Tape, Glue, and Sutures: Or How To Mend a Fractured Pack

by augopher
Summary

It all started with a missing person case, and became something greater. AKA how two packs became one, and ultimately became a family. Derek and Scott chose to consolidate their packs, but the cohesiveness of the unit is tenuous at best, and fractured at worst. Unwilling to work together, each alpha maintains some control over half the pack with poor results.

Werewolves and other supernatural creatures are disappearing throughout the county and California as a whole. It's up to the BHP (Or Beacon Hills Pack) to save the day, but can they do it before it's too late?

Takes place almost a year after end of 3A. Canon Divergence in which season 3B never happened, and some aspects of 3A have been changed. Derek did not lose Alpha status to save Cora. The Sacrifice at the Nemeton did not leave Scott, Allison, and Stiles with a darkness around their hearts (Because I just can't bear to do that to Stiles). Jackson never went to London (He's just too good of a foil to Stiles) and Danny knows all about the supernatural.

Notes

I decided to go against the popular belief that Stiles' first name is Polish (And is Genim-because that just doesn't look hard enough to pronounce). I guess everyone thinks this because his last name is Stilinski. However, since we do not know what Claudia's maiden name was, I went with my own ideas.

The relationship between Stiles and Derek in this piece will not be romantic or sexual in nature. I chose to go the route of a close male/male friendship. I tried to imply that Derek sees Stiles as his anchor, simply because he trusts him implicitly. He sees him in this piece as his only confidant and only friend. So if you were hoping for STEREK, please don't pass the work by just because they are not in a romantic relationship. I have tried to build them some really beautiful scenes together.

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Disclaimer: I do not own Teen Wolf. All characters aside from OC's are the property of Teen Wolf producers and creator.

This is my first fanfiction, so be kind if characters are a little OOC. Work is unbeta'd, and all mistakes are my own.

For the sake of this universe, I have chose to locate Beacon Hills near Paradise, CA and adjacent to Chico, CA.
Howling winds swirled along the empty road like a convection oven. On a back county route at night, well, deserted was to be expected. Route Nine near Beacon Hills had a reputation for being the kind of road few drove on unless they had to. If a full moon didn't stare down on the winding road, which ran through thick woods, it could be difficult to see the road ahead. First responders quit keeping tallies of nighttime accidents involving wildlife a long time ago.

Tonight, the only illumination came from a lonely yellow car which sat ready and waiting for its owner to return, the driver door left ajar. Despite the sound of the strong breeze, the night air was unusually free of sounds. On nights like this one, not even crickets chirped.

When the Beacon County Sheriff's office received a call of a possible motor accident near mile marker 45, most officers expected to find yet another dead deer and mangled automobile. So when Sheriff Stilinski came upon said vehicle, he was surprised to find not only no animal carcass, but no damage to the vehicle. He looked ahead, down the road to find a large tree branch blocking the Northbound lane and partially obscuring the Southbound one.

However, what he did find made him rub his temples in exasperation. "God, I hate the night shift." Why did everything bad happen on the graveyard shift? Oh that's right. Nothing good ever happened after one a.m..

"Hello! Sheriff's Department. Are you okay? Do you need help? Hello?" He waited a minute or two for a response. When he found none, he made a quick search in the area surrounding the car for signs of the owner. So he returned his attention to the car, which looked to be filled with as many possession as would fit. Several moving boxes marked clothes, dishes, books and the like sat in the back seat. On the passenger seat lie a small handbag. From it, he removed the wallet, and took the registration from the glove box.

When he walked back around to the driver's side, he noticed one shoe on the ground as well as a can of pepper spray. The seat belt had been sliced through. By his foot, a piece of jewelry glinted in the beam of his flashlight. He stooped to pick it up. Suddenly, he heard whimpering, and a German Shepherd came running up, barking emphatically. "What's the matter, huh?" He checked the dog's tags. "Where's your owner, Titan? Where is she, buddy?"

Titan ran to the edge of the woods on the opposite side of the street, barking at the tree line.

He reached for his radio. "Come in dispatch, this is Stilinski. We need a unit out on RTE 9. I have an abandoned vehicle with suspicious circs. Nevada plates Alfa Foxtrot Lima-113. Registration has vehicle as a yellow 1970 Chevy Chevelle SS convertible. Owner and driver of vehicle is a Cambia Di Pellicce, D.O.B 12/15/90, 5'11", 155 lbs, black hair, green eyes.

"The car is on with keys in the ignition. Signs of a struggle include one shoe, pepper spray and a necklace with a broken chain. It looks as if she was taken from the car when she stopped for debris in the road. Put out an APB, and send Parrish. I have the owner's very worried, German Shepherd. He has experience with the K9 unit. Over."

"Roger that Sheriff. Hang tight. Over."
He walked to the trunk of the car and took out a leash, clipping it to Titan's collar. "We'll find her buddy." He looked up at the night sky, unsure if he was relieved or worried to find a new moon. On the one hand, it meant no werewolf attack, but on the other hand, it meant he had an actual human suspect out there who snatched a young woman from her car.

Sometimes, he really hated this town.
In So Deep I'm Thinking 'Why Did I Start?'

Chapter title comes from Redlight King's "Something For the Pain"
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=643xp2IzfFY

Some days you get the feelin'
Of hittin' the concrete
Get the strain out of your life,

7 Months Later

The dead leaves crunched beneath Derek's feet as he ran. Though colder than average, the weather didn't bother him any. It was a beautiful morning, despite the few snowflakes, and he had nowhere to be today. It was a perfect day for a run, especially when he was in as foul of a mood as the one in which he awoke.

What as so special about today? Absolutely nothing. Today had just decided to suck a bag of dicks from the get-go. He woke up in a shitty mood, and it had just compounded from there. Today? Well today was, as Stiles described them, one of his black days, the kind of days that always threatened to derail him.

Music sounded through his headphones. Normally, he chose to take in the sounds of nature when he went for a run, but damn, if he didn't want to drown out the world for an hour or two. Anything that would help him forget how disgustingly lonely he felt was worth the effort on days like today.

What was I thinking choosing a bunch of moody teenagers for pack mates?

Derek and Scott decided to combine their packs to form one large Beacon Hills pack. Given how prone they all were to working with each other, whenever the next "Big Bad" came to town, it just made sense. That did not mean, however, that they were a close pack.

No, their relations resembled a loose alliance, which only seemed to be held together by the most tenuous of threats. After the debacle now referred to as Christmas Gate 2013, both alphas determined that having even numbers for each half of the pack would work best. Since there were ten of them, it made sense for each side to have five people, with at least one human per half (To keep their strengths even). That meant someone was getting screwed, and unfortunately, that meant Stiles. Derek would have been lying if he'd said it didn't hurt to witness the moment the poor kid's heart figuratively ripped in two when his best friend of thirteen years chose everyone over him. As it stood, Stiles had scarcely spoken to Scott since, which presented a problem, given they lived in the same house since the Sheriff and Ms. McCall took their relationship to the next level.

Derek realized that he just didn't care about the problems Scott's pack had to deal with, if problems even remotely came close to describing the petty issues they seemed to hold in high regard. He did not care about their power struggles (Lydia), daddy issues (Allison), or unreasonably high, self-imposed expectations (Jackson). It's not that he didn't have a heart. When they lived in a town as
screwed up as Beacon Hills, which apparently seemed to be the number one vacation destination and retirement location for Supernatural Creatures, they often had bigger things to worry about. Not that, as a werewolf, he had room to talk.

Though in the last year, the "special creature" activity had been, knock on wood, mercifully quiet in the area. It's just, well, he had more delicate situations to handle like a beta with nightmares due to childhood abuse (Isaac), rejection caused by a friend's betrayal (Stiles), and a conniving pathological liar for an uncle. Though, in all honesty, he hadn't seen his uncle since Christmas, and he couldn't say he missed him all that much. However, with his sister starting classes at San Diego State this semester, he had felt more alone than normal, and dealing with the petty teenage issues of the rest of his pack just made his head spin.

Thank God for Stiles' constant ramblings about anything and everything. Derek didn't mind though. Some days, those ridiculous tangents were the only things keeping him from having a complete breakdown, the kind that only trashy television and a blanket nest would fix. As it stood, and he wasn't sure how it happened, but the guy was the only person Derek actually trusted. The two had become close friends, with the teen feeling more like a younger brother to him, which was fantastic given the major elephant in the room that no one else in the pack seemed to notice: Derek's serious mental health issues. A hundred foot pole couldn't even begun to touch that mess. Whatever, he was a grown ass man. He had a therapist; he was dealing with it.

When he found himself in the middle of the preserve, the air suddenly, vibrated around him. He stopped and turned off his music. Once he removed his headphones, he heard the culprit: Gunshots. He ducked behind a tree. *Again? You've got to be kidding me.* He thought about shifting into his wolf form, but waited to get a better sense of the danger. For all he knew it was animal control trying to take down a rabid animal, and the last thing he needed was someone seeing him in his wolf form. However, when he heard a woman shriek and run past him, he realized there was a clear danger. Not to him, but he felt compelled to intervene on her behalf to protect her.

He ran after her. "Wait, I can help you!" The closer he got to her, the more the alpha in him grew angry, not because she wouldn't stop and listen. No, he found himself furious at her condition. The temperature was barely above freezing; there she was naked, dirty, and barefoot, her dark hair matted. Dried blood and bruises glared at him from all over her body. She had angry red marks around her ankles and had clearly been bound, wherever she'd been held. He couldn't seem to catch her, no matter how fast he ran. *Another werewolf? Why would she run instead of fight?* It was then that he worried the shooters were hunters like the Argents, and using Wolfsbane bullets. He did not want to go through that again.

"Please wait! I swear I just want to help!" He continued to chase her for several miles, where he finally lost her. Feeling pretty good that she got away at least, he turned to get the hell out of the park before he became a target. When he turned around, he found himself face to face with the most beautiful deer he'd ever seen.

The melanistic doe stared right at him instead of fleeing from him the way all other animals did. Survival instincts told them to run from predators, and werewolves were definitely predators. Worried about its safety with the shooters nearby, he took a step forward trying to shoo the deer away. She only moved closer. *What in the hell? "Get out of here. It's not safe. There are hunters. Do you want to get shot"*

She stared at him, with eyes he swore were green. He'd never seen that. Deer had black or dark
brown eyes, not green. Before he could take another step, another shot echoed around him. He
turned in the direction of the shot, and when he turned back, the deer was gone.

After another shot, far too close for his liking, he did not want to take his chances further. He copied
the deer, running all the way back to his loft.
"Wait, so you're saying you chased some naked chick through the park, somehow managed to lose her, and you didn't even get her phone number." Isaac crossed his arms, a smug grin plastered across his face.

"I wasn't trying to flirt with her; I was trying to help. Someone was shooting at her."

"But stopped looking for her because of a deer? I think you're losing it, Derek. You seriously need to get laid. Hey Scott, is death by blue balls a legitimate cause of death?"

Scott threw him a look which said 'Why the hell should I know?'

"This was different. She wasn't afraid of me." He paid the cashier for his meal, grabbing the sack of leftovers from the counter. "She stared right at me."

Scott furrowed his brow. "The naked woman?"

"No, you idiot. The deer." He rolled his eyes. Why did he agree to Scott coming along to his and Isaac's dinner?

