” Liam cries, fumbling to pick it up in his enthusiasm.

Stiles sags a little in his relief, and sends up a silent word of thanks to whichever deity gave Lydia the gift of foresight. He takes the card when Liam passes it to him, and heaves himself to his feet, reaching through the bars and angling his wrist to swipe it through the locking mechanism there. The device gives a soft beep, an even quieter clang, and the door swings open beneath the weight of him.

After that it’s a bit of a rush, Stiles and Liam working to drag Mitch into their own vacated cage and secure him to the bars there with the wires he’d brought to set up the monitor. It’s the work of a few short minutes, but with time now of the essence and so many lives at stake, it feels as though it takes far longer.

“As soon as we get enough signal, we’ll make the call,” Stiles says, a little breathless from exertion as he shuts the cage door behind him. “Are you sure you’ll be alright on your own?”

Allison nods from within her own unlocked cage, kneeling beside Jackson’s head as she reaches beneath the makeshift jacket-pillow for the cell phone she’d hidden there earlier.

“I’m not exactly defenceless,” she reasons, passing to him with a nod towards the gun resting on the floor beside her. “And you need Liam more than you need me – your best chance is to avoid running into anyone, and I’ll only slow you down if you need to move quickly. Besides,” she glances down, and gently brushes back Jackson’s fringe, “one of us needs to stay with Jax.”

Nodding, even though he doesn’t much like the idea of leaving either of his friends here in the vault, Stiles slips his own gun from the waistband of his jeans, cell phone gripped in his other hand, and turns towards Liam.

The teenager’s leaning against the side of the cage, pale-faced and exhausted, perspiration gleaming on his brow, his eyes half-closed. Faintly alarmed by his appearance (remembering all too well just how much wolfsbane the kid’s been exposed to over the past twenty-four hours), Stiles reaches for him, giving his shoulder a gentle shake.

“Dude, hey. You okay?”

Liam jerks upright with a sharp inhale, his gaze unfocused for a moment before settling on Stiles.

“Yeah, sorry, m’good,” he says, with a worrying sort of slur to his voice, but he manages a convincing-looking smile that settles Stiles’ fears a little. “We ready to go?”

Stiles glances back towards Allison one last time, tries not to linger on the way she’s slipped a hand around Jackson’s wrist to feel for his pulse because that’ll mean acknowledging how fucking bad things really are, and that’s a one-way ticket to Anxiety-ville.

“We’ll come back for you as soon as we’ve made the call,” he promises.

“Be careful,” Allison returns seriously, shifting the gun to rest it in her lap. “And good luck.”
He wishes he could reassure her that they didn’t need it, but that’d be one helluva lie. Given the enormity of what’s at stake here, they need all the luck they can get, and then some.

“The floor’s clear,” Liam says, having moved over to stand just inside the entrance to the vault, his head turned a little to the side as he listens. “If we’re gonna do this, now’s as good a time as any.”

Stiles nods, squares his shoulders, and steps past the youth into the darkened corridor beyond.

Pressing his back against the marble pillar and attempting to squeeze his way further out of sight, Stiles tries to calm his breathing, gripping the cell phone so hard that the plastic casing creaks.

“How many?” he asks, barely even a whisper, knowing that the Werewolf will hear him regardless.

Liam shifts silently beside him, head cocked a little to the side and gaze unfocused as he concentrates for a moment. A faint crease forms in his brow, lips thinning as he turns worried eyes towards Stiles.

“Three,” the Beta replies quietly. “One out front guarding the entrance, one heading this way along that corridor over there.” He points around the pillar and towards the archway that lies beyond the opposite balcony. “And there’s an older dude a little further off, somewhere on the ground floor. He’s...he’s giving orders to someone, but I can’t hear another heartbeat so he must be using a phone or something.”

Stiles swears under his breath. So Kate had left more than one additional guard behind, damn her. And as for the First National Bank itself, god – the place is built like a fucking maze. They must’ve traipsed through at least ten corridors and tried a dozen or so doors, but could they find another exit, or a single bar of phone signal? Of course they fucking couldn’t. Every window had been boarded up securely from the inside, and every door they’d found had just led to another room with more boarded-up windows. Apparently fire exits hadn’t been a thing back when this place had first been built. It’s quickly becoming clear that their only viable option is to exit through the front entrance.

The moment they’re out of this mess, Stiles is going to draft up a petition to get this building demolished. Fuck, he’ll even volunteer to help tear it down himself.

“How long until the guard across the way sees us?” he whispers.

Liam shrugs, looking tense. “Twenty, maybe thirty seconds? He’s not far off.”

The Sub swears again, peering around the pillar to glance through the sculpted columns of the upper
balcony towards the wide staircase on the opposite side of the hall that descends towards the ground floor.

“Stiles.” Gripping his wrist, Liam drag his attention back to the phone in his hand, his voice an excited whisper. “Stiles, you’ve got a bar, look!”

Hope surging within him, Stiles hits redial on the cell phone number he’s been trying to ring this past fifteen minutes, holding it to his ear and almost laughing in relief when it finally goes through; the trilling purr of the call tone has never sounded more beautiful.

He’s so focused on the cell that he almost doesn’t notice when the teenager beside him suddenly surges to his feet, reaching out at the last second to grab hold of the bottom of Liam’s t-shirt.

“Dude, what are you doing?” he hisses.

Liam manages to shake himself loose, looking pale but determined. “Buying you some time.”

And that’s all the answer that Stiles gets before the Beta’s setting off at a full-on sprint, his feet enviably quiet despite his speed, running the full length of the upper balcony and around to the other side.

Stiles kneels up and leans around the pillar to watch him, heart in his throat as the teenager reaches the archway on the opposite side of the hall and passes straight through it into the corridor beyond, out of sight.

“Allison?”

He almost startles at the voice, temporarily distracted by Liam’s idiotic act of self-sacrifice, and presses the phone closer to his ear, cupping his hand near his mouth to keep his voice from travelling in the chasm-like hall.

“Dad, it’s me,” he whispers urgently, his throat suddenly tight.

“Dad, it’s me,” he whispers urgently, his throat suddenly tight.

“Stiles!” His father’s voice sounds ragged with relief. “Oh, thank god. We-”

“Dad, just listen to me,” Stiles interrupts, his gaze focused on the archway where Liam’s disappeared, itching to go after him but knowing how important it is that he delivers the message first. “Kate Argent’s on her way to the WPDS centre with a wolfsbane bomb that could wipe out half the Were population – you gotta call Laura and get her to evacuate everyone before it’s too late. They’ve got this white and blue Beacon Hills CNN van, they’re gonna pose as reporters to get as close to the Centre as they can.”

“Call it in,” John says quickly, clearly speaking to someone else. “Divert all available units to the WPDS Centre. Make civilian evacuation their first priority, and get someone on the line to BDU.”

With Kate’s plan now made known to the right people, it’s a massive weight off his shoulders, and Stiles takes his first deep, unlaboured breath in what feels like hours. But his relief is short-lived.

Shots ring out suddenly from across the hall, the sound echoing deafeningly, and Stiles’ heart constricts painfully within his chest, panic pulsing like ice through his veins.

“Liam!” he yells, uncaring of who might overhear him, and lurches to his feet, setting off at a run across the upper balcony as fast as his legs can carry him, gun held at the ready.

“Stiles, what’s going on?” his dad demands worriedly. “Are you-?”
“Buddy, we’re on our way to First National.” That’s Jordan’s talking now (presumably he’s been put on speakerphone), utterly calm and professional, cutting above his Dad’s panicked tones. “Is that where they’re keeping you?”

“Yes!” Stiles has no idea how the Phoenix managed to pinpoint his whereabouts, but he’s never been happier to be so clueless. He skids as he turns the corner on the upper landing, feet slipping on loose detritus from the peeling, flaking ceiling above him, but he recovers and keeps on running. “And we’re gonna need an ambulance, Jackson’s been-”

A larger chunk of debris near the stairs catches him underfoot, sending him sprawling with a grunt, phone flying out of his hand on impact and skittering across the floor. He bites out a low curse and pushes himself up onto his hands and knees, reaching for it.

There’s another bang, and the cell phone is blasted several feet to the side, casing broken and screen smashed. Stiles jerks, fumbling to bring up his own gun, but a warning shot lands close to him, splintering the wood of the nearby banister, and he goes still.

“Drop it,” Haigh orders, his own weapon still trained on Stiles. “No sudden movements.”

Stiles grits his teeth, too furious with the man to be afraid right now, and reluctantly sets his gun down, pushing it away when Haigh gives a gesturing twitch of his gun.

“Good boy.” The ex-deputy climbs the last few steps and then turns around, kicking Stiles’ discarded gun back down the staircase. Then he plants a booted foot between Stiles’ shoulderblades. “You know, I warned Kate not to underestimate you. Like your father, you’ve got a knack for causing me all kinds of trouble. If it were up to me, I’d put a bullet in your head right now, but she was very insistent about keeping you alive until all this is over, and I’ve come to understand that it’s not in a man’s best interests to piss her off.”

The hot metal of Haigh’s gun presses against his neck just above his collar, and Stiles can’t help the noise of surprise and pain that escapes his lips, although he forcefully clamps them shut a moment later.

“But believe you me,” the Dom continues, his voice low and threatening. “I won’t hesitate to break every bone in your fucking body if you try anything funny. Do you understand?”

Stiles nods, clenching his eyes closed against the threatening sting of tears. God, he wishes his Dad were here.

“Your little wolfboy, on the other hand,” Haigh muses, removing his foot from Stiles’ back and stepping around him. “He’s caused far more trouble than he’s worth. If Ben hasn’t killed him already, I know for a fact that Mr Argent will.”

The Dom pulls a walkie-talkie from his belt, raising it to his lips. “Ben, did you get him?” Silence. Haigh’s brow creases a little and he turns away from Stiles, walking forwards a few paces. “Webster, do you copy?”

“I’m sorry, but the person you’re calling is not available,” comes Liam’s tremulous yet very-much-alive voice, and Stiles’ head jerks up in surprise and delight. “Can I take a message?”

Haigh’s posture tenses, his hand curling into a fist. “You,” he grits out and begins striding towards the other balcony with clear intent. “You wanna play games, pretty boy? I’ll show you how to have fun.”

There’s a dark sort of promise to his words that sends Stiles straight back to that awful night six and a
half years ago, with a grinning Matt Daehler standing over him, splattered with the blood of his most recent victims, promising that next time it’d be fun for the both of them.

Rather than inducing the usual panic attack, the snapshot memory suddenly has him pissed.

Stiles wasn’t able to stop Matt when he was sixteen; he wasn’t able to save himself from the hurt and torment that bastard unleashed. But there’s no way in hell he’s gonna stand by and let it happen to Liam, not on his life.

Pushing his aching body to its feet, he breaks into a run, ploughing straight into Haigh at full speed, tackling him with a furious shout.

“Stay the fuck away from him, asshole!”

He manages to take Haigh by surprise, and the man goes down like a ton of bricks beneath him. Adrenaline surging, Stiles scrabbles to wrench the gun from the Dom’s loosened grip, pulling back on the man’s thumb until he feels something give way. Haigh gives a pained yell and manages to throw him off, the gun clattering to the floor equidistant between them. Stiles dives for it in the same moment the deputy does, and the Sub manages to bat it away out of reach – although he miscalculates the force of his shove, and the weapon goes skittering through the gap between the balcony columns to fall to the entrance lobby far below with a noisy clatter.

“Son of a bitch,” Haigh curses, and Stiles has just enough time to stumble to his feet, ready to flee, before the man’s on him.

The blow to his stomach knocks the wind from him, but he raises his arms on instinct to block the punch to his face, Chris’ self-defence lessons kicking in even after all these years. Gasping for breath, winded, he tries to backtrack a few paces, but a kick to his midriff doubles him over with an oof, and a knee to the chin makes his vision blackout for a second, mouth throbbing where he’s bitten his tongue, lip bleeding from the cut that’s reopened there.

“You really are that stupid, aren’t you, Stilinski?” Haigh growls as Stiles stumbles back, dizzy and disorientated. “Did you honestly think a kneeler like you stood a chance against someone like me? I’m going to break every bone in your fucking body.”

The deputy comes at him again and Stiles’ reaction is just a millisecond too slow, his arms knocked aside where they’ve moved to protect his face, and suddenly there are strong, meaty hands around his neck, squeezing his trachea hard enough to cut off the air supply.

Panicked, eyes wide and watering, he pushes against the Dom’s grip, tries to twist Haigh’s elbow to release the pressure, but the man’s putting everything he’s got into it and Stiles is quickly running out of strength. His shoes squeak against the floor as his feet scrabble to shift him away from Haigh’s grip, fingernails digging into the deputy’s wrists as he futilely tries to break free. There are already silver dots swimming ominously in his vision, and he doesn’t know how much longer he can keep this up before he passes out.

“Stiles!”

There’s a blur out of the corner of his eye, and then something barrels straight into Haigh with the force of a freight train, knocking him away from Stiles. The Sub falls to the floor, legs folding beneath him as he concentrates on sucking in desperate, gulping breaths through his aching throat. He manages to blink his blurred vision back into focus in time to see Liam and Haigh grappling with each a few feet away, blood shining wetly on the Dom’s skin as it catches the light, the Beta’s claws having raked four deep gashes down one of the deputy’s cheeks.
Stiles can only watch on in horror as the two, locked together in each other’s fierce grip, stumble closer and closer to the rail of the balcony, and within moments Haigh has Liam pressed up against it, the teenager slowly tilting further backwards.

“Liam!” he yells frantically, although it’s little more than a hoarse croak from his injured throat.

The Beta lifts a foot off the ground to deliver a powerful kick between Haigh’s legs, doubling the deputy over with a pained wheeze – but the move tilts his centre of gravity, and Stiles can only cry out in alarm, a hand flung out towards them in desperation, and watch helplessly as the pair are sent toppling over the railing.

There’s a beat of dreadful silence, wherein everything around Stiles goes muffled, even the sound of his own scream. Then a horrible, sickening *thud* of a heavy object impacting with the unforgiving floor metres below.

“No,” he breathes, bile burning at the back of his throat as he fights to regain control of his weakened body, crawling over to the balcony on limbs that don’t want to support his weight. With great effort, he uses the railing to drag himself upright, his breathing quickening. “No, no, no, please god, no…”

He’s not ready for the sight that greets him.

Hanging on to the lower lip of the sculpted overhang, Liam peers up at him, pale and exhausted with a streak of black fluid leaking from his nose, but by all other appearance wonderfully, beautifully unharmed.

“Hi,” the younger Sub says after a pause. “Do you mind giving me a hand up?”

Letting out a loud, tearful, slightly hysterical laugh, Stiles leans as far as he can over the railing without risking falling himself, grabbing hold of Liam’s outstretched hand as the teenager does a one-armed pullup to meet him halfway. A few seconds of heaving later, and both of them are collapsing back onto the solid balcony floor, half on top of each other, panting for breath. Stiles immediately yanks the younger Sub into a crushing hug, shaking hands fisting in the back of the kid’s shirt.

“Oh my god, don’t *ever* do that to me again,” he fumes, his croaking voice trembling as much as the rest of him. “I’m not ready for grey hairs yet, you *jerk*.”

Liam laughs wetly against his shoulder, and buries further into his hold. “I’m sorry. I didn’t know what else to do. He was gonna *kill* you, and all I could think about was getting him away from you. I didn’t…I didn’t mean to…” The teenager sucks in a shaky, hitching breath. “He’s dead, Stiles. His neck snapped when he hit the ground, I heard it.”

Stiles hugs the kid tighter, one hand coming up to settle in Liam’s hair. “It’s okay,” he murmurs, closing his eyes as the panic slowly begins to recede. “We’re okay, buddy. You did good.”

The Beta clings to him just as fiercely, and for a long while they sit there, both of them aching and exhausted, recovering from several consecutive near-death experiences. Liam’s breathing has grown shallower and his grip on Stiles weaker, and when the older Sub eases him back a few inches, he’s alarmed to see the black fluid now leaking out of the corner of the kid’s mouth.

“Liam?”

The teenager blinks at him groggily, then lets his head sink back down to rest on Stiles’ shoulder. “Tired,” he mutters, and coughs wetly, wincingly. “Chest hurts.”
“I know.” Stiles tries not to let his growing concern show, leaning back to prop himself up against one of the columns along the balcony, too exhausted to hold up Liam’s weight on his own. “Just rest, buddy – help’s already on the way, my dad can’t be too far off. And we did it; the call went through. Everything’s going to be okay.”

He can’t know that for sure, of course he can’t. But to let himself think otherwise at the moment would only trigger his impending panic attack even faster, and it’s long overdue already.

“Stay with me, okay?” he presses, when Liam’s eyelids begin to droop. “Don’t go to sleep. Just hang in there a little longer.”

“I see the wolfsbane poisoning is starting to take hold.”

Jerking in surprise at the voice, arms tightening around Liam protectively, Stiles glances up sharply towards the elderly man who’s appeared seemingly out of nowhere, leaning against the wall nearby and absently studying the engraved hilt of an actual sword.

“See, that’s the beauty of the aconite spray,” the stranger continues pleasantly, glancing up at last from his medieval weapon with a smile. “Once inhaled, a Werewolf’s body will try to fight it off, often killing itself in the process when the wolf drowns the very fluid designed to protect it from the poison. If it survives that first stage, the lingering particles will eventually make their way into the bloodstream, and after that…”

He shrugs, and slowly unsheathes his sword, letting the leather scabbard fall to the ground as he raises it in front of him, the sharp, polished metal glinting as it catches the light.

“Well, let’s just say killing them is an act of mercy.” He swishes the blade through the air once, twice, then lowers it to his side. “This sword has been in my family for eighteen generations, passed down from father to son from the very first Gerard Argent.”

His smile widens when Stiles startles at the name.

“Ah yes,” the man acknowledges, “I understand you’ve become close friends with my granddaughter. Allison’s a strong-willed girl; that’s the Argent blood in her. But she’s been twisted by her mother’s perversions, led to believe in a dynamic that only exists in the minds of those who are not fully prepared to embrace their true identity. My son was a fool for marrying the bitch in the first place, but I suppose it’s partly my own fault – that’s what happens when you give Submissives too much freedom of choice. It may be too late to cure my granddaughter of her mental illness, but rest assured, my great-grandchild will be raised properly by my eldest daughter.”

Already sickened at hearing non-traditional dynamics being likened to mental illnesses, Stiles blanches at the notion of Kate being allowed anywhere near Allison’s baby.