"How do you know it was a female?"

"No antlers. Seriously, how did you make it this far in school?"

"Stiles."

"And where is the pack librarian tonight?" Isaac asked.

Derek laughed. "Busy. I tried to get him to come out for dinner, but he's sitting in the middle of his bedroom floor surrounded by some school project. I don't actually think he heard me ask. He sure as hell didn't see me in the doorway."

"That's okay. I bought enough for him. Both John and Mom work late tonight. Anyway, Stiles said he'd make it for the pack meeting tomorrow. Though he didn't seem all that happy when I asked him about it this morning."

_Gee McCall, I wonder why_ - Derek mused.

They walked out to their cars where the temperature had dropped just enough so Derek could see his breath. "I'll see you tomorrow, Scott."

"I'm going to the gym. I'll see you when I get home, Derek."

"Be safe, kid. I ordered a slice of cheesecake for you, but you know me. Try not to blame me if I have no will power and eat it. I'll pick one up at the store tomorrow if I do." Derek waived to the two teens as Scott climbed into his car and drove off. Isaac walked in the other direction to his car and did the same. "What in the hell?" He scowled at the cat sleeping on the hood of his car. "Get off of there! Shoo!" The cat didn't move. He shook it carefully. "Tell me you didn't die on my car." He listened for a heartbeat. It had one, but it was thready.
He grabbed an empty box from a nearby dumpster. Gingerly, he scooped the animal up and placed it in the box. When he pulled his hand away, he found it covered in blood. The hood of his car, was also bloody. "Great. Just great."

A soft meow escaped from the cat's mouth, and it turned its head towards him, brilliant green eyes boring into his soul. He hated cats with a passion, and yet, here he was actually pitying it. "I'll get you patched up, okay?" He placed his hand on the animal and felt some of its pain pulling into his own body, flooding his veins. He winced.

With the wounded cat in his backseat, he drove to the animal clinic.

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Deaton had just flipped the sign on the door to closed when Derek pulled his car to a stop outside the clinic. He hadn't even had time to lock the door. "We're closed."

"Sure you are."

Did no one in this town know how to read? Yes, investing in a neon OPEN sign might be in order. "To what do I owe the pleasure, Derek?"

He gestured with the box. "I found this cat passed out on the hood of my car. She's injured, and I couldn't just leave her to die. Look, I am a lot of things, but cruel is not one of them. You're the only animal clinic in town, and this might actually be a potentially fatal injury."

Deaton called him back into the exam room. "Hey there. I'm not going to hurt you." He took the animal from the box and lay it on the table. "What happened to you?"

"Yeah, I'm just going to go." Derek pointed to the door.

"Don't you want to stay?"

"It's not my cat. I hate cats, and they hate me. Work your magic." Derek said nothing more, turned and left, but not before he heard Deaton exclaim that the cat had been shot. Who would shoot a defenseless animal for apparently no reason? Ugh, he had little sympathy for those that abused animals... or children. He wondered, albeit briefly, if she'd been near the reserve when he'd heard gunshots earlier, but he dismissed that thought almost as quickly.
Stiles bounded down the stairs and into the kitchen. He'd been staring at his homework assignment for Mr. Harris 2.0, also known as Mr. Stevens, for three miserable hours, and he was still only half finished. If he looked at it any longer, he honestly believed his eyeballs would start bleeding. Fucking cellular respiration, Kreb's cycle, and redox reactions would haunt his dreams tonight.

"Surrender, Stiles. You can't escape NADH Ned!"
"Never! You may oxidize my acetate but you'll never take my freedom!"
"If I can't get you to talk, maybe the Ketoglutarate Kid can loosen your tongue!"
"Save me Oxaloacetate Man!"

He chuckled at his private joke before he grabbed a can of soda from the fridge and popped the tab.

"Are you sure you need caffeine at ten o'clock at night?"

Startled half to death, Stiles looked down at his shirt, now covered in soda. "Really? Really, Dad? Were you trying to kill me? I think I just aged ten years. I pretty sure too many terror induced minor heart attacks add up to a major one. I'm going to need bypass by twenty-one at this rate."

"Scott asleep?"

He cast his father a look that said, 'like I care' before answering him. "The jerk is lucky he isn't taking
AP Biology." Stiles sighed. "So when does Melissa get home?" Melissa and his father had been dating for almost a year and a half, and his father had popped the question on New Year's Eve. They, Scott and Melissa, moved in at the beginning of the school year, and while, admittedly, Stiles thought Scott living with them would be awesome, he soon found that he rarely saw him. The kid was almost always over at Allison's house. Now that he'd been sent to the dark side of the pack belonging to Eyebrows of Doom (Derek, in case anyone wondered, which he doubted), he wasn't even sure if they were best friends anymore, and in all honesty, that totally blew, blew like a blown save. Here they were, practically brothers for real, and Stiles could apparently be traded around like a human commodity between the pack. Oh God, that sounded like a bad metaphor for human trafficking. Real smooth Stilinski, you heartless jackass.

"She has the graveyard shift." He glanced up to see Stiles' eyes laced with pain. "Son, something you want to talk about?"

"What? You mean like Scott, who is damn near your step-son, casting me aside for Jackson and Danny? Danny I get. Everyone likes Danny, but Jackson Douchcanoe Whittemore? That's...well there is something...it sucks, Dad. I have no other way to say it. I always wanted a sibling, and now that I thought...he just...suddenly I'm just not good enough, and I don't understand it."

"Is that why you've been spending more time with Derek?"

"Yes, and well no. If I want to stay part of the pack, which I do, because let's face it, it's not like I have any friends outside it anymore, then I probably should keep the friends I have. Hell, Isaac and I are even getting along, but Derek, he's actually a good guy behind that 'I hate the world' exterior."

"Does Scott know how you feel?"

"Probably not, you know how oblivious he can be sometimes, but it's not like I haven't tried. First I texted him, then it was a voice-mail, then a strongly worded email with a hard copy. Did I mention I made a PowerPoint and a video address? I get the same, "Maybe later, Stiles," each time, but here's the kicker. There never is a later. I don't get it, Dad. Am I like friend Kryptonite or something?" He threw up his hands. "You know what, it doesn't matter. I'll deal with it." He ran his hands through his hair before walking over to the sofa, where his dad sat staring at several case files. Stiles sat down in the recliner and tried to peek at the papers. "So, uh, whatcha working on?" Slyly, he stretched his fingers across the coffee table to pull a file closer to him. Sheriff Stilinski snatched the manilla folder back from his son. "Give me that. You know you aren't supposed to be looking at these."

"Never stopped me before." He winced at his father's disapproving eye roll. "What are they? More murders? Break ins? Come on, Dad. You practically work yourself to death, and let's face it, it's not like the force has enough staff to solve any of these. Maybe they need fresh eyes."

He turned to him and held up a warning index finger. "Fine you can help, but no one hears about it. Understand?"

"Absolutely, of course. Who would I tell anyway?"

He quirked an eyebrow at him. "I can think of at least two people you'd tell."

Stiles fought the urge to roll his eyes. "So what are we looking at?"
"These," he gestured to the spread before him on the table, "are all missing person cases in the county for the last year."

His eyes grew wide in his head as he tried to estimate the number of folders on the table. "Dad, that's like eighty cases! At this rate, there will be no one left in the county in like..." He looked up, clearly concentrating hard on the math. "Three years. Okay so maybe that was a bit of an exaggeration."

"Fifty-three, but yeah. It's a lot."

"Any stick out as wolfy?" He grinned.

"No, there are a lot of runaways and voluntary missing in this pile. As I'm sure you can imagine, it's a lot harder to find people who don't want to be found. But these six in the blue folders, these are all suspicious circumstances or abductions." One by one, John opened the files on the table. "This is a thirty-five year old mother of three who didn't come home from work four months ago. The biggest suspect is still her ex-husband. Then there is a forty-seven year old investment banker. His firm took a heavy loss on the day he disappeared. This woman here, a twenty-one year old bank teller, taken from the bank parking lot after her shift. Security footage has her being forced into a van with no plates. We looked into all possible leads and found nothing. We have a tip-line, but haven't heard anything in months." He hesitated to open the next one.

"Dad?"

"This one, I keep looking into often. Something just feels wrong about the whole thing."

Stiles pulled the file from his hands. "That's what I'm talking about. See, it's been over a year, and nothing even remotely supernatural has happened. It's like waiting for the other shoe to drop. Who comes up with idioms? Other shoe, really?" He opened the folder. "Wow! I mean seriously, Dad. She's like, wow, super hot. 5'11"; talk about statuesque." He took another look at the picture. "I would so climb that tree."

His father cleared his throat.

"And I mean that in a totally tragic, missing person kind of way, but wow, gorgeous. Except it looks like she would break me in half, which might put a damper on any sort of relationship."

"Focus son."

"Right totally, no talking suggestively about missing people."

"About seven months ago, we received a call about a possible disabled vehicle out on route nine. It was after one in the morning, and Parrish was out on a domestic disturbance call. So I went out to check it out. When I got there, everything about it screamed abduction. Can of mace on the ground, one shoe, a necklace that looked like it had been yanked from her neck."

Stiles looked at the crime scene photo. "That's a cornicello pendant."

"What?"

"Italian horn. It's a traditional Italian jewelry worn to protect from the 'evil eye.' It's like wearing a rabbit's foot or something."
"How do you know that?"

"Uh Dad?" He pointed to his head. "ADHD, you would not believe the stuff I end up reading when I get side tracked and get lost in the rabbit hole known as the internet. One time, I was researching the Nuremberg Trials for school, but one of the articles had this little ad on the bottom about the history of ketchup. Well I was hungry. So, of course, I had to click on it, and then I got sidetracked by a blog link about how to make your food last longer in the fridge. Let me tell you, that was totally a waste of time, because a) food never lasts that long in our house, and b) totally common knowledge. I don't remember clicking on a link about handicrafts, but I can tell you though I've never tried it, I am fairly certain I can cross-stitch us a sampler saying 'Bless this Mess' if you'd like."

His father groaned and rubbed his temples. "Stiles what does that have to do with her necklace?"

He threw up his hands. "Nothing, it was to paint a vibrant picture of how tangential my mind is. Sometimes I don't know how I manage to leave the house with two shoes on, because after I get the first one on, I decide to do something else before I put on the other. Last week, I made toast with one sock on, because I remembered I was hungry. Right, so anyway, long story short, three hours and many diverse subjects later, I ended up reading about the history of good luck charms. Some of them are plain bizarre, Dad."

"How's this for strange? Her necklace mysteriously vanished from the evidence locker less than a month after she went missing. It's not like it was all that expensive. Fourteen karat gold on a simple chain. It couldn't have been worth more than a hundred dollars. Now knowing it supposedly protects the wearer from the evil eye or whatever, just adds to the strangeness of the case."

He continued reading. "She's from Nevada? What was she doing on RTE 9?"

"Moving to Seattle, and taking it to Interstate 5."

"Seattle? Why, why Dad? It rains like 150 days a year there. So depressing."

"They're called jobs. Adults usually need them to earn a living. She was supposed to start a new job two weeks after she went missing."

"So why does this one stick with you? Other than she is a knockout." He took another look at the the photos in the file. "Wow. I'd have a hard time forgetting her face too."