“You’re fucking insane,” he accuses, curling a little further around Liam as the teenager coughs wetly, shivering in his arms.

Argent’s smile takes on a sneering quality. “Why? Because I choose not to lay down and let a horde of supernatural creatures take over our country? You can dress a wolf up in a smart suit and put him in Office, but when the full moon rises he’s little more than an animal, with the instinct to hunt and kill and claim. We’re letting them breed with humans, and now their hybrid children are growing up with delusions of grandeur, convinced that they have the right to claim positions of power, to tell us pure-blooded humans how we ought to live our lives. Our government is infested, and until people start realising that the extinction of human life as we know it is a very real and imminent threat, it’s my duty to work towards reducing the Werewolf population myself. Even if that means taking them
out one by one.”

He raises his sword again, and begins advancing towards them. “Get out of the way, boy. There’s been enough human blood spilled today.”

Stiles shifts to draw Liam further against his side. “He’s just a kid. You’ve already poisoned him, isn’t that enough?”

The Dom pauses a few paces away from them, regarding him evenly. “I said move aside. I won’t tell you again.”

Hardening his jaw and glaring at the man, Stiles remains unmoving. There’s no use in trying to fight – he’s exhausted, and Liam’s only semi-conscious, they won’t get far before being cut down. Maybe if he keeps resisting just a little longer, it’ll buy his dad enough time to get here. Just a few more minutes…

Gerard sighs softly, seeming to come to some sort of a decision. “So be it. If you’re so invested in that mongrel’s life, you can die together.”

He takes another step towards them, raising his sword high, and Stiles flinches, already mentally preparing a barrage of pleas to stay his hand…but then Gerard stops. 

_Freezes_ would be a better word, actually. With his arm still raised, his posture stiffens, eyes widening as his lips part in a soundless gasp. Stiles’ protests die in his throat and as he watches, stunned, the Dom seems to arch back, rising up onto his tip-toes, the sword falling from his lax grip to land with a noisy clatter on the floor.

Then something behind Gerard moves, and the hunter’s body shifts to the side to reveal the most beautiful sight Stiles has ever seen in his entire life. Relief sweeps through him with such staggering intensity that it almost overwhelms him, but as glowing red eyes turn to focus on him, he manages a wide, genuine smile for the first time in what feels like _days._

“Derek!”

Chapter End Notes

She returns! As I promised I would. Albeit a little later than planned - *shakes fist* damn you, muse! Distracted by magical AUs and ballet, of all things.

And look, not an entirely-cliffhangerish ending! Tis indeed a New Year's miracle. Happy 2017, everyone.

Hope you enjoyed the chapter. 'Left shoe' has been a plot point I've been planning out for literally two years now, so it's a relief to finally have it feature as part of the story. I was getting a little tired of giving vague not-quite-answers to all the people puzzling over Lydia's phone call way back when I first wrote that chapter. :P Tadaa! Always
trust a Banshee's visions, even if they seem nonsensical.

Let me know your thoughts, if any of you have survived the wait and decided to stick with this story! A big thank-you to all those who kept sending me messages/reviews during the past few months, you guys inspire me so much to keep writing even when the muse is being stubborn.

More coming in a week or two! (And I can say that with certainty, because I've already written half the next chapter. ;P )
Adios!

xxx
“Derek!” he cries, and immediately the Alpha’s glowing eyes fade to their regular hue.

Gerard is tossed aside like a ragdoll, landing several feet away and tumbling over onto his front to lie still, limbs akimbo, a large red patch blooming against his white shirt at the small of his back. Derek’s unsheathed claws recede back into his bloodstained fingertips, his sharpened features shifting back to normal, and Stiles is so happy to see that beautifully familiar worried frown, he could cry.

Oh look. There he goes.

“You’re here,” he croaks, as the Alpha hurries over to kneel beside them, framing Stiles’ face between his wonderfully gentle hands. The Sub reaches up to curl his fingers around Derek’s wrist as the Dom leans in to press their foreheads together, eyes closing briefly as he savours the tender contact. “You came.”

“I’m here,” Derek confirms, his own voice raw with emotion, and kisses him carefully, mindful of the cut on his lip. “You’re safe now, Stiles.”

The Alpha’s attention is quickly drawn to the silent Beta in Stiles’ arms, the crease in his brow deepening in concern as he takes in the kid’s pale face and the black fluid still leaking from the corner of his mouth.

“Liam,” Derek breathes, one hand coming up to cradle the Beta’s cheek, dark lines working their way up his muscled forearm as he draws the pain away. “God, what have they done to you?”

The teenager stirs with a soft noise of discomfort, squinting up with faintly glowing amber eyes, which widen significantly as they settle on Derek’s face.

“Der,” the Beta slurs happily, reaching for him. “You’re here!”

The Alpha gathers Liam into his arms in a crushing embrace, a soothing sort of rumble purring at the back of his throat as he nuzzles the pup’s temple. He holds that pose for only half a beat before glancing back towards Stiles again, something frantic in his gaze, and he quickly extracts an arm from around his Beta to draw Stiles into the hug as well, holding onto him tightly in a manner that belies the Alpha’s outward calm.

“You’re okay,” the Dom reassures, but whether it’s directed towards Liam and Stiles or himself is unclear.

After a beat of silence, Liam gives a wet little cough against the Alpha’s chest, and Stiles feels Derek tense all over again. When he speaks, however, the Dom’s voice remains soft and level.

“We’ll get you both to Haven as soon as the others arrive,” Derek murmurs, his hand sliding up to
curl over Stiles’ nape, fingers settling against the smooth leather of his collar. “Don’t worry, everything’s going to be fine. I’ve got you.”

It’s impossible to resist the calming effect of Derek’s murmured reassurances, his tone pitched just-so and his words carefully selected so as to ease a Sub down from the brink of a panic attack. And Stiles ought to know – he’s been to enough dynamic therapy sessions over the past decade that he can easily identify the technique. That aside, he’d shared an apartment with Scott and Isaac for the better part of three years and willingly acted as test-dummy when they were learning said techniques as part of their WPDS training; lowering his guard and letting the gentle power-nudge ease him down is as easy as slipping into a hot bath at the end of a long day.

“Derek!” comes a far-off cry from somewhere distant, and although Stiles vaguely recognises the voice, he’s too busy being cuddled to pay it much attention.

Here, in Derek’s arms, he finally feels safe. After all the stress of the past few days, it’s the least tense he’s been in a long time, and his exhausted body welcomes that reprieve gladly.

“I knew it,” he croaks after a beat of silence. “I knew you’d find me, Der.”

“Promised you I would, didn’t I?” the Alpha murmurs in return. “And I wasn’t about to give up on the best thing that’s ever happened to me.”

“Ugh, laaame,” Stiles accuses wearily, but there’s a goofy grin curling at his lips, and the warmth in his chest feels suspiciously like happiness. “You’re so fucking corny.”

The Dom breathes a quiet laugh against his temple, and Stiles can feel Derek’s answering smile in the kiss that’s pressed there. “You love me anyway.”

“Mm.” Stiles turns his head just enough to nuzzle the underside of the Alpha’s jaw. “Damn right, I do.”

Derek presses several lingering kisses to his brow, then buries his nose in the Sub’s hair, arm circling around him as he inhales deeply to ground himself in Stiles’ scent.

Suddenly the Alpha jerks back, startled, eyes widening and quickly bleeding back to crimson, although the rest of his features don’t shift, lips parted as he breathes a shaky, disbelieving “no”.

Tentatively, Stiles reaches up to touch his Dom’s cheek, concern mounting when the ‘wolf doesn’t react beyond a ragged exhale.

“Der?” he probes softly. “What’s wrong? Hey…c’mon, dude, you’re scaring me.”

Footsteps approach them rapidly, but Derek doesn’t turn at the sound, apparently rendered numb to the world around him as he stares at Stiles in growing horror. Even Liam, half-asleep against the Alpha’s chest, seems to have identified that something is amiss, lifting his head to peer up at Derek with a worried frown. But the teen’s attention is quickly diverted to the figure he spots hurrying towards them along the balcony.

“Uncle Peter!” Liam croaks, with weary relief.
Stiles tears his gaze away from Derek’s disconcerting expression just long enough to glance up at Peter as the Dom comes to crouch down beside his nephew. The older Beta leans in briefly to yank Liam into a sideways hug, but he seems to be almost immediately aware of Derek’s dilemma, his attention quickly shifting to the silent Alpha as a crease appears in his own brow.

“Derek?” Peter murmurs, his concern evident as he grips the younger Dom’s shoulder. “What is it?”

His uncle’s voice seems to jar the ‘wolf from his temporary state of catatonia, but his eyes remain crimson and fixated solely on Stiles’ face even as he reaches up blindly to grab hold of Peter’s forearm.

“It’s her,” Derek answers, and Stiles has never heard that tone coming from his Dom before - grief and anger and disbelief and fear all intermingled into one. “It’s Kate, she…she’s back.”

The older Hale moves his hand to settle it over Derek’s nape.

“Breathe, cub,” Peter says calmly, and the Alpha obediently sucks in several slow, shaky breaths. “Find your anchor; you’ve got control here, Derek. Don’t lose yourself to the past.”

Stiles thinks his heart might just tear itself in two at the sight of his Dom so visibly shaken by a lingering trace of the monster who’d once come so close to murdering his Pack all those years ago. He hates Kate Argent even more fiercely than he had before; hates that he carries her scent on his skin, that his close proximity to Derek is what’s triggering these memories for the Alpha.

“She’s not here, Der,” he murmurs, stroking the stubble-roughened jaw with gentle fingers. He decides it’s for the best that he doesn’t mention anything about Harris’ wolfsbane bomb, or Kate’s determination to finish what she’d started over a decade ago and wipe out Derek’s family. “She’s gone, it’s okay.”

“But she touched you,” Derek manages, his voice tight and grief-stricken even as the crimson fades slowly from his eyes. He reaches out, fingertips ghosting over the bruise on Stiles’ cheekbone. “She hurt you.”

“Hey,” Stiles murmurs, tilting his cheek into the touch and managing a faint, reassuring smile for his Dom’s benefit. “It’s nothing. I’m alright, I promise.”

The rev of an approaching engine seems to break the spell over them all, and Peter rises slowly from his crouch, reaching down to lift Liam from Derek’s arms.

“I can walk just fine,” Stiles tries to insist, but the way his jelly-legs falter as Derek helps him to his feet suggests otherwise.

“I know you can,” Derek placates, politely ignoring his obvious lack of coordination. “But do me a favour and indulge me just this once, okay?”

And really, how could Stiles say no to that? Besides, it’s highly doubtful that his bruised and weary body would manage the stairs unassisted, and it’d be a real shame to have escaped the jaws of death several times in one night, only to pitch himself head-first down a steep flight of steps and break his neck.
He flinches at the thought, and deliberately tucks his face into Derek’s shoulder as the Dom carries him downstairs and through the main lobby – Stiles might’ve loathed Deputy Haigh right from day one, but he has no desire to live with the image of the man’s broken and twisted body for the rest of his days. He’d heard the sound of Haigh hitting the floor, and knew just how far he’d fallen from the upper balcony; he knows without looking that it isn’t going to be a pretty sight, and he’s already seen enough horror these past few days to last him a lifetime.

His overtired eyes have grown accustomed to the dim, dingy lighting of the bank, and he’s forced to squint against the harsh brightness of the early morning as the Dom carries him outside and down the front steps, raising a hand to shield his eyes from the sun’s glare as it glints off the hood of Derek’s Camaro. A familiar silver car screeches to a halt nearby just as they reach the bottom step, and the driver’s-side door is flung open almost before the engine has stopped.

“Stiles!”

Grinning so wide he’s pretty sure he reopens the cut on his lip, Stiles tugs on Derek’s sleeve and shifts in the Dom’s grip until Derek obligingly lowers him to his feet – just in time for him to get swept up in an enthusiastic best-friend hug, one which Stiles returns as fiercely as his battle-weakened limbs will allow.

“Oh my God,” Scott says, his voice low and uneven. “You scared me half to death, man.”

Stiles closes his eyes against the stinging threat of tears and swallows hard past the lump in his throat. “Sorry,” he mutters thickly. “Wasn’t exactly a vacation for me, either.”

A second body barrels into Stiles’ from behind, soft curls tickling his neck as long arms wrap around his midriff tightly.

“You’re alive,” Isaac breathes, his relief as audible as his tears. “You’re alive, you’re alive, you’re alive.”

Stiles lets out a surprised, slightly disbelieving laugh of his own, because fuck, Isaac’s right. Against all odds, he’s somehow made it out of this nightmare relatively unharmed. It’s just a pity that the same couldn’t be said for-

Oh. Oh god.

“Jackson!” he blurs, mortified that his sluggish, pre-dropping mind had somehow failed to remember something so vitally important. In the distance he can hear the faint wail of sirens, and he desperately hopes one of those vehicles is an ambulance. “Fuck, Allison and Jax are still inside! I was supposed to go back after we made the call but-”

“Allison?”

Stiles turns (as much as he can when he’s still squished between two clingy Werewolves), eyes widening a little in surprise as Chris Argent closes the rear passenger door to Scott’s car and strides quickly towards them, his face the picture of worry; unsurprising, really, given the circumstances. If Stiles’ only daughter was missing and he had two batshit-crazy, homicidal family members running rampant, he’d be freaking out too.

“Allison’s here?” Chris presses, and while his tone his calm his eyes are anything but, taking Stiles firmly by the shoulders when Scott and Isaac relinquish their hold, searching his gaze frantically. “Is she alright?”

Nodding quickly, Stiles attempts a reassuring smile, but he fails miserably when all his brain can
focus on is how much Chris looks like Gerard Argent up close.

“She’s fine,” he manages, albeit a tad shakily. “But Jaxon got shot when Kate first locked them up; he lost a lot of blood. Allison stayed behind to keep an eye on him while Liam and I went to get help. They’re in one of the vaults on the second floor, towards the far end of the main corridor.”

Chris nods sharply, squeezing Stiles’ shoulder in thanks, and with a grim sort of determination that’s very Argent, he turns towards the bank and sets off up the stairs at a quick pace.

“Chris, wait,” Peter calls after him, already passing Liam back into Derek’s waiting arms. He catches up to the human, a hand coming to rest on the Sub’s shoulder briefly. “You’re not going in there without backup. Are you armed?”

Pulling an impressively large gun from some sort of craftily concealed holster within the confines of his jacket, Chris disengages the safety with practiced ease.

“Always.”

Peter’s lips twitch, and he nods once. “Good.” He glances back towards the others. “The rest of you stay here with Derek until the Sheriff arrives.”

He doesn’t wait for a confirmation of their agreement (Derek may be the only Alpha present, but it’s perfectly clear who’s actually in charge), and disappears inside the bank after Chris a moment later.

Derek has taken a seat on the bottommost step, Liam cradled in his lap, and after a moment he stretches a hand out beckoningly towards his Sub. Stiles goes willingly, letting himself be tugged down to sit next to the Dom, tucked up snugly against the Alpha’s side. He closes his eyes, leaning into Derek’s warmth gladly, physical and emotional exhaustion finally beginning to take a toll on his body as he feels the world around him start to grow fuzzier and foggier by the minute.

“I thought I told you both to stay with the Pack,” Derek says after a beat, low and calm but with a faint edge of authority.

“We couldn’t just sit there and do nothing,” Isaac protests plaintively, moving to perch on Stiles’ other side, one large hand moving up and down his spine soothingly. “He’s family, Derek.”

“Danny called us with the directions,” Scott adds from somewhere nearby, and a moment later there’s a hand in his hair, talented fingertips rubbing at his scalp.

A little more of the tension eases from Stiles’ posture at the soothing contact. Were it not for the sirens growing louder and more persistent by the second, he could quite easily have gone to sleep right there and then.

Derek heaves a quiet, disapproving sigh. “Danny was supposed to be sleeping. The ritual took a lot out of him; it’ll be a while before he fully recovers.”

“He was worried about Jaxon, Der,” Scott counters softly. “We all were.”

Stiles tenses, yanked from his peaceful semi-doze by the sudden memory of Jaxon’s deteriorating condition, the Sub’s skin shockingly pale against the dark crimson of the bloodstained floor beneath him, his breathing shallow and erratic…

No. No, he can’t let himself think about it, not yet. Not until they’re all safely out of here and receiving proper medical attention. Jaxon’s going to be fine. In a few weeks they’ll all be crashing at Scott and Isaac’s place for a pizza and movie marathon, teasing each other and playfully squabbling
over who gets to pick the next movie, over which one of them has to do a midnight store-dash for more snacks. They’ll all be happy and healthy and alive, and thinking of any alternative to that just isn’t an option right now, not if he values his continuing mental health.

“It’s okay,” Derek murmurs in his ear, and the Sub realises he’s started trembling at some point. “I’m here, Stiles. You can let go if you need to.”

Stiles grinds the heels of his palms into his eye sockets to push back the threatening sting of tears, exhaling a tremulous sigh as he shakes his head slowly. His Sub-drop is inevitable, and pretty much unavoidable at this point, but he doesn’t want to do it out here – he wants to Drop somewhere quiet and private after all this is over. Once he knows for sure that Allison’s gotten out safely and Jackson’s going to make a full recovery, he’ll go down harder (and for longer, more than likely) than he ever has before. But he needs to hold on until then; he owes it to his friends to see this through to the end.

“Stiles!”

His head jerks up at the familiar voice, hands dropping away from his face, and he blinks through the floating spots in his vision just in time to see his Dad rushing over from his haphazardly-parked cruiser. The Dom comes crashing to his knees directly in front of Stiles, yanking the Sub forwards into a crushing hug.

“Thank God you’re alright,” John murmurs, with audible relief.

Hands coming up to clutch at the back of his Dad’s uniform just like they have a thousand times before, Stiles smushes his face into his father’s shoulder, basking in the immediate wave of comfort that flows through him from the hand clamped reassuringly over his nape.

After a moment John pulls back a little, enough to carefully grip Stiles’ chin and examine his various bruises with a concerned gaze. “The medics aren’t far behind,” he reassures. “We’ll have you patched up in no time. Anything broken?”

Stiles shakes his head, throat too tight to speak (a combination of grief and a bruised trachea). He hadn’t fully realised just how desperately he’d been longing for his Dad until the man was there in front of him, and now all he wants to do is cuddle up to the Dom for a good, well-deserved cry and get rid of all these pent-up feelings that are simmering so close beneath the surface.

A hand ruffles his hair, and he glances up from his Dad’s concerned face to see Jordan Parrish smiling down at him.