"Because this was twenty-three year old woman with no living family. She decided she needed a fresh start in a new city. Her old boss said she used to be warm and funny, but something happened about eighteen months ago and she became feisty and short-tempered. He said she didn't seem have a lot of friends."

"How do you know she didn't just runaway?"

"Without her purse, phone, left shoe...or dog? Leaving the car running? Does that sound like running away? Stiles, from what our officers found in research, this young woman had years MMA training specializing in Krav Maga. She should have been able to fight back, and she didn't even have time to use her mace. She's gone. I don't know, I just feel like if I don't keep looking into it, no one will, because there is no one to miss her besides her very loyal German Shepherd who is being fostered by Deputy Parrish. That's just not right, son."

"Just gone, eh? Anything feel especially crazy to you?"
"Crazier than werewolves, human sacrificing druids, and puppet lizard peo-"

"Kanimas."

"I don't know. I just have a feeling." Strong instincts and intuition were what made him a good officer.

"Well let me ask Derek if he knows of werewolf line with that last name. Or maybe I could get one of the pack to scent something of hers. If it would help."

"We tried bloodhounds, her own dog, and got nowhere. But sure if you want to research on your own, go right ahead." He looked at his watch. "Now bed. You have school tomorrow."

"Night Dad." He stood up and headed up the stairs.

"And Stiles-"

His son turned around to look at him and tripped up three stairs. He tried to brush it off as nothing. "Yeah?"

"Don't stay up 'till three in the morning looking around on the internet for 'clues' like you did last time. Go to bed."

Once he was ready for bed, he turned off his light and crawled into bed, turning away from the door. Stiles pulled out his phone and used it instead. He just couldn't help himself sometimes. Thank God for Wi-Fi. Little did he know, Scott had heard every word Stiles said.
Derek's phone buzzed on his nightstand. "Too early," he grumbled into his pillow. When it stopped ringing, he breathed a sigh of relief. He'd managed to just fall back asleep when it rang again. Stupid werewolf hearing. "Leave me alone." Three more missed calls later it rang again. *It better not be Deaton calling again about that cat.* Honestly, Derek did not care in the slightest if people had some ridiculous prejudice against black cats. He had a prejudice against all cats, black or not. Maybe it had something to do with the old dogs and cats hate each other adage, or more likely the fact that they all seemed to hate him and harbored a desire to maul him. Yeah, it was probably the latter.

Seriously though, how many times did he have to say no? It was like that one time in New York when he and Laura subscribed to the Times and cancelled their subscription once their deal was up. He swore he received a call almost daily about resubscribing. Feeling a bit wistful at his little trip down memory lane, he rolled over and stared at the ceiling. "You have no idea how much I miss you, Laura." He fumbled for the infernal device. "For the last time, Doc, I don't want a cat. There has got to be someone in this damn town that will adopt a black cat."

"Cat? Why would he think you want a pet cat?"

"Damn it, Stiles. Why are you calling me this early? It better be an emergency."

"Um."

"It isn't, is it?"

"No, not exactly."

He sat up, rubbing the sleep out his eyes. "Get to the point."

"Can you meet me and Scott at the station in like an hour?"

"I swear to God, Stiles, if this is a ploy to get me arrested again, I'm going to-"

"Rip my throat out with your teeth. Yeah I get it, and no this is totally not that."

"I was going to say, make you train wearing a weighted vest this week. Why do you always think I want to kill you?"

"Um, because you've threatened it enough times. I could use your expertise."

"No."

"Please."
He could practically see the puppy dog eyes Stiles was most likely giving him on the other end of the line.

"It would help my dad. I promise it's an interesting case, and though he didn't explicitly say so, this has supernatural written all over it. Let's be honest, it's been too long since something attacked Beacon Hills. I mean, like just a year ago, it was something new every damn day it felt like. That reminds me, we should have a pack outing of some kind soon. I don't mean a training session. Oh God no. I mean something fun, but without those stupid trust building exercises. I never liked those. They just-

"Stiles, if I say yes, will you fucking stop talking?"

"Absolutely."

"Fine, I'll be there at eight. You owe me coffee, a really big one."

"Large, hazelnut syrup, whip cream, and like a cup of sugar. You got it big guy."

"I don't even want to think about how you know that."

"You're my alpha and my friend. It's my job to know that."

"Fine." He hung up the phone. His muscles ached, and he felt sure, for the three hours of sleep he managed to get, he'd slept in a weird position.

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When Derek climbed into his car, movement out of the corner of his eye caught his attention. He turned to see a black cat sitting on the fence. He opened his door. "Go on. There's no food here." A familiar scent wafted in his direction. "Damn it, Deaton." The man had dropped the cat off practically on his doorstep. That was just too presumptuous.

The phone at the animal clinic rang three times before the vet answered. "Beacon Hills Animal Clinic."

"I told you I didn't want the cat."

"Good Morning to you too, Mr. Hale. Don't worry about the cat. I was able to find it a home."

"Then why is it perched on my fence staring at me like it expects a meal?"

"You sure it's the same one?"

He pinched the bridge of his nose. "Who do you think you're talking to? It's the same cat. Smells the same as the one I brought to you, only in less pain."

"Well she must have got loose. Drop her off at the shelter, and I will call the family to come and collect."
Scooping it up with one hand he sat it on the passenger seat. "How did it find my house Deaton?"

The line went dead.

He started his Camaro, and the engine purred to life. "You better not scratch up the leather, Molly."

*I'm talking to a cat like it's a child, and I named it. What. the. hell?"

"Meow."

As he pulled away, he expected the cat to freak out; she didn't, simply stared at him with expressive green eyes the entire ride to the animal shelter. It unnerved him. God he hated cats. By the time he arrived at the station, it was almost nine.

"Dude, you're late." Scott chided.

Derek scowled at him. "Do I look like a stoned, White Russian drinking bowler in a bathrobe?"

"Um, no."

"Then don't call me dude."

Stiles couldn't help his giggle. "Der, your coffee is probably cold by now."

"Don't care." He snatched the cup from him, downing half of it in one gulp, before grabbing the sugar canister near the coffee pot and dumping more into the glass.

"Your insulin levels should probably worry me, Derek."

He glanced over to Scott, with a look of disgust plastered across his face. "What?"

"You reek."

"You know, I don't recall insulting you this morning, McCall. Don't let your alpha-dom go to your head."

"I mean..."

Wanting to send daggers at Scott, Stiles refrained but felt the need to intervene. "Derek, why are you covered in cat hair?"

"Don't even ask."

He winked. "Late night with the crazy cat lady, eh." He punched him playfully in the shoulder.

"Yeah, no. So what is it you needed my expertise with?" He needed to get them back on track.

Stiles gestured to his father's office. "This way." He shut the door behind the three of them.

"Sheriff." Derek nodded in greeting.

"My son seems to think you'll be able to help." Sheriff Stilinski handed him the case file.
Derek looked over at Stiles. Stiles bounced on his toes in anticipation, a stupid goofy grin plastered on his face. He was practically giddy. The alpha quirked an eyebrow. "What is wrong with him?"

"I ask myself that every day."

He opened the folder and figured out immediately what had the teen so excited. "You think she's hot don't you?"

"What, no, not even a little bit. How'd you come up with that conclus--."

Derek held up a hand to silence what would surely be a long rambling mess from the hyper teen. "You mean aside from the fact that she is pretty hot? I can smell it." He chuckled as he watched Stiles' face turned bright red. "How can I help?"

"Anything about the scene look like it might be a werewolf or some other creature I don't even know about?"

"What makes you think it is?"

The man opened his mouth to speak, but his son spoke instead. "Research showed she knew Krav Maga. They were still able to get take her, before she could even use her mace."

"What is Krav Maga? Is that like ballet or something?"

"Scott, seriously, how do you manage your day to day life with that head of yours? It's a martial art developed for the Israeli military. It's basically like street fighting on steroids, massive amounts of steroids, giant needles worth of roid-rage inducing steroids."

"I ever tell you talk too much, Stiles?" Derek asked without looking up from the file. He continued to read in silence, trying to tune out everyone else. "Any damage to the car? Door ripped off, dented, anything like that?"

"None. I'm the one who found the car. Her car is in great condition. Those would have stood out. Something just feels off."

He nodded. "May I?" He gestured to the box of evidence on the desk. The Sheriff handed him a pair of gloves. The first thing that caught his eye was a well-loved American Girl doll with blonde hair and freckles.

"Why does she have a doll?" Scott scrunched his eyebrows together.

"Maybe it was hers when she was younger. I remember Heather had one of those when we were kids." Stiles voice caught in his throat as he remembered his departed friend. "Oh, I just made myself sad there."

As he perused the box further, Derek pulled out a framed picture, studying it carefully. He found the missing woman in the large group of people. She stood in the back row surrounded by friends or extended family, he couldn't be sure. The photo contained a mix of adults, teens, and children. Whatever the relation was, they were all very close. His eyes stared for a long while at the middle aged woman standing in the center of the photo, flanked by everyone else. This was a position of power. Family matriarch?
"We tried to find out who any of those people are, but came up empty. There is nothing in any of her belongings to identify any of them."

He went back to the case file. "She lives in Incline Village, NV?"

"Did, but she was moving to Seattle."

He read over her details some more, noticing her name, and no one said his college major would ever come to any use outside academia. He closed the file and handed it back to the Sheriff.

"So? Anything?"

He didn't feel like revealing more than necessary. "It's not a normal abduction."

"So we are right? It's something weird." Stiles beamed. "Witches? Sirens? Please tell me it is sirens, because I would totally follow her into the water if she was one."

"Stiles, stop talking." His dad pinched the bridge of his nose and groaned.

He mimed zipping his lips.

"Nope." Derek looked back and forth between the three of them. "Seriously? None of you noticed?"

"Noticed what?"

"Her name."

"What about it?"

God Scott, for all his morality, could really be thick. "In Italian Cambia di Pellicce literally means changes of fur. Kind of strange don't you think?"

Scott furrowed his brows. "Wait. You know Italian? I should know that. Why didn't I know that?"

Stiles raised his hands a little. "I knew. He majored in it in college. Working towards an education master's degree."

"You're in grad school?"

"Yes."

"Since when?"

"Since August. What you don't know about me, Scott, could fill volumes. I like it that way. It keeps things mysterious. So you have a missing woman whose name implies she can shift, and you have a picture of her with a large group of unrelated people, which looks conspicuously like a werewolf pack, a big and powerful one at that. There are like twenty people in that pack. If I'm right, that would take an alpha with a hell of a lot of power to hold together. My guess," he tapped his finger on the face of the woman in the middle of the photo, "this is her."

"I thought alphas were males." John tried his best to wrap his head around the whole werewolf hierarchy thing. He really did, but sometimes he just felt lost.
"No, my mother was alpha of our pack. The Reno-Tahoe area has a lot of people, so I would not be surprised for it to have a large pack or several. Either they kicked her out or it's something sinister."

"Maybe she left on her own."

"No werewolf would leave a pack that strong in numbers by choice. I know I wouldn't. One that size is almost untouch..." Suddenly a light bulb clicked in his head. He looked at the face of the woman in the middle of the picture as well as the man next to her. A feeling of déjà vu washed over him.

"What? What is it?"