“Hey, kid,” the Phoenix greets softly, warmth and relief in his gaze as he sinks into a crouch beside his father. “Still hangin’ in there?”

Stiles manages a brief, tremulous smile and a slight shrug. “You know me,” he answers, a faint croak. “Takes more than a bunch of extremist weirdos to-”

He cuts himself off in surprise at the sound of a sudden, distant howl.

The Werewolves startle around him as one, Scott and Isaac surging to their feet as Derek tenses, head jerking up quickly and crimson gaze fixed on the bank behind them. Even Jordan’s eyes flicker to a pale, burning yellow as he stands up from his crouch, his brow creasing in concern.

“Is that-?”

“Peter,” Derek confirms quickly, his tone grim. “Something’s wrong.” The Alpha glances towards
his nearest Beta, his tone brisk and authoritative. “Take him.”

Scott drops down to sit on the step just as Derek rises, and draws Liam into his arms when the younger Beta is handed to him carefully. The Alpha passes his hand briefly over Liam’s hair (the semi-conscious pup does little more than sigh at the contact), then turns to face Stiles, who has struggled wincingly to his feet, his previous fatigue gone as adrenaline surges through him all over again.

What if Kate had left another guard behind? What if he’s gone and sent Chris and Peter headlong into danger? Or, oh God, what if someone went after Allison while he and Liam were busy fighting with Haigh?

“I’m coming with you,” he insists stubbornly, before Derek can so much as open his mouth.

“Absolutely not,” his father protests, coming around to stand beside the Alpha, arms crossed over his chest. “It’s far too dangerous. Like it or not, son, you’re a civilian here – I’m not about to let you go running back into the thick of it.”

“Your Dad’s right, Stiles,” Derek agrees, his voice calm but firm. He cups Stiles’ face between both hands, leaning in to kiss the uninjured corner of his mouth. “I need you to stay here, where it’s safe.”

“But,” Stiles begins to protest, an ache lodging itself in his chest at the thought of Derek heading into danger without him. “But Der-”

“I’ll come back for you,” the Werewolf promises, and kisses him again. Then he turns on his heel and dashes up the stairs at a flat-out sprint, disappearing into the bank before Stiles can utter another syllable.

Jordan starts after him, glancing briefly over his shoulder towards John. “Sir?”

The Sheriff nods, wrapping an arm securely around Stiles before his son can get any bright ideas about chasing after them.

Stiles can tell his emotional control is beginning to waver, and he hates how vulnerable it makes him feel. Derek’s comforting pre-drop techniques had already eased him halfway down without him really noticing, but it makes the Dom’s absence all the more difficult to cope with; it’s like the rug’s been pulled out from underneath him, and he’s been left in freefall, knowing full well that the inevitable crash is going to happen a whole lot sooner than he’d like it to. The ache in his chest has warped into a steel-banded tightness that feels a whole lot like panic, and it’s taking all of his willpower to keep his breathing at an even, steady pace.

The next few minutes are horribly tense and seem to last a lifetime, and as Stiles sits wedged between Isaac and his Dad, he prays to every deity he can think of in the hopes that someone, somewhere might decide to keep an eye out for Derek. Fuck, if anything happened to his Dom, it’d just break him.

Suddenly his Dad’s radio crackles to life.

“Boss, do you copy?”

John pulls the device from his belt, keeping his other arm wrapped comfortingly around Stiles’ shoulders as he answers, “Stilinski here. What’s the situation?”

“Acknowledged. Any hostiles?”

“Negative, Sir. The coast is clear.”

John turns his head towards the dirt path that leads back through the trees to the main road, where faint sirens can be heard in the distance. “They’re only a couple minutes out, Parrish. I’ll send them straight in when they get here.”

“10-4. Parrish out.”

There are downsides to growing up with the police station as your playground; Stiles has known the regional police radio codes by heart since he was eleven years old. Which means he understands Jordan’s message perfectly – the patient’s condition is critical, and they’ve escalated the need for medical attention from urgent to life-threatening.

But before he has chance to work himself up into a panic over it, voices from the entrance behind them have Stiles turning, heart leaping into his throat at the sight of Allison stepping out into the sunlight, one hand resting on the curve of her stomach and the other wrapped around her father’s waist as Chris keeps a supportive arm around her shoulders in turn.

“Allison!” he calls, jumping up on aching legs to stagger up the steps towards her, throwing his arms around her in a careful embrace. “Oh, thank God.”

She clings to him tightly for a moment before pulling back, and Stiles’ brief moment of relief and gratitude comes to a quick and sudden end when he sees her red-rimmed eyes and the way her lips tremble faintly. The bottom drops out of his stomach, a lump lodging itself back in his throat.

“Allie?” he probes cautiously. “What is it?”

Her face crumples in grief, and although Stiles can tell she’s fighting to put on a brave face for him, her tears win out in the end. She catches both his hands in her bloodstained ones, squeezing tightly.

“It’s Jackson,” she manages, her voice choked with raw emotion. “He…he just stopped breathing, and I tried to get his pulse back, but he’d already lost so much blood, I couldn’t…”

The rest of her words are lost to tears, and as Chris draws her close in a comforting embrace, Stiles takes several slow steps backwards, shaking his head.

No. Nonononono. Jackson’s going to be okay, the ambulance is only seconds away – they’ll have fluids and adrenaline and a defibrillator, and Jax will be fine. He…he’ll be…

“Stiles.” His dad catches him beneath the arms, and he’s lowered to sit on the topmost step, a hand pushing firmly at the back of his neck to guide his head down. “I’m here, I’m right here. Just breathe, son.”

But he can’t. His chest is too tight and his lungs won’t expand any further and the panic’s so overwhelming he’s drowning in it. He wants Derek, he wants to go home, he wants to wake up from this nightmare and forget any of it ever happened, and oh God, Jackson can’t die.

He can’t say for sure what tips him over – whether it’s the Drop he’s been postponing for far too long, or if the strain of his acute panic attack is simply too much for his injured and exhausted body to cope with – but everything after that is a murky blur of overlapping voices, some familiar and some not, although he can’t name any of them. He wants to fight his way out of this grey sluggishness, to claw back to the surface where he knows things will make more sense, but he simply doesn’t have the strength for it. And he’s so fucking tired – he just wants five minutes peace
to shut everything out and rest, why won’t they leave him be?

There’s a sharp pinch to his upper arm, the pain dragging him halfway towards awareness for a brief moment before something hot sweeps through him, making his muscles go lax and muffling the noise of the world around him.

Grateful for the immediate silence, he finally lets himself drift off.

Oh fuck, his head. What on earth had he been drinking last night?

“Whoa, whoa, take it easy.” Hands push against his shoulders to guide him gently but firmly back against the pillows. “Give yourself time to come around first.”

Stiles blinks hard, his vision blurred and his head fuzzy and cotton-filled, squinting towards the speaker drowsily.

“Scott?” he rasps, and ow, his throat fucking kills.

The Dom smiles back at him, warm and wide and full of relief. “Hey there, sleepyhead.”

“Wha’ happened?” he slurs, and coughs painfully, hand coming up to rub at his aching throat. It’s caught halfway by another hand, long fingers wrapping around his own.

“Adam says you bruised your trachea,” Isaac tells him, leaning over from the other side of the bed, giving his hand a squeeze as he winces sympathetically. “It’s gonna hurt to talk for a little while.”

Stiles pulls a face. “Duuude, that sucks,” he croaks tiredly. “Must’ve been one helluva night, huh?”

Isaac and Scott exchange a brief, worried glance, which only serves to puzzle Stiles further. Why are they acting all weird and serious? And why are they in his bedroom? And what is in his hand?

“What is in his hand?” Scott grabs his free hand when he goes to rip the uncomfortable attachment that’s been taped to the back of the other one. “That line’s gotta stay in for a little while, buddy. You went into post-drop shock after they brought you in here, gave all the Healers a good scare when your
blood pressure tanked.”

“Oh. Sorry.”

“It wasn’t your fault,” Isaac reassures him quietly. “We’ve all been under a lot of pressure these past few days, and after everything that happened to you at the bank, it’s only natural that your body decided to put its foot down and call it quits.”

Stiles’ puzzled frown deepens a little. The bank? What was so special about the-

The fog in his head suddenly clears a little, enough to allow his most recent memories to slip through. He sucks in a sharp breath, eyes widening as his sore body jerks upright in the bed.

“Jackson!” he yelps, pulse thundering in his ears immediately. “What happened, is he-”

Scott and Isaac both move as one to perch either side of him on the bed, enveloping him in a sideways double-hug.

“Everything’s fine, Stiles,” Scott soothes. “He’s gonna be okay. Derek got to him in time.”

The panic recedes as quickly as it had come. “Derek?” he echoes softly, eyes widening again when he realises what Scott means. “He gave Jackson the bite?”

“Mm-hmm.” Isaac nuzzles his temple with a happy rumble. “We’ve got a new Packmate.”

Still trying to process this sudden revelation, Stiles gives Scott’s arm a squeeze. “And you’re sure he’s okay?”

Scott huffs a fond laugh against his hair and hugs him tighter. “I’m positive, Stiles. It’ll take him a couple of days to fully recover, he lost a lot of blood back at the bank, but with rest and Pack support, he’ll be fine.”

He nods, relief seeping the tension from his body and making him feel weary all over again.

“Can I see him?”

“Maybe later,” Scott answers, even as he and Isaac guide Stiles back against the pillows again. “Adam left strict instructions about how long you were supposed to sleep for, and you’ve not done your time yet.”

“We promised Derek we’d keep an eye on you while he was gone,” Isaac adds, shifting to lay down on his side at the edge of the bed and tossing an arm over Stiles’ waist. “Between dealing with the FBI and keeping tabs on the rest of the Pack, he’s been running himself ragged. Adam and Laura are trying to get him to take a nap, but I don’t think it’s going so well.”

Oh God, Laura. And the rest of the Hale Pack…


Scott squeezes his hand again and scoots down to mirror Isaac’s recline on the opposite side of the bed. “They finished disarming it a few hours ago. Most of the Enforcers got arrested by the cops on sight, but Kate Argent ran at the first sign of trouble. She didn’t get very far, though – I heard your Dad talking to Talia a little while ago; Peter and Chris tracked her down to the county border and brought her in. She’s in police custody now.”

Sagging in relief, Stiles lets his eyelids flutter closed. “Thank fuck.”
“Mm,” Scott agrees, shifting a little beside him to get more comfortable. He nuzzles Stiles’ temple as Isaac snuggles in closer from the other side. “Now go to sleep. We’ll go visit Jackson when you wake up, okay?”

“M’kay,” Stiles agrees, and he’s out like a light a moment later.

Chapter End Notes

I could've left you all on such a horrible cliffie, but I figured you'd been through enough already. See, I do love you really. <3

Hope you enjoyed the chapter! Good news is, barring some Derek-trauma in the next couple of chapters, it's fluff and cuddles from here on out. :) Let me know your thoughts, folks!
xxx
Making use of the small bathroom attached to his *Haven* recovery suite, Stiles takes the longest, hottest shower of his life so far.

It feels amazing; not only because the intense heat and pummelling pressure of the water leech the pain from his various injuries, but to actively scrub away the dirt and grime and blood and sweat from the past twenty-four hours is literally the *best feeling ever*. He uses up almost a full bar of the unscented soap he’d found by the sink, washing himself from head to toe thoroughly, *twice*, and then spends a good five minutes just standing there beneath the hot spray, hands braced against the cool tile of the wall, letting the water sluice off his body and watching as it swirls down the drain. In his still-exhausted state (God only knows why he feels so fucking tired after sleeping most of the day away), the sight is pretty hypnotic, and he can feel his eyelids drooping more and more with every passing minute.

A sudden knock on the door interrupts his upright snooze.

“Stiles?” Boyd calls from the other side, the worlds slightly muffled. “It’s me, man. Everything okay?”

Stirring reluctantly from his stupor, he quickly switches off the shower and reaches for the nearby towel.

“Yeah, I’m good,” he reassures, hating how hoarse and broken his voice sounds. Now that all his bruises have had time to fully blossom, the swelling’s set in with a vengeance, and his throat is apparently no exception to the rule. “I’ll be out in a sec, bro.”

“Erica and I swung by Derek’s place a little while ago,” the ‘wolf tells him, as Stiles dabs the towel against his still-tender neck to dry it. “We grabbed some clothes for you, figured you’d probably hate the *Haven* pyjamas as much as Lydia seems to.”

Stiles’ lips twitch up in a half-smile (he’d grin, but the cut on his lip has bled enough already thanks to his own carelessness).

“Dude,” he says, with fervour. “You guys are the *best.*”

“Damn right,” Boyd agrees. “But let’s keep that between you an’ me – wouldn’t want the others to feel intimidated.”

He laughs at that, then hisses when his bruised ribs painfully remind him that comedy is for fools. Pressing a hand to his side, wincing, he carefully pats himself dry (a task that takes at least ten times longer than it usually would, because everything fucking *hurts*, and bending down is torture) before wrapping a towel around his waist and draping another around his neck, cracking the bathroom door open a couple of inches to peek out.

Boyd’s standing directly on the other side, and wordlessly hands Stiles a pile of clothes (sweatpants, underwear, t-shirt, his favourite red hoodie, *fuck yeah*) with only a very brief glance at the myriad of bruises that litter his upper body and throat.
“Erica went to grab you something to drink,” the Dom divulges quietly, taking the towel from around Stiles’ shoulders to scrub gently at the human’s damp hair. “She’ll only be gone a couple more minutes. I’d recommend putting a shirt on before she gets back, unless you want her Shifting on you.”

“Thanks, man,” Stiles says, peeking up from beneath the towel with a wincing sort of smile.

The last thing he wants is another Werewolf freaking out over his human fragility. Scott had been human for most of his life, and ought to have remembered just how easily Stiles tends to bruise, but that hadn’t stopped the Dom’s fretful fussing when Stiles’ pyjama shirt had ridden up earlier during a cramp-relieving stretch and put the worst of Haigh’s handiwork on display. Isaac’s face had crumpled at the sight, his blue eyes brimming with tears as he made a noise of distress in the back of his throat that almost had Stiles feeling guilty for having been the one to cause it. Still, the immediate barrage of cuddles and sympathy he’d received from both of them had been nice.

But then Brett and Mason had decided to pay him a visit just as Scott had finally coaxed Stiles (i.e. blackmailed him with those fucking puppy-dog eyes) into taking off his shirt, and there’d been half a second when Brett had looked on the verge of a full Shift, his eyes flashing amber and his hands curling into fists as he growled angrily. It had taken the combined reassurances of Mason, Isaac and Adam Hale to calm him down again, by which time Stiles had thankfully managed to redress himself. Not that it had stopped the rest of the Pack from all piling into his room and curling around him in an effort to ease his pain.

He’d still been half-asleep at the time, and had greatly appreciated the respite from his bodily aches, but there’s only so much fussing Stiles can take in a single afternoon.

Lydia had been a breath of fresh air when she’d come to visit him a couple of hours ago, shooing out the rest of the Pack with orders to “go and get something to eat before Derek finds out you all decided to skip lunch”, prompting a mass exodus and several hurried promises that they’d all be back soon.

“You’ve got yourself a loyal Pack there, Stiles,” Lydia had commented as she shut the door behind them and slowly limped over to the bedside on heavily-bandaged feet, perching on the edge of the mattress with an audible sigh of relief. “But I thought you might need a little peace and quiet.” Taking his hand gently between both of hers, she’d smiled at him wryly. “Not that you deserve it, after scaring me like that.”

“You’re one to talk,” Stiles had returned with weary humour. “Running off like that in the middle of the night.” But he’d sobered quickly, because the whole thing really hadn’t been funny at all. “Do you remember any of it?”

A slight shrug. “I was being followed, I knew that much. I don’t remember leaving home, only this pressing urge to keep running. I could see you trapped somewhere, but all I got was a couple of flashes, nothing concrete; I didn’t even know they’d taken Allison until Chris told me she was missing.”

Stiles’ fatigue had dissipated a little at the name. “How is she?” he’d asked urgently. “Scott said they took her ‘round to the antenatal unit, is everything.”

“Allie’s fine, Stiles.” Lydia’s smile had been warm and genuine. “They’re both in good health. She has some abdominal bruising, so they want to monitor the foetal heartbeat for a few hours, just as a precaution. She wouldn’t even let me stay, made me promise to come visit you instead. So I guess she’s feeling better.” Then, leaning down, the Switch had pressed her lips to his brow in a lingering kiss, gripping his hand tighter. “Thanks for bringing them home safely.”
Breathing a soft laugh even as his eyes stung, he’d shaken his head a little. “Allison took out the guard on her own, dude. Without her, we’d still be locked in that cage.”

“But you remembered my phone call,” Lydia had insisted, gently cradling his chin, her green eyes serious as they locked with his. “It didn’t make any sense, but you listened anyway. And you figured it out.”

He’d wanted to argue the point further (Stiles really hadn’t saved anyone, it was Allison and Liam who’d done all the work), but Lydia’s always been stubborn and Stiles had felt too tired to pursue the matter further.

God, even keeping up a conversation had been exhausting, and for him that was a first.

So it had almost come as a relief when he’d woken up completely alone a short while ago, although the cell phone on his bedside table and the warmth of the empty space of mattress beside him had suggested that his latest visitors hadn’t been gone for long. Nevertheless, he’d taken advantage of the sudden lack of supervision and jumped (or, well, hobbled) into the shower while the coast was clear.

That being said, he doesn’t much like the idea of being left on his own for long periods; not just yet, anyway. His recent Drop is still too near, and the instinct to cuddle and seek comfort is still a pressing urge, regardless of how independent he’d like to think himself. If Boyd hadn’t turned up, he would’ve gone out looking for the Pack on his own anyway.

“There,” Boyd says with a quiet half-smile, carefully draping the towel back around his neck, using his fingers to spike up Stiles’ fringe in a playful sort of caress. “Can’t have you catching a cold on top of everything else.”

Stiles cracks a tired sort of grin. “Thanks.”

Then he ducks back inside the en-suite to get dressed. It takes a few minutes, because manipulating his limbs hurts, and more than once he has to brace a hand against the wall and breathe carefully to keep from swearing up a blue storm. Bruised ribs are the worst.

When he finally emerges from the bathroom, Erica’s there too, dressed in jeans and an oversized hoodie that he’s pretty sure belongs to Boyd. She looks ridiculously good in it all the same.

“Hi,” he greets, managing a smile. “Thanks for grabbing me- oof.”

Erica, having wrapped him up in a wonderfully warm but painfully tight hug, nuzzles the side of his jaw affectionately. “Scare me like that again,” she murmurs, “and I’ll rip your balls off. Got it?”

That startles a laugh from him, although it comes out as more of a pained wheeze. “Yup. Love you too.”

“Easy on his ribs, hon,” Boyd cautions softly, his big, warm hand resting at the small of Stiles’ back, rubbing gently. “Let him breathe.”

Erica takes a step back, but only far enough to scrutinise him closely. “Aw, baby,” she sympathises, reaching up to cup his cheek. “Look what they did to your pretty face.”

“Some might call it an improvement,” Stiles tries to joke, but Erica’s a little preoccupied, scowling at the cut on his lip like it’s personally offended her. “Hey. C’mon, dude, don’t look at me like that - I’m okay, really.”

Although she doesn’t seem overly convinced by his words, she drops her hand all the same, stepping
back to retrieve a cup of coffee from its little cardboard tray on the bedside table.

“I know you’re supposed to avoid caffeine after a Drop like that,” she remarks as he accepts it gratefully and shuffles over to sit down on the edge of the bed. “But Adam said one cup wouldn’t do you any harm, and I figured you might need it before we go and see Liam.”

Mid-swig, Stiles almost chokes on the hot coffee in his haste to ask, “He’s awake? Did the ritual work?”

Last he’d heard, the Beta was still being treated for his extensive wolfsbane poisoning – Scott had said something about healing pools and blood cleansing, but Stiles had still been a little fuzzy-headed at the time, so it’s all a bit vague. He’d understood that the Beta was stable and showing signs of improvement, and that had been enough to put his worries to rest for the time being.

“It’ll be a few days before he’s back on his feet,” Boyd answers, kneeling down in front of him, Stiles’ shoes in hand. “But Adam and Deaton seem confident that there won’t be any long-term complications. Liam’s young, and the fact that he’s still transitioning worked a lot in his favour – a fully developed ‘wolf wouldn’t have lasted as long as he did.”

Erica sits down next to Stiles as Boyd helps him put on his shoes and begins lacing them up (Stiles is grateful for the assistance – putting his socks on had almost reduced him to tears in the bathroom, he doubts his ribs can take another round).

“He’s been asking to see you from the second he woke up,” Erica tells him, a smile tugging at her mouth as she loops an arm around him in a casual sideways hug. “But you’d only just gone back to sleep yourself, and Adam wanted to let you rest a little while longer. I’m pretty sure Liam would’ve dragged himself down the hallway to come see you if Derek hadn’t put his foot down.”

Derek. He’s heard the name mentioned a dozen or more times in passing between his naps this afternoon, but he hasn’t actually seen his Dom in person since the bank. It feels like every time he wakes up he’s just missed the Alpha by a few minutes, and although the logical, reasonable adult voice in his head keeps reminding him that Derek’s got a whole lot on his plate besides Stiles, he can’t help but feel a little disappointed that the ‘wolf’s not with him.

As though reading his mind, Boyd finishes tying up his laces and gives his ankle a gentle squeeze, his smile full of warmth and understanding.

“Derek was here not too long ago,” he reassures. “He wanted to stay with you, but Laura called him away. He won’t have gone far – Liam’s room is only a little ways along the corridor, and Jackson’s is right around the corner from that. He’s bound to be in one of them.”

Stiles smiles, grateful that he doesn’t need to voice the longing in his chest. But he’s curious about Boyd’s phrasing.

“You can’t sense where he is?”

The Dom shakes his head, and twizzles his index finger in a vague gesture at the room around them. “These recovery suites are Druid-built, with supernatural sensitivities in mind. It wouldn’t be much of a comfort to patients if they were bombarded with the sounds and scents of a hundred other people; everything’s been soundproofed and warded. Pack scents don’t carry beyond the threshold of a room, and the only heartbeats I can make out are yours and Erica’s.”

“Oh.”

It makes sense, in a frustrating sort of way, and he’s certain it benefits the supernatural folk who
wind up stuck in a *Haven* hospital bed. Just makes things difficult for him when he wants to track down his Dom, that’s all.

Keen to see Derek again sooner rather than later, he chugs the rest of his coffee fast enough to feel it burn on the way down, and allows Erica and Boyd to help him to his feet so that he can limp-shuffle out of the door and along the hallway to Liam’s recovery suite nearby.

The young Beta’s sitting up in bed when he pauses in the doorway, looking pale and exhausted but a hundred times better than he had earlier that day, propped up by a mound of pillows and tucked snugly between Isaac and Mason as Scott sits perched at the foot of the bed beside Brett, Liam’s feet resting in his lap. There are several open pizza boxes laid out along the Beta’s outstretched legs, and two more resting on the bedside table.

“Oh, good, you ordered food.” Erica nudges Stiles towards the bed with a gentle hand. “Stiles needs to eat.”

Liam’s head jerks up at that, exhaustion vanishing instantaneously as his mouth curls into a huge, relieved grin. “Dude, you’re awake! Nobody would let me see you, and Adam said I had to let you sleep, and Derek wouldn’t let me get out of bed so I couldn’t even-”

Laughing now, having made it to the bedside, Stiles takes Mason’s vacated seat on the edge of the mattress and lets the young pup throw his arms around him in a painfully tight hug. Liam seems to sense his discomfort almost immediately, however, and quickly softens his grip.

“You’re hurt,” the Beta notes unhappily, pulling back an inch or so to send an accusatory pout towards his Packmates. “You guys never told me he was hurt.”

Stiles shares a brief glance with Scott, worry making his brow crease at the pup’s apparent memory loss. Given that Liam had been the one to bodily tackle Deputy Haigh before the Dom could finish pummelling Stiles to death, the pup ought to have known about his existing injuries. Scott gives a slight shake of his head, which Stiles takes a sign that if there are gaps in the younger Beta’s memory, nobody intends to fill them just yet. Given everything that Liam’s been through these past few days, it’s probably for the best.

“Hey. It’s only a few bruises, bud,” Stiles reassures, clucking him under the chin with a warm, easy smile. “I’ll be okay in a couple of days.”

Liam pouts in obvious displeasure at the news, hand curling around Stiles’ wrist to leech a little of the discomfort from his limbs. Boyd’s hand joins in a moment later, resting over the curve of his shoulder, thumb brushing the bare skin near his throat, as Isaac reaches around Liam with a smile to touch his jawline, and someone (Scott, maybe?) wraps warm fingers around his ankle where it rests on the bed. In a matter of seconds, the achy tension bleeds from his body, filling him instead with a rippling sort of warmth as he sags back against the pillows with a sigh, Liam shifting to lean against him a little more.

“Thanks,” he murmurs, with a blissful sort of smile. “But…mm…you guys really don’t have to, you know.”

“We know,” Brett agrees softly, his lap full of Mason, and frees a hand to reach for Stiles’ other ankle, squeezing gently. “But we want to.”

“You’re Pack, sweetcheeks,” Erica adds, perching on the very edge of the mattress to take his other hand between hers. “That means you’re stuck with us whether you like it or not.”
The lights in Jackson’s recovery suite have been dimmed right down to their lowest setting, and the temperature’s comfortably cool compared to the warmth of the corridor as Stiles steps over the threshold, relief flooding through him as its lone occupant glances up from his phone.

“Hey, man,” he murmurs, crossing over to the bedside. “Finally decided to wake up, huh?”

Jackson cracks weary smile in return. The Sub’s looking a million times better than he had earlier that day, sitting propped up in bed, visibly exhausted but very much alive. He’s dressed in a pale-blue Haven t-shirt and a dark pair of boxer shorts, his left thigh swathed in white bandages. The leg itself has lost the frightening purple-red tinge from before, but the skin’s still mildly discoloured, flushed a faint pink like it’s caught the sun, a clear contrast to the even tan of his right leg.

“You’re one to talk,” Jackson retorts, reaching out as soon as Stiles is near to snag him by the wrist and tug him down into a hug that’s tight enough to make Stiles grateful that he’s been cuddling with pain-absorbing Werewolves for the past thirty minutes. “Danny told me you had PDS. Just had to steal the spotlight, didn’t you, Stilinski? I’m the one who got shot.”

Despite his words, Jackson’s eyes are full of concern as he pushes him away to study the bruises on Stiles’ face and neck, his grip on the human’s shoulders gentling as he leans back against the pillows again.

“You look like shit.”

Stiles’ lips twitch. “Thanks, dude.” His gaze flickers up and down Jackson’s body briefly. “And you’re looking enviably good for someone who lost a couple gallons of blood this morning.” He soars then and asks, more quietly, “How are you feeling?”

The newly-turned ‘wolf smiles at him tiredly. “ Might need to get back to you on that one.” He glances down at his leg, slowly flexing his left foot with a slight grimace. “Pins and needles are the worst, man.”

Stiles winces in sympathy, shifting in his perch on the edge off the mattress so that his posture isn’t putting so much strain on his bruised ribs.

“And what about…” he makes a vague, all-encompassing gesture, “you know, everything else?”
Jackson heaves a short sigh, tilting his head back to gaze up at the ceiling. “Honestly? It all feels weird as fuck. Like my body’s re-wired itself.” He sniffs a wry grin and shrugs. “Which I guess it has, in a way. Everything’s still a little loud, and the light gives me a headache, but it’s not as bad as I expected it to be. Helps that the room is warded – it’s loud enough when there’s only a couple of heartbeats in here, fuck knows how I’m supposed to handle going out in public like this.”

He drags a hand down his face and sighs again. “But I’m okay,” he concludes. “And by some crazy miracle, the Healers managed to save my leg. I never really imagined that I’d end up a Werewolf someday, but still…if it weren’t for Derek, I’d be dead.”

An echo of that fear-panic-grief that had gripped him earlier twinges in Stiles’ chest at the thought of what could’ve happened. At what very nearly *did* happen. God, if Derek had delayed answering Peter’s call for help by only a couple of minutes…

Jackson glances up at him sharply, apparently sensing Stiles’ distress, his hand coming up to grip the human’s shoulder again.

“Hey…”

“I’m fine,” Stiles promises, taking a few deep breaths and trying to quash that flutter of panic back down again. “Just…overthinking things. I’m really glad you’re okay, man.”

The ‘wolf regards him searchingly for a moment longer, then gives his shoulder a squeeze and drops his hand. “Yeah. Me too.”

The door to the recovery suite opens a moment later, distracting Jackson’s attention from him entirely, and Stiles can tell who it is without looking just from the way the Sub’s posture relaxes and the warm, easy smile that graces Jackson’s tired features.

“Hey, babe. We’ve got a visitor.”

“Hi,” Danny greets, pleasantly surprised, crossing the room in a few long strides and leaning down to wrap his arms around Stiles in a gentle hug. “I didn’t know you were awake.” He brushes a hand over the back of Stiles’ head to squeeze his nape. “Feeling better?”

Stiles nods, leaning into the Dom’s embrace with a quiet sigh, eyes slipping closed briefly. Danny gives the *best* hugs. Well, second only to Derek. And his Dad. But the point is they’re *fucking awesome*, and Jackson’s a lucky bastard to get access to them 24/7.

“I came by to see you earlier, but you were still sparko,” Danny says, perching on the edge of the bed beside him and surveying his bruises with a critical gaze. “I didn’t know you were awake.” He brushes a hand over the back of Stiles’ head to squeeze his nape. “Feeling better?”

Stiles nods, leaning into the Dom’s embrace with a quiet sigh, eyes slipping closed briefly. Danny gives the *best* hugs. Well, second only to Derek. And his Dad. But the point is they’re *fucking awesome*, and Jackson’s a lucky bastard to get access to them 24/7.

“I came by to see you earlier, but you were still sparko,” Danny says, perching on the edge of the bed beside him and surveying his bruises with a critical gaze. “That black eye’s gonna be a thing of beauty by tomorrow morning. Here, let me…”

The Dom lifts his hand, index and middle fingertips brushing gently along Stiles’ cheekbone and under his right eye, back and forth slowly, making the skin tingle with a phantom sort of heat. Something bulky and white around Danny’s wrist captures Stiles’ attention, but before he can open his mouth to pry about it, someone clears there throat from across the room.

“Correct me if I’m wrong,” Peter Hale says mildly, “but I’m fairly sure I overheard Deaton cautioning you against using your core energy for at least the next forty-eight hours.”

“Correct me if I’m wrong,” Peter Hale says mildly, “but I’m fairly sure I overheard Deaton cautioning you against using your core energy for at least the next forty-eight hours.”

“I came by to see you earlier, but you were still sparko,” Danny says, perching on the edge of the bed beside him and surveying his bruises with a critical gaze. “That black eye’s gonna be a thing of beauty by tomorrow morning. Here, let me…”

The Dom lifts his hand, index and middle fingertips brushing gently along Stiles’ cheekbone and under his right eye, back and forth slowly, making the skin tingle with a phantom sort of heat. Something bulky and white around Danny’s wrist captures Stiles’ attention, but before he can open his mouth to pry about it, someone clears there throat from across the room.

“Correct me if I’m wrong,” Peter Hale says mildly, “but I’m fairly sure I overheard Deaton cautioning you against using your core energy for at least the next forty-eight hours.”

“Correct me if I’m wrong,” Peter Hale says mildly, “but I’m fairly sure I overheard Deaton cautioning you against using your core energy for at least the next forty-eight hours.”

“Correct me if I’m wrong,” Peter Hale says mildly, “but I’m fairly sure I overheard Deaton cautioning you against using your core energy for at least the next forty-eight hours.”

Peter just crosses his arms over his chest, eyebrows arched. “If we’re talking technicalities, you’re
Stiles glances between the two Doms with an expression of bemusement, although it fades into a concerned frown when he takes a moment to study Danny more closely. It’s difficult to make out in the room’s dim lighting, but the Dom’s usually-tan complexion is definitely a shade or two paler than normal, and there are circles beneath his eyes that can’t just be attributed to a sleepless night. Then there’s the matching bandages on each of his wrists, thick and padded as though to apply pressure to wounds underneath.

“What happened?” he asks after a beat, taking one of the Druid’s hands to examine the dressing more closely. “Danny, what the hell did you do?”

“Something stupidly brave,” Peter answers for him, approaching the bedside to brush a hand over Stiles’ hair in a casual caress before clapping a hand against Danny’s shoulder. “Something that, by all accounts, probably saved your life.”

Danny gives a wry smile, but it’s visibly strained, his eyes haunted by the memory of what had almost come to pass.

“Something stupidly brave,” Peter answers for him, approaching the bedside to brush a hand over Stiles’ hair in a casual caress before clapping a hand against Danny’s shoulder. “Something that, by all accounts, probably saved your life.”

Danny gives a wry smile, but it’s visibly strained, his eyes haunted by the memory of what had almost come to pass.

“The trail went cold after Haigh switched vehicles,” he reveals quietly. “Your kidnappers had covered their tracks with scent-blockers, probably doused the whole van in them to keep your scent contained once the doors were closed. We had no other leads, only Lydia’s insistence that you were caged up somewhere, and time was running out. I could feel Jackson growing weaker by the hour, and it was killing me. I had to know where they were keeping you.”

Jackson reaches out to take his Dom’s hand, and Danny laces their fingers together, taking a deep, steadying breath.

“There’s…a ritual,” the Druid continues after a beat, lifting his gaze again. “It only works between blood relatives, or people who’ve been soul-bonded. Centuries ago, it was most commonly used to gain control over someone else’s body, but it has other applications; I was able to use it to pinpoint Jackson’s location.”

Stiles’ eyes widen fractionally. “You used blood magic?”

“And almost killed himself in the process,” Jackson adds tetchily, squeezing Danny’s hand a little tighter. “Because he’s a self-sacrificing idiot.”

Rendered temporarily speechless, Stiles can only stare at the Dom in awe. Danny’s dabbled in illegal activity before to obtain information or hack into ‘secure’ networks for one good cause or another, but when it comes to his Druid powers he’s always been completely by-the-book. And seriously, blood magic? It takes a hell of a lot of core-energy to wield that kind of power. Messing with those kind of rituals is fucking dangerous, not to mention expressly forbidden by the Druid High Council because of the whole bodily-possession thing.

“It isn’t exactly something I’ve had chance to practise before,” Danny explains, glancing down at his bandaged wrists. “I made the cuts too deep, and the spell lasted longer than I’d intended it to. I was lucky Deaton was nearby; he found me before I could bleed out.”

Stiles blinks at him, stunned. “Holy fuck, dude.”

The Dom manages another wry smile and a shrug. “Unorthodox, I know. But it worked. I got a brief glimpse at Jackson’s most recent memories, enough to figure out he was being held at the First National Bank near the county border. I managed to pass on the message to Derek before…”
“Before you collapsed,” Peter finishes for him, in a mild tone that carries only the barest note of censure.

“Idiot,” Jackson tacks on, but it’s half-fond.

It’s a lot to take in, but at least it answers some of the questions Stiles has been puzzling over since he woke up. Like the fact that when he’d finally been able to make the phone call to warn his Dad about the bomb, he and Deputy Parish had already been en-route to the bank. And the fact that Derek had arrived ahead of the patrol car, less than five minutes after he’d made said phone call. None of it had made much sense at the time, but factoring Danny and his blood magic (holy fuck) into the equation, suddenly the truth of the matter is perfectly clear.

Without Danny, they’d all be dead.

Gerard Argent would’ve murdered Stiles and Liam with his (admittedly badass) ancestral sword, bigoted psychopath that he is. Jackson would’ve gone into total cardiac arrest, and without Derek there to give him the Bite before he went brain-dead, there would’ve been no chance of resuscitation. And nobody would’ve been there to stop Gerard from taking Allison (and the baby) and getting the heck out of dodge, where it’d be near-impossible to track him down once he crossed the county border.

“Dude,” he breathes, and yanks Danny into a tight hug, overwhelmed with relief and gratitude. “Thank you. I’m so fucking glad you’re a rebel.”

Danny huffs a quiet laugh against his temple as he returns the hug carefully. “I wish the Council felt the same way.”

“Fuck.” Stiles winces as he draws back to look at the Dom. “They heard about the ritual?”

Danny gives a one-shouldered shrug. “It’s more than likely that a number of them felt it. It wasn’t exactly a small feat of magic – these kind of rituals draw energy from the earth to supplement a wielder’s magic, and that sort of power shift disturbs the balance of things, like ripples in a pond. It wasn’t difficult for the masters to trace those ripples back to me.”

Stiles swallows past the lump in his throat. “Are you gonna face charges?”