"I know her. The Alpha, I think and her mate. This guy. I remember seeing them with my mother once. Um..." *Think Derek, think.* "I seem to remember her name was Ta...something. It was an unusual name."

"Talia?" Scott asked, earning him a scowl from Derek.

"I think I would remember if her name was Talia, seeing as that was also my mother's name. Remember?" *God Scott, you are so thick sometimes.* He looked over at Stiles, who was trying his hardest not to laugh. "His name, however, was Charlie."

Stiles handed him a bag containing a royal blue athletic jacket with faded yellow writing, so much so that only a few letters remained.

"We don't know what that means, Mhtmdi" The Sheriff informed Derek upon seeing his confused expression. "I tried looking it up. Best guess, is it's Mahtomedi, a suburb of St. Paul, MN, which makes sense, because when we did a search on her name, the results took me from Denver to Philadelphia which in turn brought me to Ramsey County, MN. Anyway, she took the drastic step of legally changing her name. A search on that name showed she took out an old restraining order on her ex-boyfriend, which he subsequently violated and put her in the hospital. Police report said he'd been stalking her. You think he could be involved? I mean it was almost six years ago, but they weren't able to arrest him because he skipped town. There is an outstanding warrant for attempted murder out on him."

"She changed her name and moved across the country multiple times. I doubt it, but take a look I guess."

"Don't look so grouchy, Sourwolf. Get your nose in there and scent the hell out of it."

"My son seems to think it might help find her. Personally, I'm skeptical."

Derek stuck his nose in the bag and inhaled, and immediately, he found his senses flooded. Mentally, he had to take a step back to slow his heartbeat.

"Anything?"

"Coconut and whiskey; she likes Scotch."

"Anything else?"

"Other than the overwhelming smell of terror? No sorry." He glanced over his shoulder for the door.
"I need to get going."

"Thanks for your help Derek."

"No problem Sheriff. Bye Stiles, Scott." Once the door shut behind him, he exhaled the breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding and hurried out to his car so he could turn on the radio to drown out the sound of his pounding heart. He did not want Scott noticing the flutter in chest.

Scent of fear aside, she smelled amazing, like coconut, with olive trees, bougainvillea, and sea water hitting his nose next. Underneath all those were the smallest undertones of fine Scotch and wet clay. His sense of smell had never been so overloaded. Or maybe a person's scent had never appealed to him as much as this missing woman. As soon as he'd inhaled, a jolt of energy, white hot, exploded in his chest. Steeling his resolve, he knew he had to find her; though he couldn't begin to fathom why.

* * * * *

Derek pulled the car to a stop outside his loft. As soon as he opened the car door, he heard it; faint purring. "This is getting ridiculous. I don't want a pet cat." However, when he looked around, relief coursed through his veins, because, thankfully, he found no sign of the cat.

He changed into running clothes and took off towards the preserve, needing to clear his head. Music would not be necessary today. Before he realized it, he'd made it to the far edge of the park out by route nine. What could it hurt?

Venturing into the tree line towards the road (And roughly where Sheriff Stilinski had found the abandoned car), he looked for anything that might catch his eye. This far out in the woods did not see too much traffic. He listened for passing cars, walking in the direction of the noise.

Just ahead of him he could see mile marker 46. Eyes to the ground, he headed to the previous marker. Right here. She was taken from right here. Seven months, what could he possibly hope to find after seven months? Having found nothing sticking out as strange, he crossed the road to the narrow path branching off from the other side of the road, if for nothing else, a change in scenery.

About half a mile from the road his foot caught on a rock, propelling him forward, and he barely managed to catch himself before hitting the ground. His stumble disrupted a pile of leaves revealing the shredded remains of a black t-shirt. The foliage had preserved the scent of its owner. She'd been here. About two hundred feet from where he found the t-shirt, he saw an empty liquor bottle.

Doesn't look like normal drunken teenager booze. A picture of the bar-code and quick Google search later confirmed this. He was holding an empty bottle of $150 Scotch. So taking this poor woman was not enough, the creeps had to go through her things too? He committed his route to memory and resolved to come back later with the rest of his pack.

On his return trip, something dawned on him. The week before he'd been running on the same side of the preserve but a couple miles north. That had been where he'd seen the deer...and naked woman with long black hair running away from the road. Maybe it was nothing, but a feeling in his gut told him to call the Sheriff and tell him what he'd found.
I'm Being Followed

Derek rubbed his neck. He ached everywhere; he was exhausted, not to mention growing paranoid about his new feline shadow. In fact, even now, as he sat on the steps of Stiles' front porch, the thing watched him from the hood of his car. How the hell did it even get here, run alongside as he drove? He'd barely slept since the thing came into his life. His coursework was suffering. Not exactly how he wanted to spend this semester of graduate school.

He'd been sitting waiting for everyone to show up for thirty minutes, and in that time, he watched her scamper up the driveway up to him and rubbed herself all over his legs. He was pretty sure he told her to scram, but she only made it as far as his car.

By the time Stiles arrived with Scott and Isaac and Lydia, the little molly had disappeared. I'm hallucinating; that's the only explanation.

"Dude, you look terrible. Sleeping less than usual?"

"I've told you all before, Scott, don't call me dude." He yawned. "Yeah, I had a early walk-through at the house."

"Almost finished?" Stiles clapped him on the back.

"A couple weeks or so. It will be nice to not have neighbors around."

"Good to hear, because I am tired of having these meetings at our house, although I am glad you waited outside like a normal person instead of breaking in."

"I haven't done that in almost two years. Now that your dad knows about all this werewolf and pack stuff, what's the point?" He looked up to see the two wolves snarling at him. "What?"

"You stink." Isaac wrinkled his nose.

He changed the subject as they all followed Stiles into the house. "I'm being followed."

"Like by another werewolf, a hunter, or something?" Isaac took his usual seat on the couch looking very concerned for his honorary big brother. "I mean I know I haven't been home in like four days, but shit. Cora says hi by the way."

"A cat." Raucous laughter broke out in the room. "Shut up. She was wounded and half-dead on the hood of my car. I took her to Deaton, and now she won't leave me alone."

Stiles wiped the tears of mirth from his eyes. "Look I know I keep telling you to tell more jokes, but this...is too much."

"I'm not kidding. She was adopted by a family but ran away and somehow found my place. I took her to the animal shelter."

"That doesn't sound so bad."

Derek lowered his eyebrows. "Scott, I've done that eight times now. She kept escaping. I gave up
trying four days ago. I'm serious. There will be no sign of this cat when I leave my house, but no matter where I end up going, the thing shows up. I come out of the grocery store, bank, Target, and this thing will be sitting on my car. She sits outside the shop every shift and waits for me to leave work. The only time I don't see her is when I'm in class, and that's only because I assume Chico is just too far a walk.

"I don't know how, but somehow last night, she managed to get past the main door of my building only to sit outside my front door and wail all night long. Finally at four in the morning, I went outside to tell her to find someone else to bother, but she was gone."

"You sure the cat's not just in heat?"

"Why would a cat in heat be following me around, Stiles?"

"A fine specimen of male animal magnetism like you, Derek? I just always assumed females of all species followed you around and some men. Hell, I'd probably follow you around if I didn't know you."

Derek scowled at him.

"You're going to kill me aren't you? With your teeth. Yeah sorry I said anything. She's probably just grateful you helped save her life."

"Sure, but other animals are being weird around me too. I saw a deer in the preserve a week and a half ago."

"Here we go again about this deer. Did Derek tell you he stopped chasing a naked chick through the woods in order to stare at a deer. Naked, butt ass naked! He didn't think a naked woman was as interesting as a deer." Isaac fell off the couch laughing.

"Was she cute?" Stiles quirked an eyebrow.

"I don't know. I only caught a glimpse of her. She looked like she was in trouble."

"Seriously Derek? Really? Has it been so long since you've been laid that you confused a naked woman with a deer?"

"She walked towards me instead away from me."

"Weird."

"Why is that weird Stiles?"

He rolled his eyes at Scott. "Deer run from predators. What are werewolves? Big predators. So my species confused alpha, what did this deer look like?"

"Normal sized, black fur, white tail."

"You actually saw a melanistic deer? That is so cool!"

"Um a what?" Isaac asked

"Opposite of albino. Wait, you saw a white-tailed deer?"
"Yeah why?"

"Just like wolves, there aren't any white-tails in California. I probably would have stopped to look at it too."

Derek stood up. "Come on guys. Stiles, send a text to Alison, Jackson, and Danny too. Tell them to meet us at mile marker 47. We're helping the Sheriff, and I can't be out all night. I have a like two hundred pages of reading to finish by Tuesday."

*   *   *   *   *   *

The pack searched until almost nine at night, trying to find another trace of the missing woman, but they came up empty. This mission Derek had adopted, was quickly becoming an obsession, though to be honest it was more of an attempt to hide from his mystery cat. He had begun to think it was a death omen, and it freaked him the hell out. He stayed out until two in the morning searching before giving up for the night. By the time he opened his front door, it was nearly four a.m. So much for making a headway on that chunk of text for his Foreign Language Curriculum Development class.

On a night like this, where he hadn't slept more than three hours a night in over a week, he wished he could get drunk without resorting to Wolfsbane infused alcohol, of which, he was fresh out. With so many perks of being a werewolf, he could forget about the downsides. God, how he wanted to be loaded right now. Instead, he quickly showered and took a couple sleeping pills. He'd never resorted to them before, because he figured they wouldn't work for long, but he would try anything to knock himself out before that damned cat came back.

He cracked his bedroom window, thankful for the lack of fire escape and for being four stories up, otherwise, he was certain the cat would find a way in and smother him in his sleep. As a precaution, he turned on the TV in the hope that it might drown out the caterwauling later. Minutes after his head hit the pillow, he was asleep, and soundly too.

If he hadn't been so exhausted, he might have noticed his feline friend sneaking in his window. The drain pipe for the building lay on the other side of his bedroom window. Not an easy feat for a cat, but achievable for one with good skill. She was an expert climber. Without making a noise (Even for werewolf ears. Cats did have better hearing than dogs), she leapt to the floor where she padded to his nightstand. If scaling a four story building didn't stop her, this three foot tall piece of furniture surely wouldn't.

She wasn't hungry; there were dumpsters for that. She wasn't thirsty either. No, she only wanted attention, and though this grumpy man kept shooing her away, he felt safe to her. He saved her life after all, and someone who did that couldn't be as bad as the front he put up for others.

Besides, he needed her. Cats always seemed to get a bad rap when it came to affection for their owners, especially when compared to dogs. Man's best friend. Ha! She happened to have known the sweetest white kitten once, who loved everyone she met. This man, needed someone to love and protect him, even if it was only his heart and mind that needed protecting.

She curled into his side, relishing in the warmth, and drifted off to sleep.
Sunlight glinted in through the bedroom window, casting light on a scene Derek wouldn't have believed even if someone showed him a picture of it. Pressed up against him, the cat purred softly. Sometime during the night, he'd thrown an arm around the sleeping animal like she was his own living security blanket.

Unfortunately, her purring was not quiet enough to remain unnoticed. He opened an eye. "Listen, Missy. This has got to stop. We need to have a discussion about boundaries. I am not your owner; you are not my pet."