“No.” The Druid shakes his head and heaves another short, tired sigh. “While the ritual itself is forbidden by the Council, they acknowledged that I hadn’t used it with malicious intent. And given that I didn’t actually take possession of Jackson’s body, the only law I broke was in the casting itself. But it’ll still go down on my record that I’ve been officially cautioned against the use of dark magic.”

“Dude, that sucks,” Stiles sympathises softly, squeezing the man’s arm. “I’m sorry.”

It’s been Danny’s lifelong ambition to gain a seat on the Druid Council – it’s all he’s really talked about since his powers first truly manifested themselves back in middle school. While Stiles was still trying to decide between becoming a rocket scientist, a rock climber and a world-famous rock musician, Danny had planned out his entire future from the age of twelve: college degree, postgrad doctorate, Druid Councilman. It’s the only reason why he’d been so by-the-book about his training, why he’d never once dabbled in any of the more interesting (and legally questionable) rituals that Stiles’ late-night-research had often uncovered. To even be considered for the High Council, he couldn’t have any affiliation with those sort of practices. It’s one of the reasons why Deaton had never been granted a seat on the Council himself, or so Stiles had been led to believe.

Considering his future plans have been cut to ribbons, Danny seems to be remarkably unbothered by
it all. Either he’s putting on a brave face, or there’s more to the situation than meets the eye.

Stiles’ puzzlement must show, because Danny’s expression softens into a wider smile.

“As it turns out, there’s an Alpha whose Pack has recently gained a couple of new Betas,” the Druid tells him lightly. “He’s looking for an Emissary to help keep things in balance. Since taking a seat on the High Council isn’t a viable profession for me anymore, that seemed like the next best option. What do you think?”

Laughing by way of a response, Stiles yanks the Druid into another tight hug, grinning wide enough to make his injured lip sting.

“I think Derek’s lucky to have you,” he says once he’s sure his voice won’t break (his emotions post-Drop are always a bit closer to the surface), pulling away to scrub at his eyes with the sleeve of his hoodie. “Speaking of Derek, I don’t suppose any of you have seen him around?”

Peter ruffles his hair gently. “Actually, Derek’s the reason I came to find you. He could use your company for a little while, if you’re feeling up to it?”

Standing quickly enough that he twinges just about every strained muscle in his torso, Stiles nods eagerly. “Yeah, totally. Where is he?”

Peter wraps a companionable arm about his shoulders and steers him towards the door. “He’s in the garden with Alex. I’ll show you the way.”

‘The Garden’, as it turns out, is actually an indoor therapy suite on the ground floor of the hospital. Roughly about the same size as the gym hall back at Beacon Hills High School, it’s chock-full of plant life, like someone’s taken a slice out of the forest and slotted it neatly into Haven.

The lighting’s fairly dim, the fake-sky above them resembling a late dusk, and if Stiles didn’t know any better he’d think it was early evening already.

“Watch your head,” Peter cautions, pushing a branch out of the way before Stiles can take his eye out. “Sorry. We adjusted the light settings in the hope that it might help Derek sleep for a couple of hours.”

Stiles glances sideways at him, a worried crease in his brow. “Are things really that bad? Why did nobody tell me sooner?”
Peter’s smile is faintly apologetic. “Derek was pretty adamant that we leave you out of it; he wanted to give you time to rest after what you’d been through, especially in light of your recent Drop. But he keeps sneaking out of here to go check on you and the rest of the Pack, so we figured our best option was to rope you into babysitting duty.”

“Babysitting duty?” Stiles echoes.

“Essentially, all we need to do is keep him in here long enough for his exhaustion to finally catch up with him,” the Dom elaborates, taking his arm gently to guide him away from the main path and over towards a grassy slope, leaving the treeline behind them. “Although getting him to talk about his feelings won’t hurt, either. The rest of us haven’t had much luck in either field, and it’s getting to the point where his control’s starting to slip.

“He isn’t in any danger of hurting you,” Peter is quick to reassure, not that Stiles had ever been entertaining the notion of his Dom Shifting on him. “But Werewolves are pretty keyed into each other’s emotional stability, and if an Alpha’s feeling volatile then it tends to have a knock-on effect on the rest of the Pack. Talia’s worried about the Betas, especially Jackson. A newly-turned ‘wolf needs stability, and Derek doesn’t have the capacity to offer him that right now.”

They reach the crest of the small hill, and Stiles is able to see the rest of The Garden, all lush green grass and seasonal flowers that would look breathtaking if the lighting were better. The far wall of the therapy room seems to be made out of grey stone, carved smooth but shaped to look like natural rock, and there’s an actual waterfall cascading from a cave-like opening near the ceiling, and a sizable plunge-pool that feeds into a smaller stream which weaves back towards the forest area behind them.

On the grassy embankment near the plunge pool there’s a huge willow tree, its long branches draped like curtains around the figures who sit beneath it, leaves swaying gently in the soft breeze that seems to be blowing from somewhere. Stiles feels warmth swell in his chest when he recognises Derek and Alex Hale, and quickens his pace down the gentle slope towards the pair.

Derek’s laid on his side with his head pillowed in his father’s lap, the older wolf carding his fingers slowly through the Alpha’s hair. Alex is the first to glance up as Stiles nears them, his smile welcoming, but it isn’t until Stiles pushes back the curtain of green willow-vines that Derek appears to notice his presence (and that in itself is concerning, given how attuned the Alpha normally is to his surroundings).

“Stiles,” Derek says in surprise, jerking upright. “You’re supposed to be resting.”

He’s tempted to say “right back at you”, but in truth Stiles is having difficulty vocalising anything at all now that he’s seen the state of his Dom with his own eyes.

Derek looks awful. And it’s not just the bags under his eyes or the exhausted pinch to his expression, but his fatigue is evident in the way he holds himself, in the near-frantic sort of look that flickers briefly in the Alpha’s gaze before Derek schools his features to reflect something calmer.

“I’m okay, Der,” Stiles reassures softly. “I’ve slept half the day away already. I wanted to come see you.”

He lowers himself down wincingly, and Derek reaches for him with a soft noise of concern, gathering him into his arms gently and moving to sit back against the trunk of the willow tree, settling Stiles comfortably in his lap. The Alpha presses his face against Stiles’ throat and takes several deep breaths, holding him close like he’s afraid the gentle breeze might snatch the Sub from his arms.
Alex Hale pushes himself to his feet, leaning down to stroke a hand over the back of Derek’s head and brush a gentle kiss against Stiles’ brow.

“We’ll leave you boys alone,” he says, and holds Stiles’ gaze for a moment, a look of gratitude in his eyes. “I’ll be right outside if you need me, cub.”

Stiles nods in return, reaching up to run his fingers through Derek’s hair as he feels a little of the tension bleed from the Dom’s shoulders. He waits until Alex and Peter have disappeared over the crest of the grassy embankment before turning his head to brush a kiss against Derek’s temple.

“I know you’re not okay,” he murmurs, pulling back to cup the Dom’s jaw and guide his eyes up. A myriad of complex emotions flicker across his expression for a moment, and Stiles’ chest aches at the weight of grief and guilt he sees there. “Tell me what you need me to do to make things easier for you. I wanna help, Der.”

Derek’s lips twitch in a barely-there smile that doesn’t reach his eyes, but his answering kiss is full of warmth and affection, his hand rubbing soothingly up and down the Sub’s spine.

“You already are, Stiles,” the Dom tells him quietly, and leans their foreheads together for a brief moment. “Fuck, I’ve missed you. I thought after your father arrived that everything would be okay, but you Dropped at the bank when I wasn’t there, and then you went into shock the minute we reached Haven…” He exhales shakily and kisses Stiles again. “You scared the crap out of me.”

“I’m sorry.” Stiles cradles the Alpha’s face between his hands, brushing kisses over his jaw and cheeks between apologies. “I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry-”

“Don’t.” Derek shakes his head a little, but not enough to dislodge Stiles’ hands. “Don’t be sorry. This is all my fault.”

Stiles pulls away a little at that, still cradling Derek’s face gently, his brow creasing slightly. “Your fault?” he echoes. “Dude, how is any of this your fault? If it weren’t for you, none of us would’ve gotten out of there alive.”

Derek’s eyes flicker to crimson for a split second before he closes them and takes a steadying breath, and when he looks at Stiles again their’re back to their regular hue.

“I let her touch you,” the Dom answers, his voice half an octave lower and audibly tremulous, although whether it’s grief or anger Stiles can’t say for certain. Derek’s thumb brushes gently against the healing cut on his bottom lip. “I let her hurt you. That’s all on me.”

Stiles shakes his head, leaning in to kiss him again. “It’s all on her,” he counters softly. “She’s the one who chose to kidnap me, Derek. You weren’t there, there’s nothing you could’ve done.”

Derek looks pained as he averts his gaze. “I should’ve stopped her a long time ago. None of this would’ve happened if I’d…”

The Alpha falls silent, but Stiles can see his jaw working, can see the bright sheen to his eyes as he fights to control his emotions. His heart breaking for the burden of guilt and shame that his Dom’s clearly been carrying all these years, Stiles wraps both his arms around Derek’s shoulders in a tight embrace.

“Kate told me what happened,” he confesses after several long beats of silence, and feels Derek tense up all over again. “I know what she did to you, Der. What she tried to do to your family. And none of it was your fault, okay, none of it. You were a kid, Derek. And she was a manipulative psychopath. Everything that happened, everything she did, that’s all on her. How can any of that be
“Because I let her go.”

Stiles pulls back slowly to look at Derek, heart clenching painfully at the grief and guilt evident in the Dom’s face. “What?”

“I…Kate, she…” Derek struggles to find the words for a moment before sighing, pressing the heels of his hands against his eyes. “Fuck. I’m sorry.”

“Hey, no, it’s okay.” Stiles gently takes hold of his wrists to tug his hands away, leaning in to brush their lips together. “You don’t have to talk about it if you’re not ready.”

Derek traces the line of Stiles’ jaw with his nose in a tender nuzzle. “I want you to know,” he insists quietly. “I’ve hated keeping it a secret from the Pack, and I don’t want to keep it from you too. But talking about the past, that’s something I’ve struggled with for a long time now. It…it might be easier if I show you.”

Stiles tilts his head a little to one side, puzzled. “Show me?”

“Are you familiar at all with memory transference?” Derek asks. At Stiles’ blank look, he elaborates, “It’s a skill passed down from parent to child, and not all Werewolves possess the ability to perform a transference successfully. Hales happen to be one of the bloodlines capable of using it. The link is stronger if we’re bonded or related, so the memories should come through to you clearly.” He strokes his fingers against the sensitive skin of Stiles’ nape. “To establish the link, I have to pierce your skin with my claws along your chi-point here. It doesn’t hurt, but the adrenaline rush after the link is established can leave you feeling a little disorientated.”

The Dom kisses him again. “It’s safe. But I won’t do it unless you want me to.”

“I trust you,” Stiles murmurs in return, reaching up to stroke the Dom’s cheek. “And if this’ll be easier for you than talking about it, then I’m game.”

Derek nods, another sort-of smile flickering at the corner of his mouth as he tilts his head to touch his brow to Stiles’ briefly. Then he’s helping Stiles shift in his lap, prompting him to move until the Sub sits straddling him. He palms the back of Stiles’ head and gently guides it down to rest against his shoulder, the fingers of his other hand caressing the skin of his nape soothingly.

“If you want the memories to stop at any point, just say so,” the Dom tells him, and Stiles feels Derek’s soft fingertips turn to pinpricks as his claws extend. “I’ll be able to hear you.”

“Oh, Stiles breathes, soothed by both the hug and the caress, his body lax in Derek’s hold. “I’m ready.”

There’s a pinching sort of sensation around his nape – not exactly painful, just uncomfortable – and a liquid sort of heat trickles down his spine as he arches with a soft gasp, muscles tensing as his stomach gives an almighty swoop. And fucking hell, ‘adrenaline rush’ is an understatement – for a second he quite forgets how to breathe, everything around him lighting up as his heart beats a quickening tattoo in his ears.

Then his vision whites out entirely, and the whole world changes.
Hope you enjoyed the chapter! :D As always, I'd love to hear your thoughts. It's lovely to have Stiles out of danger and safely back with Derek and the Betas, I do so enjoy writing their fluffy interactions. Also Peter is a doting uncle who is delighted to have a new nephew (Jackson) to spoil, and nobody can tell me otherwise. ;P

As you may have guessed, the next chapter's going to be a sort of flashback-segment similar to the one seen earlier in the story regarding Stiles' memory of Matt and the mass-shooting incident. Given that it's going to involve Kate being her usual pervy self, please only read it if that sort of content isn't likely to trigger you. I don't intend to actually write any intimacies in any sort of detail (because omg gross), but references will be made to their relationship and like I said, Kate will be there, being icky and pervy.

The only consolation is that Peter and Laura will also be there, being badass and protective over baby Derek. <3

More coming soon! xxxx
Ancient History

Chapter Notes

Content warning for this chapter: while there are zero explicit Kate/Derek scenes, their sexual relationship is implied/vaguely referenced to, and obviously there's Kate Argent being the stalker-creep-psychopath that she is and coercing a minor into dating her. If any of this could be triggering to you, please skip this chapter.

Hang in there, folks, there's a happy ending.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“So,” Stiles comments, staring down the long, dark corridor ahead of him apprehensively. “I gotta admit, this whole Twilight Zone thing is a little unexpected.”

A warm hand slides into his own as Derek steps up beside him, which is weird as fuck, because he knows this is all in supposed to be happening his head so they shouldn’t even have hands.

The Dom smiles, and somehow Stiles can both see and feel his amusement. “Phantom nerve stimulation,” he explains, and gives the Sub’s hand a squeeze as though to prove his point. “It's the brain’s way of convincing the rest of your body that something’s real, even if it’s not.”

“Great. Like that isn’t gonna keep me up at night,” Stiles mutters, before shooting Derek a slightly wide-eyed look. “Fuck. You heard that?”

“We’re in a sort of cohesive bubble between our conscious minds,” Derek tells him apologetically. “Thoughts and speech tend to overlap a little. If you don’t want me to overhear what you’re thinking, we should probably stop now before we head in too deep.”

“No,” Stiles shakes his head. Or…thinks about shaking it? Gods, this is confusing. “No, it’s fine, I can do this. I wanna help you.”

Derek gives his hand another gentle squeeze, warmth and love and affection swelling up in Stiles’ chest and pressing against him on all sides, and for a moment it’s like every part of him is wrapped up in a cosy embrace. Then they’re moving somehow (he can’t really call it walking, because there’s no sensation from his legs), Derek guiding him along the corridor past dozens of closed doors. They all look the same, built from a dark sort of oak but with no other distinguishing features to tell them apart, so there’s no real clue as to what lies beyond.

Stiles peeks at his surroundings curiously. “So this is what it’s like inside your head?”

There’s another pulse of warmth and amusement from Derek.

“In a manner of speaking,” the Alpha agrees. “It always looks a little different, depending on who
I’m linked with. The memories are mine, but this place is a sort of shared creation born of our connected minds.”

“Pretty sure my brain’s nowhere near as calm as this,” Stiles mutters, eyeing the doors as they pass them by rapidly. “How’s everything so organised?”

“I’ve had a fair bit of practice over the years,” his Dom admits quietly, and something that feels like regret ripples briefly through Stiles before quickly dissipating. “After what happened with Kate, I couldn’t…it was difficult to live with the memories of what she’d done to me; of what she’d tried to do to rest of my family. I’d spent so long trying to please her as a Sub, the person I’d become was totally at odds with the Dominant my wolf was transitioning into. I didn’t know who or what I was anymore, and a ‘wolf without an identity is a ‘wolf without an anchor. I might’ve gone rogue if it weren’t for Uncle Peter.”

Suddenly, the end of the corridor looms up ahead of them. A lone door stands there, identical to the ones they’ve already passed if not for the large, intricately curling triskelion carved into the wood. Derek reaches out, his fingertips trailing over the topmost spiral reverently.

“He helped me build this place,” the Alpha reveals, and Stiles feels a rush of warmth-affection-gratitude that he knows is coming from his Dom. “It’s a barrier, of sorts – a mental wall built around the memories that threatened to hurt me the most. My uncle couldn’t erase them completely – only Alphas have that level of control over another ‘wolf’s mind, and I wouldn’t let…” He pauses again, as though struggling to find the right words. “Mom offered to link with me, to take away those memories for good so that I could move on, but I didn’t want her to see me like that. Guess I was scared she wouldn’t look at me the same way if she found out the whole truth.”

He reaches for the door handle, hesitating a brief moment as he glances towards Stiles. The Sub can sense his Dom’s lingering concern, and smiles at him reassuringly.

“I’m right here,” Stiles murmurs. “I’m not going anywhere.”

The Dom nods, squeezes his hand a little tighter, and pushes the door open.

… … … … … …

It’s too warm in the car, even with the windows rolled down, the scent of hot leather thick in the stuffy air. Teenagers chatter loudly as they go walking past, and there’s laughter from a group of girls nearby, the low roar of a skateboard approaching along the sidewalk and the click-click of a bicycle chain changing gears.
Stiles is momentarily overwhelmed by the intensity of all the scents and sounds, the vividness of the unfamiliar world around him. When he manages to regain his focus, he finds himself looking at a much smaller, much younger Derek, sitting slumped in the passenger seat of a car, picking idly at the strap of his backpack and ignoring Peter Hale’s searching gaze.

It’s a weird sort of sensation – like he’s regarding Derek as an observer and looking at the world through the Beta’s eyes simultaneously.

“How come I can see you?”

The teenager doesn’t reply, staring sullenly down at his lap.

“Memories are often like dreams,” Derek (his Derek) answers, a bodiless voice that comes from all around him. “When we think back on events from the past, we don’t always see things from a single perspective - the mind has a habit of filling in the gaps and creating an external viewpoint.”

“I’m in the car,” Stiles tries to process. “But… I’m outside the car. Watching me, I mean you, staring down at my - at your backpack.”

“It can be a little disorientating at first,” the Alpha acknowledges. “Takes a bit of getting used to. Try to think of it as a 4D movie, if that helps.”

“You don’t have to do this,” Peter murmurs, quickly drawing Stiles’ attention away from his Dom’s inner voice. “If you’re not ready to go back to school, we can take the day off.”

The teenager tightens his grip on the shoulder-strap of his bag briefly before huffing out a sigh, shaking his head. “Nah. Mom’ll get mad if you miss your flight again.”

Peter shrugs, tapping his fingers idly against the steering-wheel. “I’m not afraid of your mother.”