She rolled onto her back exposing her stomach and craned her neck so that those big green eyes stared up at him. She trilled a greeting. "Rrrrowwe. Rrrrowwe"

"No you can't stay. Stop looking at me like that." He turned to his back, but before he could roll to his other side, she climbed onto his chest.

Her paws kneaded gently into his chest, and she resumed purring.

"Stop that. I am not a pillow for you to fluff. Get off me." Instead of leaving, she stretched forward and rubbed her cheek against his chin. "Oh no you don't. Stop marking me. I am not your human." When she licked his chin, he grabbed his phone and fired off a group text to the pack

To: The Troops
07:10

Emergency meeting this morning 9 am. @SMH

A few minutes later, Derek received a response.

From: Stiles
07:13

Why my house?
To: Stiles
07:14

Because I said so.

He hurried out of bed and into the shower, in what he knew to be a vain attempt to rid himself of the cat smell. Through the shower curtain, he could discern the cat's shape as she sat on the counter waiting for him to finish. "Because that's not at all creepy." Well at least she didn't insist on sitting on the edge of the tub between the shower liner and curtain to watch him shower. Yeah, that would have been worse.

He pulled the towel off the bar and into the shower, wrapping it tightly around his waist. I can't believe I am covering up for a damn cat- He cursed silently and walked into his closet. Somehow, he managed to get dressed before she left the bathroom. Thank god for small favors. When he glanced into the bathroom, he saw her drinking from the dripping faucet.

"Are you thirsty? Come on. I don't have any cat food, but how about some milk?" He filled a bowl and set it on the counter where she greedily lapped up the liquid. "Don't think about scratching me." He warned as he picked her up. She must have understood him, because he didn't feel any of her claws. "Thanks, Molly." He gave her a quick rub under her chin, before grabbing a shirt from his hamper to serve as a blanket. Once she had been wrapped up and shielded from the wind, he carried her out to his car. Okay, so she was like the one cat that didn't want to claw out his eyes; it didn't mean she happened to be growing on him.

Who the am I kidding?

She totally was, and that fact baffled him. "Feeling déjà vu yet? This is how we met." When he turned on the radio, the cat hissed.

"No music?" He turned it off, but then she whined. "Maybe a different station." He quickly found she did not want to listen to Top 40 radio, or country, or hip-hop. If she didn't like either of the rock stations, well then she'd just have to suffer the silence. When "Back In Black" started playing, she calmed down. "Like ACDC do you? Anyone ever tell you you're weird?"

Why am I talking to the cat like a person? Fuck. I am so lonely, I am turning into one of those people who talks to their pets like children. Not your pet. Just a nuisance. Get it together Derek.

The ride to the Stilinski residence passed without another word.

*   *   *   *   *

Derek knocked on Stiles' front door. When he received no answer, instead of knocking again, he choose to walk right into the house where he found Stiles sitting in front of the television embroiled in an intense session of Call of Duty, completely oblivious to the world around him.

"You motherfucker!" He yelled at the TV, throwing his game controller and headset across the couch. When he saw Derek, he fell off the couch. "Jesus Derek! You scared the hell out of me. Please just come into my house without knocking! Such a gentleman!"

"I did knock.

Looking contrite, Stiles crossed to the kitchen. "Did you eat breakfast yet? I made pancakes if you want some."

Derek sat down at the dining room table. "I'd love some."

"How many?"
"Do you have enough for five? Isn't it a little early for video games?"

"Well someone decided to wake me up with a text, but I suppose I deserve that for texting you to come help out at the station. I couldn't think of any other way to occupy my time after breakfast was done." Stiles came into the dining room carrying a plate with pancakes and syrup. "Here you go my grumpy friend." He pointed to the bundle in the protective custody of the crook Derek's left arm. "Did you bring me a host present?" When the fabric moved, he jumped back in fright. "Holy shit! It moved."

"Of course it moved." Derek rolled his eyes as he took a bite.

"What? Why?"

At the sound of Stiles' exasperation, Molly poked her head out of the makeshift blanket. "Meow."

Derek channeled his inner Vanna White as he pointed to the bag. "Tada! So yeah, do you have anything I can feed this cat?"

"Derek, why do you have a cat in a T-shirt?"

He groaned. "This is the cat that has been following me. Molly here, sneaked into my loft last night. I woke up to her sleeping on my chest."

Stiles looked like he was about to die from cuteness overload. "Aw, you named her?"

"No. A molly or queen is what you call female cat, but she doesn't act like a Queen. She's actually a very nice cat, who seems to like me a lot." He noticed the incredulous look on his best friend's face. "I know.. I don't understand it either. Stiles, food?"

"Oh right." He opened his fridge and pulled out some leftover chicken. "I hope you like chicken, Molly. These are pretty bland. Doc says my dad needs less salt." He slid a plate full of chopped chicken in front of her. When she saw it, she emerged fully from Derek's arm, hopping onto the table where she greedily began scarfing it down like she hadn't had a meal in days. "To be honest Derek, when you said you were being followed by a cat, I thought you were either paranoid or making it up. She's adorable."

"Who's adorable? Find a girlfriend finally?"

"Shut up, Jackson." Stiles waved to Danny and Cora as they walked through the front door. "Hi guys." Scott, bright eyed and bushy tailed walked in the door after them. He would never figure out why the guy went to the gym so damn early (He much preferred going around ten at night). As it was, the kid made so much noise getting ready in the morning, he woke the whole house.

"No one else is coming this morning. They are all busy or not answering their phones. Well Peter told you to fuck off; he's in Florida, but what else is new?" Cora ruffled her brother's hair. "Missed you, Der."

"You too, Cora. How are classes?" He said after swallowing.

"I think I want to transfer. It's just too far away. I will try to come home more weekends." She wrinkled her nose at the feline. "You have a cat, Stiles?"
"No. Derek brought her."

"You need to get out more, Derek. You're turning into the crazy cat lady."

"For that to be true, I think I need more than one... and also be a woman." As he stood up, Molly jumped off the table and followed him into the kitchen so he could put his empty plate in the sink. "And anyway, she's not my pet, Cora. So Stiles, you're the research guy. Anything stick out about this cat?"

"Well although I can't fathom why, she seems to like you a lot. Haven't been hanging around any witches have you?"

Derek scowled. "As always, Stiles, your witty brand of sarcasm is quite refreshing."

"Thank you. Wait, that was also sarcasm. Why Derek, I didn't know you were capable."

He looked down at the cat, purring loudly as she walked figure eights around his legs. "Stop that."

Danny yawned. "Why did you ask about witches, Stiles?"

"Maybe she's a familiar."

"Oh my god Derek, have you considered that you might have been cursed?" Scott blurted out.

When Molly stretched up on her hind legs, purring loudly against Cora's leg, Derek laughed. "Finally, she's bothering someone else."

"Yeah, I don't like cats."

He patted his sister's shoulder. "I don't either, but Molly's nice."

Desperate for attention, the black cat wrapped herself around Danny's legs. He bent down to scratch between her ears. "Hey there, Molly."

"No, don't get cozy with it Danny. I don't want my car stinking of cat." Jackson groaned.

"Don't be a dick." Danny stood. "Okay if I grab something to drink, Stiles?"

"Help yourself."

"So, is no one going to answer my question?" Scott looked wide-eyed at Derek.

"Which was?"

"Have you been cursed? I mean if it's witches, you might have been cursed."

"I don't feel cursed. I mean, I've been unnecessarily clumsy, injured myself, and started coughing up razors, but that's normal right?" He deadpanned.

"That was sarcasm again, Derek! See guys! I told you he had a sense of humor, that it was just a dry wit, but none of you believed me!" He grinned. "You know, when I said familiar, I didn't mean for
evil witches. A familiar can be benevolent. Or Derek, maybe she's just a cat who needs a home and happens to like you."

"What are you hinting, Stiles?"

"That you let her stay. At least for a little while. I'll research it, see what I can find. Look if you don't want to keep her, I can try and sweet talk my dad. Personally, I think she'd be good for you. Keep you company." The 'give you something to take care of' went unsaid.

Molly scampered into the kitchen and into the kitchen sink, where Danny was filling his glass of water. She wet her paws and licked the water off them, then rubbed them over her face, repeating the action several times.

"I'm going with familiar, because she is playing in the water. I thought cats hated water."

Stiles pulled his phone out and did a quick Google search. "So, there are several breeds of cats that like water. Is her coat all black?"

"No, she's spotted underneath. You know how like a black panther is really just a black jaguar. The spots are still there."

"Have you seen her run?"

"She was wounded, remember?"

"Anything unusual about her, body wise?"

"You mean like the fact her back legs are longer than her front and she has this?" He pointed to her stomach. "She doesn't feel pregnant. It's just this skin flap thing."

"Oh well congrats Derek. You have a rare breed of cat. She's an Egyptian Mau. They like water, can be chatty and can run over... wow thirty miles per hour. Oh how cute, look at this one." He turned his phone around and showed Derek a picture of a similar black cat. "This coat color is called smoke. Looks kind of like Molly, yeah? Good news, they are affectionate, active, intelligent, and agile. They like are easy to groom, but very loyal, which probably explains why she kept following you. So, I say keep her."

"Meow, meow." She responded to her name and hopped onto the kitchen table, forcing her head underneath Derek's hand. "Meow, meow."

They group continued catching up, talking about Cora's schooling, when Stiles brought up his idea for the pack again. "So...instead of having this Scott's side and Derek's side, how about we just call it pack? Scott can take over planning any attack strategies, because we know Derek likes to act first ask questions later, and that isn't always a good idea. Because Scott, for all I've tried to teach him, still knows jack shit about werewolf protocol and interpack relationships; Derek would be good about that. That would leave the tasks of new pack members, training, and bonding for you guys to sort out."

"That is the stupidest-"

Derek glared at him. "Jackson, he has a point. We can't be a strong pack if we are divided."
Scott nodded. "I don't want either of those last two responsibilities. I mean, I can weigh in on potential members, but unless you are undecided or against someone joining whom a majority of the pack wants, you can have final say on that, Derek. I have a job, and school, and I just don't think I can manage another thing on my plate."

Derek fought not to roll his eyes. It wasn't like he didn't also have a job and school. "I can take that and training, but no one wants me to coordinate pack bonding from now on, as you all seem to think I am incapable of caring or taking care of anyone." As soon as he said the words, Molly stood, and rubbed her head against his chin. "Never mind the face that I had three younger siblings, and babysat all the time, but whatever, you can all keep thinking I'm an unfeeling asshole." He stared down at his coffee, avoiding Cora's gaze. He knew exactly what he'd see, the same broken feeling running through his body.

"Three? Jesus Derek, is five kids a common werewolf thing? Because I do not want to have that many kids."

This time, however, he did roll his eyes at Scott. "Five? More like seven, but no. My parents just liked kids. They were good parents with the means, so why shouldn't they have had seven kids if they wanted to?" He knew his expression was wistful at that point. A small thud erupted as his head hit the table, where he buried his head in his arms folded on the table, wondering if any of them other than Stiles and Cora would notice if he completely shut down.

"I get Laura was the oldest." Scott mused.

Cora saw that her brother was in no condition to correct him. "No, she was number three. We had twin sisters a year and a half older than Laura. Sofia and Serena. They were home from college on fall break. Laura was a couple years older than Derek."

"So, you're the middle child, Derek? That explains so damn much."