“Liar,” Derek accuses, but there’s a reluctant smile tugging at the corner of the younger Beta’s mouth. He finally unfastens his seatbelt, squaring his shoulders a little as he sighs again. “You’ll be home for the game next month, right?”

“Wouldn’t miss it,” the Dom reassures and reaches out to hook an arm around the teenager’s neck, yanking him into a hug. “I’m only a phone call away if you need to talk, cub. Night or day. Although if you could schedule something to interrupt Friday morning’s board meeting, I’d appreciate the save.”

Derek’s smile curls a little wider into a faint grin as he leans into the other wolf’s embrace for a long moment, the tension easing from his posture. “Thanks, Uncle Peter.”

The older Hale brushes a kiss against the kid’s temple before releasing him. “Go on. It’s bad form to be late on your first day back from Spring Break.”

“Because you were such a model student, right?” Derek drawls, and quickly slides out of the car (beyond Peter’s reach) before his uncle can retaliate. He shuts the car door, slinging the strap of his backpack over his shoulder as Peter starts up the engine.

“Stay out of trouble, kid,” the Dom calls through the open window. “Or at least try not to be obvious enough about it to get yourself caught.”

The teenager grins, lifting a hand in a wave as the car pulls away from the curb. When he turns, the expression slowly begins to fall away, the smile fading into nothingness as he glances towards the school. Stiles feels an echo of a heavy sort of ache in his (or maybe Derek’s?) chest, a familiar
tightness that the teenager’s been trying to ignore.

“You’re upset,” Stiles realises. “Has something happened?”

The school up ahead blurs, scents and sounds beginning to fade, and then older-Derek is suddenly beside him, watching his younger self with an unreadable expression even as he slips his hand back into Stiles’, warmth and love surrounding the Sub once more.

“A friend of mine had recently died in a house fire,” he reveals quietly. “Ravi Johnson. He was in the year above me at school, but our families had always been close, and his death hit me pretty hard. I imagine Kate saw me as an easier target because of it.”

The world around Stiles swims back into focus, the warmth of his Dom’s hand vanishing, and suddenly teenage-Derek is in front of him again, a letter clutched in one hand as he shifts restlessly from foot to foot, glancing around the deserted library as he waits at the reception desk. Stiles takes a moment to peer at his surroundings (it’s only mildly unsettling how the library looks almost exactly the way he remembers it from his own school years) before refocusing his attention on the young Beta as a voice startles them both.

“Something I can help you with, handsome?”

Kate Argent emerges from behind a row of bookcases, dressed simply in dark trousers and a flattering blouse (the top few buttons of which are noticeably unfastened), long blond hair pinned up in a clasp so that her slim neck is more prominently on display. Stiles would glower at her if his phantom self possessed the necessary facial muscles, but he settles for silently seething instead.

“Oh, hi. Um, I was just waiting for Ms Winters.” Derek passes her the letter when she holds out her hand, and stands there as she reads it, fidgeting endearingly. “The note said I had to come here after basketball practice. Apparently I took out a book last month and it’s overdue, or something?”

“Is that so?” Kate’s smile is playful, teasing, and already the teenager’s cheeks are heating, the fluttering tattoo of a pulse echoing loudly in the otherwise quiet library. “First day back after Spring Break and you’re already in trouble, Mr Hale?”

Stiles wants to gouge out her eyes with the nearby paperweight, but he already knows his non-corporeal hand will pass straight through it.

The Beta huffs an awkward laugh, rubbing the back of his neck. “Thing is, um, I haven’t actually taken out a book in a while, so unless someone swiped my card and borrowed something in my name, I don’t really see how anything could be overdue.”

Kate makes a humming sound and moves around the desk to sit at the computer (if that ancient piece of technology could even be likened to a functioning information database).

“A few minutes of quiet mouse-clicking (Kate) and awkward shuffling (Derek) later, she hands the library card back to the teenager with a smile.

“Let me check your account, sweetheart. Do you have your card with you?”

A few minutes of quiet mouse-clicking (Kate) and awkward shuffling (Derek) later, she hands the library card back to the teenager with a smile.

“Sorry about that, honey. I guess there must’ve been a glitch in the system.” She tucks a stray lock of wavy blond hair behind her ear. “Ms Winters is away until next Monday, but I’ll let her know about the mix-up when she comes back. If you need anything in the meantime, come find me – I’ll be working here for the rest of the semester. College classes don’t pay for themselves, right?”

“Right,” Derek agrees, fumbling a little as he slips the card back into the front pocket of his
backpack.

Kate perches on the edge of the desk, crossing one long leg over the other. “I deferred my enrolment for a year because I wanted to travel,” she explains. “But backpacking wasn’t really my thing, I got too homesick. So I’ve been working temp jobs to pass the time. How about you, cutie?” She smiles, tilting her head a little to the side as she eyes him closely. “You look like an athlete to me. Let me guess – football scholarship?”

“How? Oh, me?” Derek gives another self-conscious laugh, fidgeting under her appreciative gaze. “I play basketball, actually. And I haven’t really thought much about college, to be honest. I mean, I’m only a sophomore so…”

Kate has the nerve to look surprised at the revelation (that sick bitch), eyes widening in a far too convincing expression of astonishment.

“No way,” she protests, then laughs, giving him a gentle shove. “Shut up! I thought you were a senior; you totally look my age.”

Derek’s cheeks tinge pinker as he ducks his head, smiling and rubbing the back of his neck. Stiles wants to plant himself in front of the underage Beta and act as a physical barrier to protect him from the budding psychopath currently eyeing him up like he’s a gourmet meal.

“It’s getting late, handsome, you’d best run along.” Kate reaches for the stack of books waiting on the end of the desk, sending him a playful wink. “Don’t be a stranger, Mr Hale.”

The world shimmers briefly out of focus, and when his surroundings solidify again, Stiles finds himself sitting in one of the library’s study alcoves, math books spread out across the table in front of him.

“Here, sweetheart.” Kate pulls a bag of cookies from her purse, passing them to Derek with an indulgent smile. “I know how hungry you get after practice. Can’t study on an empty stomach, can you?”

Derek bites into one eagerly, his attention still mostly focused on the notepad in front of him. “The test’s not until next week,” he admits, the words muffled as he chews. “But it’s the big game on Saturday, and I don’t wanna be stuck inside all day Sunday trying to cram.”

Kate shakes her head with a soft laugh, reaching out to stroke her fingers through his hair. “God, you’re so responsible. I know guys in college who still can’t balance their schedules like you do.”

The teenager peeks sideways at her with a shy sort of smile, then ducks his gaze back to his math problems. Kate shifts closer, her hand cupping the back of the Beta’s neck as she makes a show of studying his work.

“You’re coming, right?” Derek asks hopefully after a few beats of silence. “On Saturday?”

Kate leans in to smooch his cheek with another quiet laugh. “Like I’d miss your big game. I’ll be right there in the front row cheering you on.” After another minute or so, she glances down at her watch and sighs sadly. “It’s almost five, sweetheart. You should go.”

Derek reluctantly gathers his books and slips them into his backpack, glancing up at Kate as she
stands. “When can I see you again?”

“Soon,” she promises, shooting a brief, cautionary glance around the empty library before reaching down to cup his cheek. “If you can get away from your team, meet me here after the game on Saturday. I’ve bought something special for my little champion.” She leans in to press a quick, chaste kiss to his brow. “Our little secret, okay?”

Stiles shudders inwardly as he watches her leave. It’s so easy to see how Kate had managed to gain Derek’s trust and affection; starting things off so friendly and platonic to draw him in, then slowly building it up to something that hinted at romance without directly calling it that. It’s careful and calculated and so completely fucked up, and all Stiles can do is watch and wait for the moment things turn sour.

“Still with me?” Derek asks, a reassuring presence beside him.

“Yeah,” Stiles confirms, submerging himself in that warmth gladly. “Still with you.”

The Dom’s presence seems to pulse around him again, radiating comfort and reassurance and love. “The link’s strong enough now that we can head in a little deeper. These aren’t memories I’ve confronted in a quite a while – there’s a chance you might find yourself experiencing them rather than standing by as the observer.”

Stiles has grown more accustomed to the sensation of seeing things from Derek’s perspective, and isn’t worried about being overwhelmed by the experience this time around.

“I’ll be okay,” he reassures. “I’ll let you know if it gets too much.”

Derek doesn’t answer him, at least not with words, but the warm and loving presence around him seems to swell, and Stiles reciprocates as best he can as his own world shimmers and fades into nothingness.

…

Derek sits on the edge of the marble worktop in the kitchen, watching as his older brother sieves flour into the bowl of pancake batter. It’s unusually quiet in the kitchen for a Saturday morning; they have the house all to themselves for once, Nick and Cora having joined their parents on weekend trip to visit Grammy and Gramps on the other side of the county. Derek’s always been an early-riser, but without his five-year-old little brother demanding his attention every ten seconds, the house seems weirdly empty. He’s grateful for Johnny’s company, though – it’s been too long since they last got a
chance to hang out together without the rest of his family around.

Johnathan’s always been the quietest out of his siblings, and despite the seven-year age gap, he’s still somehow the easiest to talk to. His brother’s been away at college for what feels like forever, but now he’s finally home for good, and due to start working as a support officer at the newly built Beacon Hills WPDS centre alongside their mom and Alpha Deucalion.

The teenager watches his brother closely, swinging his legs back and forth, the heel of his bare foot lightly bouncing off the wood of the cupboard beneath the worktop.

“Johnny?”

“Mm?” his brother responds without looking up from his task.

“When you were in school…how did you first know for sure that you were a Sub?”

The older Hale pauses at that, glancing across at Derek as his whisk stills in the batter.

“I can’t remember, to be honest,” the older ‘wolf finally answers. “It wasn’t like I just woke up one day and knew what I was; it was a gradual change over a couple of years. My Beta instincts started shifting towards more Submissive inclinations a few months before the rest of me caught up – Mom and Uncle Peter knew my true dynamic long before I’d finished transitioning.”

Derek fiddles with the strap of his watch (a present from Kate after winning last month’s basketball game), and avoids Johnathan’s searching gaze.

“So say, hypothetically,” he hedges, “that there’s this person you really like, who’s kind of a Dom. And you know they like you back. Like, a lot. Do you think it’d still be okay to go on dates and stuff, even if you’re not done transitioning into a Sub just yet?”

Johnathan sets the mixing bowl aside carefully, wiping his hands on the towel slung over his shoulder as he makes his way over to Derek, a fond smile tugging at his lips.

“As long as they know you’re not a Sub,” his brother tells him quietly, reaching up slide a palm from jawline to temple in an affectionate caress that immediately calms Derek’s nerves. “There’s nothing wrong with dating as a Neutral, but don’t go trying to fit yourself into a mould to make someone else happy, okay? You’re only fifteen – you might not start transitioning for another six months yet. And you never know, maybe this person you’re interested in might decide to re-register as a Sub in a couple of years. Puberty can do the craziest things.”

The teenager fidgets, cheeks heating a little. Kate’s a Dom through and through, and she’s so confident about everything she does, he can’t imagine that she’d want to change her registration. She seems like the sort of person who’s known about their dynamic identity right from day one.

Johnathan taps Derek beneath the chin gently, drawing him from his thoughts. “Just don’t do anything you’re not comfortable with, buddy. Eventually, your ‘wolf will start to let you know if you’re going against your body’s instincts. In the meantime, just keep things casual, okay? No swearing your undying love and devotion to anyone.”

If Derek’s answering laugh is a little bit forced, his brother doesn’t seem to notice.
Derek squirts another dollop of the scent-suppressant shower gel onto the washcloth to lather himself down again. He’s already scrubbed his skin hard enough to make it feel irritated and oversensitive, but it’s a necessary precaution.

Kissing Kate at school was one thing – her scent tends to intermingle with all the others he accumulates throughout the day by being jostled by other students and sharing locker rooms with the basketball team – but spending hours at a time in the Dom’s apartment (and in her bed) has allowed her scent overpower everything else, and he can’t risk going home like that – he wouldn’t make it two steps through the door before someone caught him and started asking difficult questions. He’s still not sure how Kate managed to get her hands on Blocker-Scrub, as far as he knows the stuff’s still prescription-only, but he’s not about to question it. Not when their whole relationship relies on his ability to effectively mask Kate’s scent.

“It’s not that I don’t want to meet you family, sweetie,” Kate had told him the other day as they cuddled together on the couch. “But they just wouldn’t understand our relationship. They’d probably want you to wait until you’d registered before letting me see you again.”

“They don’t have to find out,” Derek had hurried to reassure her, alarmed at the thought of being separated from Kate until he turned sixteen. “I’ll just keep you a secret until I can register as your Sub.”

The smile Kate had sent him in return had made his heart flutter.

Derek rinses himself off quickly and grabs a towel (Kate always keeps one separate from her own so that it only smells of laundry detergent), scrubbing himself down briskly before heading back into the master bedroom.

“Are you sure you can’t stay?” Kate wheedles temptingly from her seat on the edge of the mattress, holding the sheet against her chest as she swings her legs out of bed.

“You know I want to,” he answers apologetically, quickly drawing his gaze away from her tanned calves and reaching for the clean set of clothes he’d stuffed into his backpack earlier that day. “But my mom’s gonna be home from the Centre by ten, and I’ve already missed curfew twice this month.”

Kate reaches out to tussle his hair. “Who’s gonna know? You said your Dad was out of town, right? And the rest of your family’s away at college.”

Derek nods hesitantly. She has a point – Adam’s at medical school, and Laura’s still training at the police academy. With Dad away in New York visiting Uncle Peter, and Mom working late at the Centre this past fortnight, Johnny’s been the only adult home most evenings (babysitting Cora and Nick). And his older brother’s been pretty cool about covering for Derek’s ‘dates’ so far, but he’s as strict as Mom when it comes to his 9pm curfew, especially on school nights. He’s already warned Derek that their mom will hear about it if he stays out late again, and although he’s kinda chill for a grownup, Johnny’s not the sort of person who makes idle threats.

“Maybe tomorrow?” he suggests tentatively, stepping back out of Kate’s reach to grab his shirt. “Mom doesn’t usually mind if I sleep over at a friend’s house, as long as it’s the weekend.”
Kate shifts to wrap the sheet a little further about her torso, watching him with a faint smile that gives Derek pleasant butterflies in his stomach. She waits until he’s finished tying his laces before crooking a finger at him, and the teenager moves obediently, sinking to his knees when she gestures towards the floor, the motion far less fumbling and awkward now that he’s had a few weeks to practice.

He still can’t say he enjoys being on his knees, but he’s getting used to ignoring the cramping and focusing on Kate instead. Being obedient seems to make her happy, and Derek will gladly live with a little discomfort if it’ll make his Dom smile.

“You’re so cute like this,” she murmurs, and pinches his cheek. It hurts a little, but the ache fades quickly. “Always such a good boy for me, Derek.”

He smiles and ducks his head, fighting not to fidget in place. Kneeling will get easier when he finally transitions, he’s sure of it – Johnathan can kneel for hours at a time while he’s reading in the library back home, without needing to change position even once. Derek just needs a bit more practice at it, that’s all.

“You know, summer vacation starts at the end of next week,” Kate mentions after a short pause. “We’re not going to be able to meet up after school anymore.”

Derek glances up at her worriedly. “But we’ll still get to see each other, right?”

The Dom smiles warmly, tugging on his fringe. “Like I’d ever be able to keep away from a cutie like you.” She winks, tussling his hair again. “We’ll just need to be a little bit more careful from now on. Your family might start to worry about you if you come and visit me too often, especially if your siblings finish up college for the summer. They’ll want to see you too, right?”

The teenager nods slowly, a little crestfallen.

“Tell you what might help,” Kate continues, tilting his chin up so that their eyes meet. “If you email me a rough idea of the dates when you think everyone’s gonna be back home over the summer, we can try to work out a schedule of our own around it. Okay?”

Derek nods again, appeased. “Yes, Ma’am.”

“Good boy.” She taps a manicured finger against his nose, then glances towards the clock on her bedside table. “Uh oh. I think you might’ve missed your curfew, sweetie.”

Wide-eyed, the teenager stumbles to his feet and hurries to grab his bag, calling out a “love you, bye!” over his shoulder to the sound of Kate’s light, musical laughter.

It’s a thirty-minute bike ride back to the woods even on a good day, and although he doesn’t have any traffic to contend with, he’s cautious enough to take a side-route home to avoid the main road just in case his Mom’s on her way back from the Centre already. There’ll be no talking his way out of it if he gets caught red-handed, after all.

By the time he reaches the winding driveway that leads up through the forest towards the main house, Derek’s thoroughly out of breath. He ditches his bike in some bushes halfway up the hill (the pedals and chain are too noisy) and creeps the rest of the way on foot, tiptoeing as stealthily as he’s able up the dirt track, wincing at every snapping twig and crunching leaf he treads on.

He pauses to catch his breath at the edge of the clearing, a hand braced against the trunk of a sheltering oak tree as he peers towards the house. The half-moon’s high in the sky already, albeit mostly hidden behind cloud cover, but his vision adjusts to the darkness easily enough, his gaze flitting across to the vehicles parked along the driveway. He groans under his breath when he
recognises his mother’s car right behind Johnny’s.

“Shit.”

“I wouldn’t advise saying that around Mom,” a voice remarks dryly from above.

Derek yelps and stumbles back few hurried paces, eyes widening when a familiar Beta drops down from a branch high up in the tree to land near-silently in front of him.

“You jerk, you scared the crap out of me,” he accuses, carefully keeping his voice hushed.

“Nice to see you too.” The older ‘wolf grins at him fondly, grabbing Derek by the arm to yank him forwards into a crushing embrace. “Hi, Laura,” she drawls, mimicking what’s probably supposed to be his voice, squeezing him hard enough to make him wince. “How’s life at the Academy? I’ve really missed having you around.”

“Okay, okay, I’m sorry!” Derek huffs out a breathless laugh and squirms in her hold until she lets him go. She’s still a full head taller than him, now with added muscle from her months of training, and his ribs can certainly feel the difference. “But seriously, when did you get back? I thought you weren’t coming home until next weekend?”

Laura drags her fingers through his hair to muss it up, smiling. “Dad and Uncle Peter came to visit. Since the semester officially ended yesterday, I decided to skip all the partying and come home a week early. We drove down from Sacramento earlier today.”

Derek feels his insides freeze up. “We?”

“Mm-hm.” Laura’s smile twitches a little wider, a teasing older-sister sort of smugness in her eyes. “You picked the wrong day to break curfew, little brother.”