Derek didn't say anything, but Stiles wanted to knock that smug grin off Jackson's face for his comments.

"I'm number five, then there was Maria. She was nine, and David, the baby he was almost five."

Derek's chair fell over backwards as he fled the confines of the house for the back porch. It was still chilly outside, but he couldn't sit in there and listen as they reduced his siblings to birth order and a bunch of 'was's' and 'never will be's.' The last thing he needed, was everyone seeing him fall apart. No, he'd done well with the brick wall he built around his heart, and he intended to keep it that way.

He heard faint scratching at the door behind him and let Molly outside. "Hey, Molly." He patted the wood beside him; she forewent the cold porch, choosing to climb into his lap instead. "Oh please, make yourself at home."

She flopped on her back, exposing her stomach. "Rrrowwe." She trilled at him, waiting for a belly rub, which he obliged.

"Maria would have liked you. She loved cats. You know she was the only one of my siblings who wasn't a werewolf. She was home sick with the flu. She shouldn't have even been there. What kind of monster kills little kids? What danger could a four and nine year old possibly be? Cora still hadn't learned to control her shift. So she was home-schooled, and she still won't tell me how she escaped the fire. I miss my family, you know? I just want to know if my parents would be proud of me, if
they'd think I was doing a good job at this alpha business." He rubbed his face. "Who am I kidding? Of course they wouldn't; I've been a terrible alpha, but it's not as if I'm not trying. I mean well, really, I do. My mother would be so disappointed I turned teenagers, but at least I gave them a choice."

She stretched onto her hind legs again, resting her front paws on his shoulders. "Rrrowwe, rrrowwe." The cat sure did love to make noise. She cocked her head to the side, studying him. Her eyes, like sage leaves, seemed to be searching his own for hints on how to help him. "Meow." A cold paw tapped him on the nose.

"Stop that."

So instead, she licked his nose, and he wasn't sure what was worse. "Why do I get the feeling you're trying to cheer me up?" His question was only met with purring. "Let's go back inside." She left his lap, walked behind him and climbed onto his shoulder. "Well okay then." They reentered the house to find the pack staring at Derek, clearly waiting for his return.

"Glad you came back." Stiles patted his shoulder. "We still need someone to handle pack bonding."

"I think you should do it. You have good ideas on that sort of thing. You planned the last few we had with half a pack, and they were fun."

"Yeah, that's a good idea." Scott smiled at his best friend. "We had some bonding nights with my half."

"I think it's a terrible idea. He'll probably make us hold hands and sing songs."

"Shut up Jackson." Danny shoved him playfully. "I bet he's good at getting people to work together."

"Now that's settled, has your Dad found any new leads on that case he asked us to help in?"

"No, and he doesn't really expect to."

Scott nodded. "He has Mr. Argent looking into it on his end though."

"Good. I have things I need to do this afternoon. If no one has anything else, let's be done with this meeting."

"You okay, Der?"

"Yeah Cora, but if I'm keeping the cat, I need supplies. See you at home? We can get dinner later."

"Sounds good. I need to do a bunch of laundry anyway, and knowing you and Isaac, there is no food in the house. I can swing by the grocery store too."

"Did that yesterday."

"Well look at you, being responsible." She kissed his cheek. "Bye, guys."

Scott waited for her car to pull away before he commented. "Oh my God, you two can be a normal family."
"What?"

"She just seems as, what's the phrase you use Stiles?"

"Emotionally closed off."

"Right just as emotionally constipated as you are."

"I said closed off not constipated."

"What's the difference?"

"One is a little insulting, and the other is more clinical." Wow, Scott, way to be insensitive- Stiles fumed silently.

Derek glared at Scott before changing the subject. "Hey Stiles, do you have one of those mesh gym bags? You know the ones that look like flimsy backpacks?"

"Yeah, I think so. Why?"

"Cat carrier."

"Give me a minute." He disappeared upstairs.

Loud banging, several thuds, and a curse or two echoed through the ceiling above. "Sounds like he's breaking a wall down up there." Danny laughed.

"No, that's pretty normal for him. I sleep with earplugs in some nights. He's up until at least one in the morning almost every night."

"Bingo." Stiles mumbled as he came back downstairs, the bag held between his teeth as he fumbled with a couple things in his hand. "Here."

"A laser pointer?"

"Cats love those things."

"What's with the ribbon?"

"For the pretty girl." He took Molly from him and tied a bow around her neck. "I figured you would be against putting her in a collar on principle. So, this way she has some style. See, she likes it. She's not even fussing with it. It matches your eyes, Molly, you pretty kitty, you."

Derek pinched the bridge of his nose.

"What? I happen to like cats."

"Fine. Let's see the bag."

He held it up for him to see. "This big enough?"

"Should be, and the nylon along the bottom half will keep her claws from getting stuck." He placed
the t-shirt he'd carried her in before inside the bag, lining the bottom. "Hold it open, Stiles, and I'll get her in the bag." He took back his cat. His? When did he....oh yes, he agreed to keep her for a while. That probably made her his pet cat. "Sorry, Molly." The pack readied themselves for the inevitable hissing and yowling contest, but none came. She poked her head out of the top of the bag as Derek looped the straps around his arms. "We still on for a run tomorrow, Stiles?"

"Yeah. How's two sound?"

"Works for me. Bye." Derek clapped him on the shoulder and walked out the door, cat in tow.

"Dude, you two go running together?" Scott shook his head in dismay.

"Yes, and occasionally to the gym and the batting cages. I mean we workout together. I am pretty sure aside from work, school, eating, and sleeping, he lives there. I just go after dinner."

"You go to the gym now?"

"Yes, Scott."

"You've changed."

"Says the bitten alpha werewolf. I got tired of being fragile. You might not have noticed I grew a couple inches last semester. I'm as tall as Isaac now. Can you imagine 147 pounds on 6'1"? Yeah I can't either. That's like twenty pounds underweight, and fuck if I'm going to look frail." He sighed. There was a lot about him that had changed.

"It's almost like Derek has made you his pet project."

"No, Scott, he's my friend. Friends do things together. Even so, pet project is better than nothing. Now, I'd love to stay and chat but I have a lesson in," he checked his phone, "thirty minutes on the other side of town." He grabbed his wallet, keys and sunglasses, heading towards the garage.

"Lesson?"

"Yes, it's called a job. I give drum lessons now. It goes in my college fund. Remember drums? You'd bring over your guitar. We used to jam in the garage."

"We haven't done that in a long time."

"Yeah, I know. Believe me, I know. I miss it. I swear, it's like we don't even live in the same house."

"I just can't wrap my head around Derek being friends with anyone. How long has that been a thing?"

"Not really your business anymore. So what, I made friends with Derek, who by the way, not that you will ever listen to me, is actually a good guy. Get the fuck over yourself, Scott. Derek and me, we're bros. You know, what we used to be." He gestured back and forth between Scott and himself.

"What do you mean used to? We're still bros. Come on man, you're my best friend."

Abandoning his trip to the garage, he stormed back towards him. "No Scott, no we're not. We haven't been since you kicked me out of this pack and decided you'd rather hang out with Jack-off
Dickmore than me. Excuse me if Derek actually wanted to be my friend. Shame on me for needing one of those right?” He pushed Scott. “How dare I not sit in my room and mope! Newsflash Alpha, I did that already. I got over it. Now excuse me; I'm gonna be late for work. See you Danny.” He waved to them. “Jack-off.” He didn’t stay for Jackson’s or Scott's response, perfectly content to leave having the last word.
Lost In the (Pet) Supermarket

Chapter Summary

Derek goes to the pet superstore.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Inside the Camaro, Derek plugged in his phone. "So, what should we listen to? I don't have a lot of classic rock on here. You okay with Cage the Elephant?" She hissed as the music started. "Okay, not your thing. Um...Gaslight Anthem?" Another hiss. "Well, shit. How about this? Laura got me into this group, and it's a little harder than I normally like, but I confess, I have a major crush on their vocalist. If you like metal, this is the closest I have. So you better be happy with Halestorm." To his surprise, Molly didn't make another peep outside of contented purring until they arrived at the pet store.

Instead of slinging the makeshift pet carrier onto his back like a regular backpack, he hooked the straps over his shoulders so the bag sat up against his chest. "Don't get any ideas. I am not going to carry you like this all the time. I don't do pet carriers. If you want to go out and about, you'll need a leash." She growled at him. "I don't like it either, but that's just the way it is. Having an unleashed pet in public is apparently frowned upon. I promise I'll only use the harness when we go for a walk. Capisce?"

Her ears perked up at that phrase. "Meow!"

"What? I asked if you understood. That's what capisce means in Italian."

She turned her head and stared up at him, freeing a paw to bop him on the mouth.

"What is the deal, Molly? Maybe I should have called you Queen. You can be demanding you know that? Would you like me to change your name? Tough, because I think Molly suits you. Okay? Bene?" She bopped him on the mouth again, and he had a sudden thought. "Ti piace...Italiano?"

"Meow."

"You really are a strange cat, and I'm starting to believe Stiles' assessment that you are a familiar. Well, then if you're good in here, we can have long one-sided conversations where I use what I learned in college. Andiamo, allora." He rubbed her head and walked towards the entrance.

Somewhere in the cat food section, he found himself utterly lost in the amount of choices. "Well, what kind do you want, Molly?"

"Need help finding anything?" A clerk asked.

"Yes, oh God yes. I rescued this cat, when I found her half dead from a gunshot wound. I got her patched up, but I know nothing about cat food or necessities. The vet said she was probably a stray and used to catching her own food, but all this..." He gestured to the wide selection. "I'm confused.
Can I just feed her fresh raw meat from like the butcher or something?"

She smiled. "You could do that, but she'll need some additional vitamins like taurine, and if you aren't grinding bones up, she'll need calcium. My cat has a very sensitive stomach, so most dry foods make her sick. I make her meals. Don't use pre-ground meat. I don't have a meat grinder, so I just use a vitamin powder. Follow me." She took him to the supplement section. "I use this one. Just sprinkle it over her meal once a day. I have found my cat likes beef hearts. They have taurine in them. I will let you know, a lot of cats are lactose intolerant. So you might not want to give her milk."

"I didn't know that, but I gave her some this morning."

"Well if she tolerates, you can consider it, but I wouldn't give it to her often. Do you want help." Molly poked her head out of the bag. "Well hello there. Aren't you a pretty kitty! I love your bow. Do you know her breed?"

"Pretty sure she's a Mau. She seems to fit the breed description."

"What's your name pretty girl?"

"Molly."

"Well hi, Molly." The cat pushed her head into the hand of the clerk. "And so friendly. Let's get your litter box sorted out. So these, are your standard clay litters you are probably familiar with. They come in scented and unscented. The pros is they are usually cheaper, but they create a lot of dust, and if your cat was a stray, she might not take to them. There are alternatives like pine based, walnut, wheat, and corn."

"Which one smells the best? I have a really sensitive nose. I mean I can pick up bad smells really quickly."

"Well this one here is our most popular clay based litter alternative. It has corn and some cedar mixed in. I've heard nothing but good things. You can always try it out. The company does have a money back guarantee."

"Sounds good."