The teenager winces, his gaze flickering back towards the house apprehensively. Facing Johnny’s disappointed lecture would’ve been crappy enough, but now he’s gonna hear it not only from Mom, but Dad and Uncle Peter too? Fuck.

“Come on,” his sister says cheerfully, but there’s a note of sympathy in her voice too as she slings an arm around his shoulders. “No use prolonging the inevitable. If you’re lucky, Mom might only ground you until school’s out.”

Then her nose crinkles a little, a small bemused frown creasing her brow as she peers down at him.

“Why do you smell like that?” she asks, quiet but direct, and Derek feels his heart seize up in his chest.

“Uh, like what?”

“Like you’ve just taken a bath in scent-suppressant,” the Dom pursues. Her hand comes up to touch his hair again, her nostrils flaring. Then her eyes narrow fractionally. “The hell have you been doing, kid?”

The younger ‘wolf ducks out from underneath her arm. “Hanging out with friends, jeez, is that a crime now? I just took a shower before I came home, that’s all.”

His heart’s beating too fast, and he knows that she must be able to hear it (in his own ears the sound is almost deafening), but all he can think about right now is getting inside the house and normalising his scent before someone else catches him out.
He doesn’t even bother closing the front door, just legs it straight upstairs and into his bedroom, dropping his backpack and kicking it under his bed before diving on top of the duvet. It’s a bit undignified, rolling around semi-naked in his own sheets like a pup on his first full-moon shift, but he needs his skin to smell like him, and this is the quickest way. His shirt and jeans end up on the floor right alongside his shoes and socks as he tries to maximise skin-to-bedsheet contact.

He’s halfway through squirming his way into a clean pair of shorts when he hears his mom’s voice calling up the stairs, low enough so as not to wake Cora and Nick, but just loud enough that the teenager knows he’s in Big Trouble.

“Derek Alexander Hale!”

He might be fifteen (and even older than that on the inside, as Kate’s told him more than once), but there are some things in life he’ll always be afraid of, and hearing his full name called in that particular tone of voice is one of them.

Wincing, the teenager stands, bare feet tripping over his jeans where he’d tossed them aside, and grabs a random t-shirt from his dresser, yanking it over his head as he turns towards the door. Pausing, he takes a moment to sniff at his arms, heartbeat slowing a little when all he can smell is himself. It still doesn’t thaw out the icy block of dread currently sitting in his stomach, but it reduces the burning anxiety by a few degrees.

Derek doesn’t exactly drag his feet, but he’s not in much of a hurry either, rubbing his sweaty palms against his shirt as he pads cautiously downstairs. Already knowing exactly where he’ll find his mom, he heads towards the library, skirting carefully around Laura when she inhales suspiciously as he passes by.

“Close the door, baby.”

Although her voice is calm and her posture utterly relaxed, Talia’s presence (somehow exuding Alpha and Dominant and disappointed all at once) has Derek’s wolf itching to turn tail and run back to the safety of Kate’s apartment. Nevertheless he obeys, the soft shnick of the latch quite literally sealing his fate, and turns to face his mother.

She can’t have been home from work long – she’s still dressed in the standard WPDS uniform, fitted black cargo pants and a beige cotton shirt with the triskelion logo printed near the left shoulder. The fact that she hasn’t even taken time to change gives Derek an idea of exactly how deep in shit he’s managed to bury himself.

Opting for an old defensive tactic, Derek immediately makes a beeline for his father, who’s perched on the arm of one of the plush armchairs nearby.

“Hey, champ,” his father greets, fond and amused (likely seeing straight through Derek’s current strategy). The older ‘wolf stands to pull him into a tight hug, brushing a kiss against Derek’s temple as he rubs the teen’s back.

“Not that I don’t appreciate the hug, pup,” Alex murmurs, “but I’m afraid it won’t be getting you out of trouble.”

Derek peeks up at him, wincingly hopeful. “Not even a little bit?”

Alex’s lips twitch up at the corners, but he shakes his head all the same. Derek deflates a bit, even as he sags a little further into the Sub’s hold. He might be having the shittiest day ever, but he hasn’t seen his Dad for almost two weeks and he’s missed this, the familiar security of his father’s embrace.
He grew up in these arms, and there are some things his ‘wolf will never stop craving, no matter how old he gets.

All too soon, his father’s nudging him down into the chair and reclaiming his perch on the arm beside him as his mom pulls up a padded footstool to sit directly in front of him, their knees almost touching.

“It’s ten-fifteen,” she tells him calmly. “Would you like to explain to me why you were still out more than an hour past your curfew?”

Unable to bring himself to meet her gaze, the teenager shrugs, fiddling with the strap of his watch. “Forgot, I guess.”

Talia sighs softly.

“Derek, baby, you’ve had the same weekday curfew since your birthday last November,” his mother reminds him, which Derek knows is a polite way of saying I’m not buying your bullshit. He fidgets, feeling the intensity of her gaze even without looking up.

“I just lost track of time, okay? I’m sorry, Mom. It won’t happen again.”

“So what did you tell Johnny on Tuesday? Or last Thursday?” At Derek’s sudden wide-eyed look, Talia arches an eyebrow. “Breaking curfew as a one-off incident I can overlook easily enough, but this is becoming something of a bad habit.”

Caught in a lie, burning shame making him frustrated both at himself and the situation, the teenager glowers down at his knees. “Look, I told you it won’t happen again,” he snaps. “Can you just drop it already?”

“Cub,” his dad murmurs, hushed and chiding.

There’s a beat of awful silence, and Derek swallows past the lump in his throat even as he feels something change in the air, a palpable sort of power-shift that makes his ‘wolf want to bare its throat.

“I don’t appreciate being snapped at, Derek,” Talia tells him, and there’s an audible note of warning beneath the layer of forced calm that makes Derek cringe internally. “I understand that you’re upset, but I’m your Alpha and your mother, and you do not take that tone with me. Understood?”

Derek nods, still moody but with enough sense to keep his attitude to himself.

“Now,” his mom presses on, her voice gentling, the unsettling edge of Alpha authority gone for the moment. “We’re not going to talk about this longer than we have to, and I don’t do this to embarrass you, but we need to get a few things straightened out.” Dread curdles in Derek’s stomach at that, but she ploughs on before he has time to flee. “I don’t mind you taking part in sexual relationships with someone from school as long as it’s mutually consensual, but I do want to know when you’re leaving and what time you’ll be coming home.”

Dropping his face into his hands, cheeks aflame, Derek can only groan in agonised mortification.

“And since we’re on the subject, you need to understand that STD’s are nothing to mess around with,” Talia continues calmly. “Are you using condoms?”

“Mom,” Derek sputters between his fingers, silently begging the ground to swallow him up. “Ohmygod stop.”
“Because you both need to be using protection,” she insists firmly. “And if you get someone pregnant before you’re bonded, Derek Alexander-”

Another strangled groan. “Mom, I know, okay? I’m not an idiot. Can we please not talk about this?”

His father pats him between the shoulders sympathetically, but Derek’s too busy dying of embarrassment to find much comfort in the act.

His mom knows, fuck, all this time he’s been trying to be sneaky and taking three showers and a day and keeping his laundry back to wash separately so that nobody asked any awkward questions, and it’s all been for nothing. The only small consolation is the knowledge that the library has been thoroughly soundproofed by Druid wards, so at least Uncle Peter and his siblings won’t have overheard this clusterfuck of a conversation. Small mercies.

“One last thing.” Talia’s hand curl around his wrists to gently tug them away from his face, leaning in close to hold his gaze, utterly serious. “Laura tells me you’ve been using scent-blockers. That stops tonight, young man.”

He doesn’t even try to deny it – there’d be no point, he’s never successfully lied to his mom’s face before, and he’s in enough trouble already. But the notion of him coming home smelling like Kate unsettles him more than anything else they’ve talked about so far, and he’s shaking his head before the words have fully sunk in.

“This isn’t about you keeping your relationship a secret from us,” Talia tells him firmly. “This is about me keeping you safe. I’m not sure how your friend got their hands on prescription suppressants, but neither of you should be using them. They’re dangerous, Derek.”

“What, so now I need your permission to take a shower?” Derek fires back, a growing sense of panic now fuelling his already-fractious temper. “Do you wanna tell me what toothpaste I have to use too, or do I get to decide that for myself?”

A steely sort of glint enters his mother’s gaze, but her grip on his wrists softens rather than tightens. “Don’t raise your voice to me.”

Anger and annoyance and fear and frustration are quickly reaching breaking point, and feeling on the verge of a shift, Derek wrenches his arms out of his mom’s grip and surges to his feet.

“This is bullshit,” he fumes. “Who cares what soap I use when I shower? It’s none of your goddamn business!”

Talia reaches up quickly, her hand resting lightly against his arm, although the fingers don’t grip (and really, that ought to have served as a warning in itself).

“Sit down,” she tells him quietly. “We’re not done here.”

The teenager side-steps out of her reach. “Whatever,” he mutters, his ‘wolf so close to the surface that his joints feel creaky. “I’m going to bed.”

“I told you to sit down.”

Derek can easily count on one hand the number of times his mother has resorted to using her Alpha authority to subdue his ‘wolf, because it’s only ever happened once in his living memory. He’d been six, waiting grumpily on the sidewalk for Laura to finish tying her shoelaces so that they could cross the road to go to the park. His mom had told him to wait, but he’d been impatient and had decided to cross the road all by himself, stepping off the curb and right towards the path of an oncoming car. It
had been his mother’s stern command of “Derek, freeze!” that had stopped him in his tracks, giving her time to swoop in and drag him out of the road, seconds away from becoming another RTA statistic. He’s never forgotten that bone-chilling command, that tone of absolute authority that had cut straight through his human flesh to the ‘wolf beneath and demanded obedience.

It damn near rocks him to the core now, his knees buckling beneath his weight, but he manages to launch himself back into the armchair before his legs can fail him, colours growing brighter and more focused around him as his wide eyes shift to their Beta hue, head tilting on instinct even as he shoulders hunch to become smaller, smaller, sorry, sorry. His heart’s beating too faster in his chest, and his throat’s growing tight, and fuck he’s going to cry-

“Talia,” Alex murmurs softly, a gentle hand stroking over the back of Derek’s head to settle on his nape.

His mom blinks, her red eyes fading back to their usual dark brown, and then she’s leaning forward to cup his face gently between her hands, pressing their brows together.

“I love you,” she murmurs, her voice calm again. “Shhh. You’re okay, baby.”

It’s almost word-for-word what she’d whispered to him on the roadside nine years ago as she’d cradled him in her arms, Derek sobbing his heart out into her neck, scared and upset and incredibly sorry. There’s a part of him that envies that little boy and his freedom to burst into tears at any given moment, because that’s exactly what Derek feels like doing right now.

His breath hitches only once, but it’s enough to have his father sliding into the armchair behind him, drawing Derek into his lap with a soothing rumble, the way he has after countless nightmares and scuffed knees and time-outs over the years. The Sub’s strong arms wrap themselves around the teenager securely, and it helps, calming the trembling Beta within Derek until he’s able to shift back, stubbornly blinking away the threatening sting of tears.

Talia strokes her fingers gently through his hair, lips pressed against his temple, her Alpha presence now a soothing, reassuring warmth.

“I never like doing that to my own cubs,” she tells him, with audible regret. “But I need you to listen to me very carefully, sweetheart – scent suppressants are dangerous. If, gods forbid, something should ever happen to you, I need to be able to track you down. If you’re wearing blockers, that becomes significantly more difficult, and it could cost you your life. I won’t allow that to happen. Do you understand me?”

He nods, the tightness in his chest finally easing as the ‘wolf within him settles back down again. His Alpha’s not mad at him. He’s okay. He can breathe again.

She kisses his forehead, arms circling around him so that the teen’s cocooned snugly between both his parents. “I don’t want to have this conversation again, alright? Promise me you’ll stop using blockers, Derek.”

He swallows thickly, and nods again. “I promise.”

“Thank you.” She pulls back to look at himsearchingly, thumb stroking his cheek as she regards him for a moment. “Now, about your curfew…”

_Oh crap._
“Grounded again?” Peter sympathises, setting down a mug of hot chocolate on the bedside table.

Derek yanks his pillow over his head and continues sulking. It isn’t fair. He’s never broken curfew before in his whole life, and suddenly he’s getting grounded for two whole weeks because of a few little mistakes? Laura used to break curfew all the time, she was just sneakier about it. Ugh.

He feels the mattress dip, and his uncle rubs a soothing hand up his spine. The touch goes a long way towards settling Derek’s wolf, but the teenager keeps pouting all the same, because he can.

“I’m curious, though,” Peter remarks casually. “What exactly did you say to make Talia go all Alpha-Dom on you? Your mom hasn’t put her foot down like that in quite a while.”

Derek flinches a little at the memory and smothers himself into the duvet a little further. He knows he’d crossed the line, snapping at her like that and challenging her authority with his ‘wolf so close to the surface. His mom’s usually so calm and patient, seeing her control slip even for a brief moment had been more of a shock than anything, even if she’d been well within her rights as his Alpha to remind him of his status. Laura and Johnathan had both come to find him as soon as he was back in his bedroom, bringing snacks and sympathy.

“Poor Der – being Alpha’d by Mom is never fun,” Laura had commiserated, unwrapping a candy bar and all but forcing it into Derek’s hands. “But we’ve all been there. Well done for keeping it together, tough guy. God knows I was a mess my first time.”

They hadn’t overheard anything, of course, but being “Alpha’d” was more of a feeling than anything, and when his mom had tapped into the core of her power for those few seconds, the whole house had known about it. Hell, his brother had probably felt it all the way from medical school. Johnny still swears up and down that ground itself had shook when their mother had found Adam trying to give himself a tattoo in the middle of the forest a few years back.

“Still,” Peter says, undeterred by the teenager’s sulky silence. “Happens to the best of us. Just be grateful she inherited your grandpa’s patience – my mother had a much shorter fuse when I was your age.”

“Were you ever grounded for taking a shower?” Derek grouches.

Peter gives a thoughtful hum. “Can’t say that I was. Found myself with a tanned hide often enough for skipping curfew, though.” The Dom ruffles Derek’s hair where it sticks out above the pillow. “Count yourself lucky, pup.”

“Lucky?” Derek shoves the pillow off so that he can shoot his uncle a glower. “I’m gonna be a prisoner inside my own house for the next two weeks. How’s that lucky?”

He’s not even allowed to stay late after school. “No study club, no math tutor sessions, no going to...”
the park and staying out until after dinner,” his mother had told him, calm but decisive. “You’re to come straight home after practice. If you’re going to be late, you call your father to explain why. You can have friends come over once summer vacation starts, but you’re not to stay over at anyone else’s house until you can prove to us that you’re able to abide by your old curfew.”

That gives him absolutely zero flexibility when it comes to fitting Kate into his current school schedule. ‘Study club’ had been hanging out in the library together, ‘math tutoring’ had been doing his homework back at her apartment, and it’d been weeks since he last went to the park with his friends to shoot some hoops. Up until his now, he’d spent every waking moment trying to see Kate as often as possible from the minute he left for school in the morning, to the moment his watch struck eight-thirty at night. And now he isn’t going to able to see her at all outside of lunch break.

It’s totally, completely unfair.

“Come on, it won’t be all bad,” Peter cajoles, tapping him gently beneath the chin. “Your sister’s home for the summer, and Adam’s due back by the end of next week. And then you’ve got me to hang out with – what else could you possibly need?”

That would normally be enough to coax a reluctant smile out of Derek, but he’s feeling so utterly miserable about the whole thing that he just can’t manage it, slumping over again and dropping his head onto his folded arms with a sigh, averting his gaze.

Peter tilts his head a little to one side, his hand warm as it settles on the back of Derek’s neck. “Okay,” he murmurs. “Out with it, pup. What’s really upsetting you?”

Derek stills, glancing up towards the Dom quickly. “What?”

“Your wolf’s fractious,” Peter tells him plainly, his voice low and calm. “And it’s not because of your mom, little one. This has been an ongoing issue for a couple of months now, and it’s been getting progressively worse. Every time I come home for a visit, your wolf’s grown a little more restless. Is there something going on I need to know about?”

Derek shakes his head, keeping his gaze averted. Gods, why does his uncle always have to be so observant?

Peter’s hand shifts to his hair, brushing his fringe back so that Derek’s gaze flickers up to his own momentarily. “Is there a problem at school?” the Dom perseveres. “Is someone bullying you? A student, a teacher?”

The teenager shakes his head again. “No, nothing like that,” he promises. The Dom doesn’t seem convinced, so he huffs out a forced laugh and rolls his eyes. “I’m fine, Uncle Peter. School’s great, okay?”

“If you’re sure.” The faint, almost imperceptible crease in the older wolf’s brow tells Derek that his uncle isn’t entirely satisfied with the answer, even if his easy tone says otherwise. The Dom ruffles his hair with a quiet, fond sigh. “You worry me, kid.”

Derek manages a convincingly reassuring smile as he reaches for his mug of hot chocolate, gulping down the hot liquid quickly and hoping the burn will soothe the uneasiness twisting itself into a knot in his chest.
“So I can’t even hang out with you once summer vacation starts,” Derek grouches, scuffing at the floor of the boiler room with the toe of his sneaker. “Grounded means no leaving the territory without my parents’ permission, except for school or emergencies. She won’t even let me stay after practice, she’s asked Laura to come pick me up.”

Kate makes a noise of sympathy, and Derek feels horribly guilty for how upset she looks about the whole thing.

“I hate the situation as much as you do, sweetie,” she sighs, with a cautious glance towards the staircase that leads up from the basement. “But I can’t see any other way around it. We’re just gonna have to stick to emails for the next couple of weeks.”

Derek’s posture droops a little. He’d been holding onto the hope that Kate would be able to come up with some sort of cunning plan that’d make it possible for the two of them to meet up, but apparently even her genius has its limitations.

“What about this Saturday?” he wheedles. “Mom and Dad are heading over to my grandparent’s house with my younger brother and sister, and Johnny’s working at the Centre this weekend. My sister’s the only one who’ll be home, and I know I can sneak out without her noticing.”

Uncle Peter will probably still be around too, but he spends a lot of his free time in the library or running in the woods, so it shouldn’t be too hard to slip away unnoticed while he’s busy. As long as Derek’s not gone for more than a few hours, he can just pretend that he went for a walk or something.

Kate strokes his cheek, a smile playing at the corner of her mouth. “Wouldn’t that be going against the will of your Alpha?”