"I would probably recommend a covered box. They seem to help with litter tracking, and the ones with doors also help with the smell. You'll want to scoop daily or at most every other day. Once a month throw out the litter and start fresh. I would recommend storing the litter in an airtight container to keep out bugs and moisture."

He smiled at her, thankful for all the help.

"So, since she's a short haired cat, basic brushing is all that is really needed. Cats can be picky, so you might need to experiment with different grooming tools. You'll also probably want a scratching post, or she might destroy your furniture if she still has claws. Does your place have room for her to play?"

"Yeah."

"Well make sure you pick out some toys too."
"Great thanks for all your help. Oh wait, do they make harnesses for cats if you want to take them for walks? I don't want her to be an outdoor cat, but I'd like to take her running with me."

"Sure, they are down this aisle."

"Thanks again. Well Molly, should we pick out some toys? I don't think you need one of those fancy cat trees. I think you'll have a field day climbing on all the exposed beams in the loft." Twenty more minutes and two hundred dollars later, his car was loaded with more things than he ever thought he would need for a pet. Funnily enough, the more time he spent with the cat, the less miserable he seemed to feel.

They made a quick stop at the butcher (Though she was unhappy about being left in the car). He was pretty sure he was one of the only customers requesting liver and hearts. Though after a quick explanation that they were for his cat, the butcher said he'd set some aside each week for him.

"No peeking." He scolded when she poked her nose in the bag. "I'll get you some when we get home."

* * * * *

He carried his purchases inside in one trip. Thank you, werewolf powers.

"What did you do, buy the whole store?"

The sneer he shot his sister could have eaten holes in metal. "Why do you have to rain on my happiness?"

She studied him for a while. "Didn't realize you were so lonely."

"Well I am. This silly little cat is practically godsend right now. You left. Peter ran out without so much as a good-bye. Isaac, even though he's part of my half of the pack or whatever Scott called it, he's not always here. I am alpha to a bunch of teenagers and Peter. It's not like I have a lot of friends, and really Stiles seems to be the only one who can stand my company. So yeah, I'm lonely." He slipped off the cat carrier, and Molly hopped out to seek out the bag from the butcher. "Hold on." Bag in hand, he walked to the kitchen and chopped up enough meat for a meal. He pulled the ceramic food dish out and sprinkled the vitamin powder on the meat like he'd been instructed. Once she had a bowl of fresh water, Molly went to town, practically scarfing the food down. "I'm gonna set up your litter box. I'll show you where it is when you're finished." He set up the box in the hall near the bathroom.

"You could just find a girlfriend."

"And I've done a bang-up job with the ones I've had." He chuckled at his pun. It was banging that caused the problems in the first place. He opened the package of toy mice and tossed a couple around the apartment. "It's not like a cat would be my first choice for a pet, but hell, this one found me. She kept running away from the home Deaton found her. I couldn't take her back to the shelter again. She obviously wasn't happy there. It's like we need each other. Is that so hard to believe?" Over the last hour, a dull ache had crept up from the back of his head, settling behind his eyes. He
rubbed his temples. "My head hurts, and I'm going to take a nap. Wake me when you want to leave for dinner." He headed to his room, only to be joined about ten minutes later. "We need each other. Isn't that right?" He scratched under Molly's chin before she curled into a tight ball on his chest.

Chapter End Notes

Translations for the Italian used in this chapter.

Capisce?- Do you understand?
ti piace...Italian?- Do you like...Italian?
Bene?- okay?
Andiamo, allora- so let's go, then.

I'm not a fluent Italian speaker. So I have tried my best with it. If I have translated incorrectly, or used the wrong words please let me know the correct translation, and I will fix it.
Chapter Notes

Chapter title comes from Slaves' "Starving For Friends"
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ql7gHUHEgrw
Dream sequence notated by Italics

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I miss my friends
The ones I'd die for

Don't make me wait for a falling star
I've been afraid that the blood in my heart
Won't sing for me a melody that's ours
Drown me in the rain, and I'll be there for you
You were the only
You were the only saving grace I ever had

A soft wind blew outside Derek's window as he slept, but his slumber was anything but peaceful. With Molly snuggled up against him, her head on his shoulder, his head twitched back and forth. Whatever demon plagued him in his sleep, woke her eventually. Her green eyes, inquisitive, stared at him with concern; a soft meow escaped her mouth.

All around him, the trees came alive in the night, grabbing at him as he ran past. Branches fought to get him into their clutches, and giant chasms opened up with every pounding step onto the ground his feet made. He could feel the terror making its home in the very marrow of his bones.

Derek felt the scalding air suck the breath from his lungs, an angry vengeful vacuum hell bent on seeing him suffer. He dared not look behind him, not that he didn't already know what he'd see. Flames licked at his heels, hissing at him in fifteen different but altogether familiar, hauntingly familiar, voices.

"This is your fault, Derek! You did this! You did all of this. We are dead because of you! You stupid, weak, poor excuse for an alpha and sorrier excuse of a man!"

"I know, and I'm sorry! I tried. Really, I did."

"No one is ever going to love you for you, because you're an animal, Derek, a monster. You're going to die alone. After all, it's what you deserve!"

His legs gave out; he collapsed to the ground in a heap of shame and resignation as the trees ripped him to shreds. Flames ate away at his flesh, and the ground swallowed whole, what little of him that remained.
Derek woke up screaming and shaking, his body covered in sweat. He sat up, clutching his knees to his chest like a lifeline. Before he realized it, the bare skin of his knees had long grown damp. Crying? Well now, he was definitely glad Isaac literally had a graveyard shift tonight preparing a couple plots for funerals tomorrow.

Warmth and gentle pressure hit him in the shoulder blades. He looked over his shoulder to see Molly standing on her hind legs, front paws pushing on his upper back. Though she purred, her ears were back, and Derek could feel the tension she held in her body as if it were his own.

"Mew." Her quiet cry startled him.

He rubbed her head. "It's okay, Dolcezza. I'm okay."

"Rrrowwe, rrrowwe."

"Just a bad dream. I bet you didn't realize you picked someone with so much baggage."

"Meow?"

He lay back and stared at the ceiling. "I make bad choices, and I'm a terrible person." Molly put a tentative paw on his chest. "Oh, you're asking permission now? You must really be worried. Come on up." A paw to the spleen elicited a groan from him. "Would you just lie down?" He didn't feel like dealing with her five minute ritual of making his shirt into a bed by turning in circles until she was satisfied. She did that enough with the sheets before snuggling into his side every night as it was.

Though he feigned irritation, he didn't mind; it reminded him just how desperate for touch he really was. It's partly the reason he'd been drawn to Jennifer in the first place, or Julia, or whatever the hell her name was. He'd slept with her, not because he'd been particularly horny. Well he was, but it was nothing he couldn't handle. Well, except for Stiles, the kid, loyal to such a fault he somehow saw worth in a friendship with Derek. Werewolves were a tactile species, and one of the indicators of a strong pack was members feeling comfortable enough with each other to show physical affection, even if it is only platonic or fraternal.

Isaac once asked him why he turned them. "Were you lonely?" He asked. Derek didn't answer him then; he wished that he had, wished that he'd told someone how he'd been struggling since Laura's death, that he'd wanted a family, a pack again so badly. Instead, he said nothing, too afraid of looking weak he let the three of them think he turned them for power.

Maybe it was true a little bit. His world had been torn apart. He'd been hunted, tortured, wrongly arrested and damn near shunned by the town until the Sheriff held that press conference declaring the deaths animal related, clearing his name. Could anyone really blame him for wanting to reclaim control over his own life again? To take the power back?

No one believed him when he said his family had been very close, and he was quite a hugger in his youth. They only assumed his current demeanor since the fire to be a reflection of his upbringing. As it was, his betas were afraid to touch him at all. Derek had handled the beginning of his alpha-dom so badly. No wonder they all thought him cold. Well, except for Stiles, the kid, loyal to such a fault he somehow saw worth in a friendship with Derek. Werewolves were a tactile species, and one of the indicators of a strong pack was members feeling comfortable enough with each other to show physical affection, even if it is only platonic or fraternal.

"I've made a lot of mistakes, Molly." He sighed, rubbing her head as he told her about his family and the pain he still felt over them, Paige and Kate. He talked about those six years in New York, how he managed to graduate from both high school and college. He told her everything, but mostly, he
talked about Laura.

"You would have liked her, Molly. Everyone did. She was outgoing, confident, and so funny, but god, was she powerful. If she'd never come back here, and built a larger pack, she'd have been amazing. She did great with just me. She could walk into a room and her personality, so effervescent that everyone noticed. She was everything I'm not. I just can't help think that if my family were still alive, they would be so disappointed in me.

"I'm just the fucking middle child trying to live up to expectations and the examples of my older sisters, but disappointment in my lot in life would be so much better... God, I found her body, Laura's. I buried the half I found. Scott and Stiles had to dig her up and accuse me of murder. They didn't know better; I'm sure they thought I was the one responsible. Like I could actually do that to her, cut her in half!" He pressed his palms to his eyes, trying to dash away the wetness in them. "She was my sister, and I loved her. Hell, she was my best friend, practically the only one I had. I'm not... good at making friends anymore. It's so hard to trust people after what I've gone through, and now, nobody trusts me either." A painful sob wracked his body. "I want to do the right thing. I just want to be good."

He couldn't keep talking, just rolled over trying to get some sleep. After about an hour, he gave up trying. Clothes from the day before waited for him on the floor. "Come on pretty lady, let's go for a walk."

Her ears perked up. "Rrowwe, rrowwe." She scampered off the bed, following him to the front door, where he fastened the harness around her body.

The clasp on the leash clicked. "I know. I don't like putting you on it either." He crouched down and rubbed her chin. "You're such a good girl, Molly. I'm glad Stiles told me to keep you."

The door to the loft squeaked as Derek pulled it shut, and they walked into the night.

Chapter End Notes

Translation for Italian used in this chapter:

Dolcezza: Term of endearment similar to sweetie or honey
I wonder if the things I did were just to be different
To spare myself from the constant shame of my existence,
And I would surely redeem myself in my desperation
Here and now I'll express my situation.

The more the light shines through me
I pretend to close my eyes.
The more the dark consumes me
I pretend I'm burning, burning bright.

There's nothing ever wrong but nothing's ever right
Such a cruel contradiction
I know I crossed the line, it's not easy to define

Seconds turned to minutes, and minutes turned into ten minutes as Derek sat in silence. He looked around his therapist's office. Though Spartan in decor, Derek did find comfort in the many shelves of books. He didn't trust a lot of people, but he was certain he could never trust someone who didn't own books.

The first session he'd been so defensive in posture, felt so vulnerable and threatened, that he couldn't say a single word. When he stood, choosing to peruse the bookcases, he found himself amazed at the fact Dr. Simonson had not only the psychology reference volumes he'd expected, but also novels, comics and various art instruction books. On the lower shelves, the man had children's books and
coloring pads, crayons, even some toys. After that, Derek began to trust the man a little. Still, it took almost a month for him to be able to talk about anything beyond the superficial, 'I'm feeling angry today; don't ask.'

Today however, he just felt empty. He'd woken up so underwater, he wasn't sure he'd be able to surface; he still hadn't. If normal bad days were the black days, then ones like today were like being trapped in Tartarus where he felt so suffocated by the negativity in his head he wished he'd died in his sleep. That wouldn't count as doing something stupid; Stiles couldn't hold it against him then.