The notion alone makes him feel sick and uneasy, but Derek shrugs, pushing those feelings aside. It’s not Kate’s fault that he got himself caught out after curfew, so he’s the one who needs to make the effort this time.

“I don’t care,” he lies. “I just wanna see you.”

The Dom’s smile widens, clearly pleased by his answer, and after another quick glance towards the staircase she pulls a pen and a notepad from her purse, writing something hurriedly.

“Meet me here at midday,” she tells him, tearing off the slip of paper and pressing it into his hand, curling his fingers around it. “The burgers are to die for. Don’t be late, okay? There’s something important I’m going to want to talk to you about.”

Then with a chaste kiss to his cheek, she’s gone, her heels clacking quietly up the stairs as she heads towards the exit. Derek glances down at the scrap of paper in his hands and grins, quickly memorising the address. He’ll worry about how to successfully sneak past his sister later on – he’s just happy to get another chance to spend time with Kate outside of school, even if the thought of
disobeying his mom unsettles him. He’s almost sixteen. He’s old enough to decide these things for himself.

Derek slows to a halt in the parking lot of Ned’s Diner, breathless from the long bike ride. The eatery seems like a decent enough place, attached to a gas station a little ways out of town, but it’s not somewhere Derek’s been before. The parking lot’s mostly empty – it’s probably a little early for the Saturday lunch-rush – but the teenager recognises Kate’s car immediately and begins glancing around for her, hands flexing nervously around the handlebars of his bike.

“Derek,” a voice calls quietly, and his head turns quickly towards the speaker, a smile lighting up his face when he sees Kate beckoning him closer.

Leaving his bike up against a rail, he follows after her eagerly, a little surprised when she leads him around the side of the diner rather than through the entrance.

“You’re early,” she accuses teasingly, pushing him up against the wall of the alleyway at the rear of the diner, safely out of sight. “I guess you managed to escape your prison without getting caught, huh?”

The teenager smiles and nods, letting the Dom press up against him. There had been a couple of times on the way over here when he’d felt like he was being followed, but there’d never been anyone there when he’d looked, so it was probably just his imagination playing tricks on him. A guilty conscious isn’t a fun burden to bear, but it’ll be worth it to go on a proper date with his Dom, like in public and everything.

“Good boy,” Kate purrs with an answering smile, and Derek forgets all about the guilt twisting in his stomach when she starts kissing him.

He’s somewhere on cloud nine when his distracted Were-senses alert him to the presence of another ‘wolf in the near vicinity, but before he can pull away from the kiss to warn Kate, he hears a very familiar and pissed-off growl coming from somewhere nearby. Derek turns his head, eyes widening when he spots his older sister standing in the entrance to the alleyway, her eyes already burning amber in a half-shift.

“I’m only going to tell you this once,” Laura growls, angry but in control. “Get the hell away from my brother.”

Kate begins to step away from him slowly, and Derek makes a noise of alarm in the back of his throat, reaching for her with one hand as he holds the other up towards his sister.

“Laura, it’s okay, Kate’s just a friend,” he insists desperately. “We weren’t doing anything-”

“Kate?” Laura echoes, surprise briefly putting a stop to her ire before her gaze hardens and her eyes bleed back to yellow. “What the hell are you playing at, Argent? You know he’s only fifteen.”
Kate regards her for a short moment, then an out-of-place sort of smile curls at her lips, her posture relaxing as she strokes a hand up Derek’s spine to cup over the back of his neck, her other hand slipping into her purse.

“Laura Hale,” she returns casually. “I see old habits die hard – you were always sticking your nose in other people’s business back in high school, too.”

“Wait.” Derek glances between them nervously, a cold sort of dread curling in his stomach. “You two know each other?”

Laura’s expression softens for a brief moment as she tears her gaze away from Kate, holding out a hand towards him. “Derek,” she calls, calm but with an underlying note of urgency. “Come over here, okay?”

Derek shifts a little from foot to foot, unsure, but the poorly-disguised look of fear on his sister’s face is enough to persuade him that something else is going on here, and he takes a hesitant step towards her.

“No, no, no; you’re staying with me, sweetheart,” Kate murmurs, her hand closing around his wrist firmly, in a grip tight enough that it would probably hurt if he were human.

Laura growls again in warning, amber eyes flashing and claws unsheathed. “Get your hands off him, bitch.”

The next few moments are a blur. Kate pulls something from her purse, and Laura lunges towards her with a fierce growl, claws extended. Derek gives a yell of alarm and wrenches himself out of Kate’s grip to intercept the tackle, knocking his sister off-balance so that her claws slash Kate across the stomach rather than knocking the human to the floor. Kate cries out in pain, the object in her hand falling to the ground at Derek’s feet, shattering on impact and immediately sending up a thick cloud of acrid, burning fumes.

The teenager coughs after the first breath, his lungs on fire, doubling over and clutching at his chest. Then a firm hand clamps over his mouth and nose, and he’s being bodily dragged away from the smoke and out of the alleyway. His eyes are streaming so badly he can barely see, but at the screech of tires he manages to focus his gaze enough to glance towards the sound, watching in shock as Kate’s car goes speeding away out of the parking lot and down the road, out of sight.

She left him. She left him.

“Derek!” Hands cradle his cheeks, and Laura’s worried face swims in front of his eyes. “Der, baby, look at me. Stay with me, okay?”

He’s on the ground. He can’t quite remember how he got there, but breathing hurts, fuck, it hurts so bad. As a Werewolf, prolonged pain isn’t something he’s intimately familiar with, and this feels like tiny shards of glass are piercing deeper into his chest cavity with every lungful of burning air.

“The cops are on their way, Ma’am,” a voice says from somewhere nearby, although it’s fuzzy and muted, like Derek’s hearing it through a thick wall. “They’re sending a Haven ambulance. The operator’s asking about his symptoms.”

Laura looks close to crying, Derek can see it in the thin set of her mouth and the bright sheen to her eyes, but her voice is impressively calm and level when she answers.

“Acute wolfsbane poisoning.” Her fingers brush Derek’s fringe back from his forehead. “Some sort of aerosolised chemical weapon. He got a good lungful of the stuff before I could pull him out of
there.”

She glances back down at him, and manages a tremulous smile, although it doesn’t reach her eyes. “It’s okay, Der,” she reassures, hand cupping over the side of his neck, leeching some of the pain from his chest. “You’re gonna be okay.”

Derek wants to believe her, but he can’t. He’s never going to be okay again.

The house is on fire.

Derek watches from the front yard as bright yellow flames lick their way along the tiled roof and wave at him from every window. He can hear his family screaming from inside, hear them banging against the walls to try and forge a means of escape, but the thick ring of mountain ash that circles the property keeps them sealed inside.

Kate strokes a hand over his hair with a playful smile, peering down at him. “I never could’ve done it without your help Derek. Good boy.”

He wakes screaming.

Hands are catching him by the shoulders almost as soon as he’s bolted upright in bed, but he fights against them for a brief moment, unable to shake the feeling of Kate’s hands on him, the image of her delighted smile branded into his mind’s eye.

“It’s okay,” a voice murmurs, and Derek stills as the words finally reach his ears. “You’re okay, baby.”

The fight goes out of him, and with a tearful whimper he lets the weight of his head drop forwards a little into his mom’s hands as the Alpha cups his face, pressing their foreheads together. A warm, strong body slips into bed behind him, his Dad’s arms circling his torso and drawing Derek back against his chest.

The bedroom door is open, Laura standing at the foot of his bed with a pinched look of worry on her face, eyes burning amber in the semi-darkness as Johnny and Adam linger in the doorway, watching him with open concern.
Derek sucks in a few hitching breaths to calm himself, pulling away from his mom to glance towards them. “Sorry,” he manages, his voice thick and shaky. “Did I wake you guys again?”

Laura’s expression softens as she climbs up onto the bed beside Talia, reaching out to gently brush a tear from Derek’s cheek.

“You don’t have to apologise, Der,” she murmurs. “We all have nightmares sometimes.”

Still, Derek can’t help but feel guilty. It’s been over a month since Kate had fled the county as a wanted fugitive, weeks since Chris Argent returned to Beacon Hills to inform the Sheriff’s department about his family’s old storage bunker, where the crates of wolfsbane-infused lighter fluid had subsequently been discovered. And in all that time, there have only been a handful of nights where Derek hasn’t been plagued by nightmares. He’s so fucking tired, and he can see that exhaustion reflected in the faces of his siblings. Not only had Derek been the one to endanger them all in the first place by falling for Kate’s act, but now he’s torturing them all by depriving them of sleep every night. Hell, his parents have even sent Cora and Nick to stay with Grammy and Gramps for the summer, things have gotten that bad.

His mom squeezes his hand gently. “Think you can go back to sleep tonight, baby?”

Derek shakes his head. He’s exhausted, but even the thought of closing his eyes again and seeing Kate’s face sends a ripple of dread through him.

“The rest of you, off to bed,” his dad tells the room quietly. “It’s late – you can talk to Derek tomorrow.” He glances at Talia with a tired smile. “You too, hon – you’ve got a meeting in the morning.”

Laura hesitates, clearly torn between her desire to stay and keep Derek company (as she had done the first couple weeks) and her body’s need for sleep. Talia makes the decision for her, pulling the younger Dom up front the bed by the hand before wrapping an arm around her shoulders.

“You can sleep with me tonight,” the Alpha murmurs. Then she reaches out to stroke a gentle hand down Derek’s face from temple to jaw. “I love you, baby.”

Derek tilts his head into the touch, eyes closing briefly. To think that he came so close to losing this, all of this, just because he allowed himself to be tricked into thinking that someone like Kate Argent might be interested in him. Gods, he’s such an idiot.

The guilt’s the worst part to live with. It sits there on his chest every day, suffocating the life out of him, squashing the happiness out of every waking moment to the point where he just wants it all to stop. It’ll be the full moon in another few days, and he knows he’ll be spending it inside again this month – with how volatile his ‘wolf has been these past few weeks, he’s too scared of hurting someone to risk running with the rest of the Pack.

“Alex.” It’s Peter, standing in the doorway with two steaming mugs. “You’re just as exhausted as the kids. Go to bed; I’ll sit with him tonight.”

His dad’s arms tighten around the teenager briefly as though in protest, but after half a beat he sighs softly, dropping a kiss against Derek’s hair.

“Is that alright with you, cub?”

The teenager nods, scooting forwards a little when Alex lets him go so that the Sub can slip out from behind him. His dad pauses on his way out the door to bump his forehead lightly against Peter’s, a hand coming up to touch the Dom’s cheek briefly in a passing caress, before he bids them both
goodnight and closes the door quietly behind him.

Peter carries the mugs over to the bed, passing one to Derek before settling himself down beside the teenager comfortably, his back against the padded headboard.

“I might’ve suggested a run instead,” he comments, taking a sip of his own hot chocolate. “But they’ve forecast a storm tonight, and your mom won’t be happy if we both got caught out in it.”

Derek cradles the warm mug between his hands, leaning into Peter’s side when his uncle settles an arm around his shoulders.

Out of all of his family members, Derek probably appreciates Peter the most at the moment. Not that the rest of the Pack haven’t been there for him every minute of every day (because by god, they have), but Peter has this aura of complete calm that the others lack. Derek loves his parents to pieces, but he’s always conscious of their guilt whenever he’s had a nightmare (both of them blame themselves for having failed to realise what was going on, which is stupid, because Derek had been the one actively hiding it from them).

Johnny, too, gets this pinched look around his eyes sometimes when he looks at Derek, like he’s trying to work out how he could’ve missed the signs – the Sub’s already apologised to him numerous times, and Derek hates that, because it’s not his brother’s fucking fault.

Laura spends her waking hours hounding the Sheriff’s department for updates about the ongoing investigation and Kate Argent’s whereabouts, and Derek’s worried she’ll decide to follow one of her own leads and get herself arrested (or killed) in the process. That vial of wolfsbane gas had been intended for his sister, after all – Derek had jumped in the way when he’d shoved at Laura to protect Kate, like the gullible idiot he was. Doctor Deaton had stayed with him those first couple of days at Haven, when his lungs felt like they were splintering apart in his chest – the man had always been a tad cryptic whenever he’d come over to the house during Derek’s youth on official Pack Emissary business, but he hadn’t sugar-coated anything this time; Derek was lucky to be alive. If the vial had struck its intended target (Laura), whose ‘wolf was nearing the end of its transitioning period and therefore more sensitive to the poison than Derek’s, she probably wouldn’t have made it.

And it would’ve been his fault.

Then there’s Adam…gods, he’s probably the worst out of all of them. His brother’s given up his future career in general medicine for Derek – he’s quit medical school to move back home to Beacon Hills permanently, taking up a Druid apprenticeship as a Healer at Haven hospital instead. Adam insists it’s his own choice, that the three days Derek had spent as an inpatient had made him rethink his previous career choice, but Derek knows differently. And the guilt he feels whenever Adam comes home in uniform is just another checkpoint on his list of ‘reasons why I hate myself’.

But Peter doesn’t fuss or fret or worry like the others do. He doesn’t try to fill the silence with cheerful chatter, or coax Derek into talking about his nightmares (he gets enough of that from his therapy sessions at the Centre), or try and force him to eat when he’s not hungry. He’s just there, a reassuring presence when Derek doesn’t feel like being on his own, a solid warmth that the teenager can lean against when he wants company without all the fussing that comes with it.

“Uncle Peter?” he asks, once his mug’s empty and the ceramic has cooled between his hands. “When are you going back to New York?”

Peter’s mouth quirks up at the corner. “That desperate to get rid of me, are you?”

Derek shakes his head, but there’s a tentative sort of half-smile tugging at his lips.
Jennifer and Theo can handle things without me for a little while,” his uncle tells him. “I haven’t taken a proper vacation in years, they owe me at least another month.”

The teenager feels a rush of relief ripple through him at the Dom’s words. It had been weighing on his mind this past week, the knowledge that eventually his uncle would need to return to work to resume his role as co-CEO of Hale Industries. He’s glad to know that the day of his departure won’t be for some time yet.

“The nightmares,” Peter says after a moment, and Derek tenses a little. “They’re getting worse, aren’t they?”

Derek rubs his thumb back and forth against the rim of his mug, leaving the question unanswered, allowing his silence to speak for itself.

“What if I told you there was a chance you could put a stop to them for good?” Peter continues quietly. “A way to isolate the memories that haunt you the most and separate them from your conscious mind until you’re ready to deal with them at a later stage in your life.”

The teenager glances up at him hesitantly. “I told Mom already, I don’t want her to link with me-”

“I know, kiddo,” Peter reassures, plucking the mug from his grip and setting it aside, before taking both of Derek’s hands in his. “But your mom isn’t the only one capable of forming a transference link…”

Stiles sucks in a sharp breath, head jerking up as his immobile body startles at the unnerving sensation of being thrust back into a being of flesh and bone after spending what feels like half a lifetime linked with Derek. But already those heart-breaking memories are fading, scents and sights and sounds that had been so vivid only seconds ago now little more than vague recollections.

He shakes his head, flexing his fingers and toes to relieve the cramping in his limbs, and turns a little to glance up at Derek. Seeing the open grief and guilt in his Dom’s face, he turns fully to throw his arms around the Alpha’s neck.

“You’re not to blame for any of this, you hear me?” he murmurs, kissing the Dom’s throat. “It wasn’t your fault eleven years ago, and it sure as hell isn’t now. You were just a kid, babe; you couldn’t have known what kind of a person she really was.”

Derek’s arms come around him, squeezing him tightly. “I shouldn’t have kept it a secret from you for
so long. I came to terms with what happened a long, long time ago, but…God, Stiles, she wasn’t ever supposed to come back.”

“I know.” Stiles combs his fingers through the Dom’s thick hair, pressing soft little kisses along his jawline from ear to chin, then up to his mouth. “I’m so sorry for everything she did to you. But it’s over now, Der; she’s in police custody, and if my dad has his way, she’ll probably be transferred to the nearest max-security prison by tomorrow morning.”

The Alpha breathes a shaky sigh against Stiles’ lips, tilting his head to press their brows together as he closes his eyes. The Sub strokes his thumb against the rough shadow of stubble on Derek’s unshaven cheek.

“You’re exhausted,” he murmurs. “Lay down with me for a little while, okay? Life always seems a helluva less shitty after a powernap.”

He shifts back on his knees, taking one of Derek’s hands between his own and tugging gently. The Alpha hesitates, glancing through the willow-leaf curtain that shelters them towards the wooded area of The Garden, and the exit that lies beyond it.

“I…I should go and check on the cubs,” he protests softly. “Jackson’s still recovering, and Liam-”

“…is in good hands,” Stiles reassures him calmly, tugging on the Dom’s hand again as he lays back on the soft grass. “They both are, Derek. Your Pack won’t let anything happen to them. They’ll be okay for an hour or two, you know that.”

Derek lets himself be pulled down alongside the Sub, rolling onto his side and wrapping an arm snugly around Stiles as soon as he’s settled. More than happy to be the little spoon after all the stress and grief of the past few days, Stiles hugs the arm to his chest with a contented hum, lips curling up into a tired smile when he feels a soft kiss pressed against the crown of his head.

Silence lingers between them for a short while, the soothing sounds of nature around them growing louder in the absence of conversation, and Stiles finds that the hiss of the waterfall and the trickle of the stream that snakes out from the plunge-pool begin to lull him to sleep better than any sedative. In the dimmed lighting, with the warm fake-breeze making the willow-leaf curtain sway gently back and forth, it’s easy to forget that they’re indoors – it’s so utterly serene here, and cradled in his Dom’s arms, all the pain and fear and sadness seem to wither away into nothingness.

His whispered ‘I love you’ goes unanswered, but only because Derek’s body has gone lax behind him, the Alpha having finally succumbed to his exhaustion and drifted off into a peaceful slumber.

With a fond smile, Stiles readily follows suit.

Chapter End Notes

You made it! Well done. It was probably the squickiest chapter for me to write, because romance is something I really enjoy putting into words, and portraying Kate’s systematic hunting of Derek was just...*shudders*. Ew. But she's in jail, huzzah! Let's hope she
rots.

I promise that's the last of the heavy angst out of the way with! Fluff and cuddles and Pack-bonding from here on out. For those who requested it many, many, MANY moons ago, the fic about Jackson and Danny's relationship (from high school friendship to college roommates to bonded partners) is now officially in the works, and it'll continue on Jackson's story as a newly-bitten Beta, so don't worry if there isn't a lot about him in this fic because he's getting his own. :D

Let me know what you thought of the chapter! Thanks for reading. <3 xxxx

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!