After fifteen minutes of silence, the doctor put an end to it. "How are you feeling today, Derek?"

"Like I'm at the bottom of the Mariana's Trench."

"Why is that? Anything in particular that's caused you to feel that way?"

He shrugged. "I don't know. Some days are just like this. I wish I knew why, because then I could fix it, or at least handle it better. But I don't know. You ever feel like your head is a nebula or a hurricane? I'm not sure exactly which one applies today. Hell, maybe both."

"I can understand that. Still, it's good you made the session. Today, I want to talk about the fire."

Derek's eyes widened. He was in no way ready to discuss that. The muscles in his shoulders seized. He was frozen; he was the tundra, and a slow ache began to build in his chest.

Dr. Simonson noticed the near instantaneous shift in his patient's demeanor from one of listlessness to outright fear. After six months of thrice weekly therapy, he hadn't even begun to scratch the surface of his patient's self-admitted problem. He was familiar with the man's history, and the fire was an issue they needed to start dealing with, because he suspected most of Derek's melancholy and self-loathing stemmed from that one event. "In our first session you said you were responsible. I want to talk about why you think that is." Dr. Simonson was a meticulous man, always doing as much research as he could. He'd familiarized himself with the Hale fire, knowing now that it had been arson with a suspect. The evidence against her had been so strong; had she not taken her own life, a trial and conviction were pretty much guaranteed.

"It was my fault. I don't think it was; I know it was."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because it's true. About a year before the fire, my first girlfriend, Paige was killed by a coyote."

"I'm sorry."

"Me too." If only the man understood how much he'd just lied. "Before that, I was outgoing, well as much as a natural introvert can be, but after..." He rubbed the back of his neck. "I don't know. I just felt lost. I was lonely and withdrawn. Then I met Kate." He took a deep breath, trying to fill his lungs with as much air as he could, but it didn't help. He still felt like he was drowning. Hell, he'd been fighting for the surface now for nine years. "I was... there she was, a beautiful older woman who seemed so interested in me. She doted on me, earned my trust, and I fell for her hard. I couldn't believe someone like her would want me."

"Let's stop there for a second. Why didn't you think you deserved her?"
"It really doesn't matter why I thought that." Derek couldn't think of a way to talk around the literally being a monster thing. "The point is, I was wrong about her. So fucking- Sorry."

"If cursing helps you get this out into the open, go ahead and swear. You wouldn't be the first patient of mine to do so."

"I was lonely. I was the middle child, and up until five years before, I was the only boy out of six kids. Getting enough attention was always difficult. All three of my older sisters-- they were so lovely, commanding attention just by entering a room. My younger sister, Cora, was quieter but so curious, and Maria, everyone loved her. She had special needs and required so much extra care." It was not technically a lie. Being the only human in a werewolf family did require careful attention, especially when she got sick. "Then David was born, and it was like everyone forgot about me. It shouldn't have bothered me as much as it did, but what can you do?" His hands clenched into fists and released several times, and he could feel his pulse rapidly pounding beneath his skin. "That's why I latched onto Kate like a security blanket. I told her all about my family, showed her our house. The first time we were together, well my first time anyway, she told me she loved me."

"I see. Did that solve your need for attention?"

"No, but those were the perfect words to say to me to get what she wanted. I still don't know why she did it. I never will; I know that, but three days later, she dumped me. The next day, my house was a pile of ashes. It wasn't enough to destroy our home. She had to make it so none of my family could escape. Thank God, Cora was home-schooled and out playing in the woods when it happened, or she'd be dead too. Kate knew the house, knew where they would be that early, because I'd told her what everyone liked to do before work and school. My family died, and it was my fault."

Dr. Simonson removed his glasses to clean them. " How old were you?"

"Sixteen."

"I can't imagine losing my whole family that young."

"I didn't lose everyone. Like I said, Cora was out playing. My older sister, Laura and I were at school. My uncle survived but spent six years catatonic."

"Still, that is a profound loss at that age. Can you tell me how you coped?"

"Laura and I ran. We didn't even know Cora survived. I only found out a year and a half ago, and I still can't get her to tell me where she was for six years. I suspect foster care, which makes me feel like a giant asshole. Laura and I couldn't stay in the area with all those looks of pity everywhere we went, knowing it was all my fault. Well, I guess I didn't really cope, just bottled everything up and quit trusting anyone. I'm a little better about that now, but I trust only a few people."

The doctor thought for a moment how best to phrase his next question. "You said Kate was older than you. Can you tell me how much older?"

"Does it matter?"

"I have a feeling it might."

Derek chewed nervously on his thumb nail. He understood exactly why Dr. Simonson wanted to know, but he wasn't ready to put a name to it, and to admit it aloud terrified him. He'd been shot,
stabbed, electrocuted, tortured and hunted, but the thought of hearing someone else say one four letter word scared the shit out of him.

"Derek, I know you may think I delight in sitting here in silence, because I still get paid whether you talk or not, but it's not true. I got into this profession for a reason. It is my duty, job and desire to help my patients, to see them overcome the issues plaguing them. I can't do that if we can't get to the root of the problem. The first thing you said to me in our first session was, even though you have a close friend in whom you trust and confide, you are desperately lonely. "I understand it's likely because you blame your family's deaths on information you shared with someone you trusted, someone you loved. In order to help you realize that it is not your fault, you need to see her for who she was." He kept his tone even and calm. "She murdered your family. How old was Kate when you two dated?"

Derek sighed. "Twenty-four."

"What she did, it was her choice. You did not make her do it. You were a lonely and vulnerable sixteen year old boy towards whom she had absolutely no business making romantic advances of any kind. They tend to be vilified sometimes, but statutory rape laws exist for reasons like this. In relationships between adults and minors, the adult has all the power and can use that to their advantage. Does this happen in every relationship like that? No, but for every time some poor eighteen year old that gets caught up in being arrested for being with his fifteen year old girlfriend, there are countless other cases just like yours. That's why we have the law. She preyed upon you, using your teenage hormones and the promise of sex to manipulate you into giving her what she wanted. Nothing she did to you or your family was your fault."

Derek sank down in his chair. He couldn't meet the man's eyes. His foot bounced up and down off the floor.

"I can see my words have made you uncomfortable. That isn't uncommon when forced to confront the issue of abuse, whether physical, emotional or sexual in nature. It can be scary admitting you've been a victim. I have found that to be especially true for male victims of abuse and rape, because our culture's notions of masculinity show men to be strong and powerful, to actually become a victim is a weakness, but Derek, what happened to you, that's what she did."

Yep, hearing it aloud was just as bad as he thought it would be. His chest tightened; his lungs constricted, struggling to take a breath. No matter how many times he'd been told (Mostly by Stiles) the fire was not his fault, no one had ever called him a victim. No one dared. He felt the room begin to spin and close in on him.

"Focus on your breathing."

Could werewolves even get panic attacks? Apparently so, because that was exactly what was happening to him. His usual anchor, the trust he had in Stiles, didn't seem to be helping. The fear he would "wolf-out" in the middle of his therapist's office consumed him, only compounding the problem. Before he could stop himself, he felt tears roll down his face. He tried to wipe his eyes, but more kept coming. What is this shit? Crying again? Real alpha-like.

"Derek, there is a restroom right through that door. Why don't you go splash some cold water on your face? Keep breathing. In and out, in and out. Take a few minutes to yourself. I'm not going anywhere. We can work on this more when you come back."

He bolted for the bathroom, closing the door behind him, and not a moment too soon, as he felt his
face shift to his beta form. *Come on, Derek, focus. Find your anchor. You've been doing this for twenty-four years now.* He hurried to the sink, turning on the water. His claws, now fully out, pierced through the skin of his palms. Mesmerized, he stared at the blood as it washed down the drain. That focal point seemed to reign in his panic. A few minutes later, he felt his pulse slow down. A check in the mirror showed his normal human face. When he retook his seat out in the office, he still felt light headed.

"How are you feeling, being faced with that realization?"

"Aside from being embarrassed at bawling like a baby? I don't know. It's like the wall I built around myself is cracking. It's scary. At the same time though you know, hearing someone call her that, putting a name to what she did, it's like permission to forgive myself for the guilt. Overwhelming I guess."

"That sounds like a practiced answer, Derek."

"It's not."

"Then say it; confront it."

"I don't understand."

"Hearing someone else call it out and admitting it to yourself are two different things. I think you might actually feel a little better if you say it aloud. Hearing it in your own voice."

Derek felt his blood begin to boil. *Don't wolf out. Don't wolf out and eat your psychiatrist. That sort of thing would be frowned upon in this establishment.* "What? You mean like how even though I loved her, she was a monster? How she used me like a whore and then burned my family alive? Hell, she might as well have paid me for it! How she made me doubt my self-worth, made me think no one could ever want me without an ulterior motive? Because I've been burned since Kate! My last girl friend only went out with me to get back at her abusive ex. That kind of sounded like Jennifer right? "How I have spent the last eight years blaming myself for every bad thing that has happened to me! I have pushed everyone away or kept them in my peripherals because I am scared shitless to let anyone in ever again!" He spat out the words with indignation.

"That's a start."

"What else do you want me to say? That I think I am a complete failure, despite getting up every day, despite graduating high school and college and working towards a masters degree? That I was falsely accused of murder twice because I look like someone who could not only kill my own sister but cut her in half! First I get victimized by that bitch and then by two obnoxious teenagers that think they're Columbo! My ex kidnapped the father of my best friend in a power play. I am a terrible judge of acceptable romantic interests, because look at how well I've down so far. I am so fucking sick and tired of people using my body to their advantage!" First Kate twice, then Matt, then Scott and Gerard, the alphas, Jennifer...oh fuck, he should just make a ballad out of it and walk around singing it as the world's most tone deaf troubadour. He could call it 'Stop Stealing My Bodily Autonomy.' It would sound great on a mandolin. "I wake up every day terrified I am going to die unloved and alone, and most days I don't want to wake up at all!"

"And?"

He swallowed hard. "And the fire was not my fault. She preyed upon my insecurity. She was too old
for me, and if my parents had known about it, they would have had her arrested for statutory rape!"
He huffed in disbelief that those words have actually come out of his mouth.

"Very good. Now say it again."

"She raped me, and my family's deaths and the fire were not my fault."

Dr. Simonson waited a couple minutes before continuing. "Tell me, now how do you feel?"

He chuckled. "Surprisingly a little better."

"Sometimes, just getting things into the open can do wonders for lightening the loads of our minds. Every day in which you wake up with those feelings of inadequacy and guilt, say that out loud a few times. I won't lie to you, Derek. You are going to have those days. Depression, even with therapy and medication, doesn't just magically go away. You will have black days. Reminding yourself that you are not to blame for them, will help. Talking to someone will help. But I do need to ask, do you really feel better? I don't need to worry about you walking out of here and trying to kill yourself again, do I? If I feel you are a danger to yourself, I am legally protected if I break confidentiality. Given your history of suicidal thoughts and attempts, any new thoughts of that nature, I am going to treat as serious."

"Yeah, I do feel a little better, but given where I started today...better is still beneath the surface. I couldn't do that to Cora or Stiles. I understand now how selfish those attempts were. I mean except for the one after Laura's death. At that point, I had no one left, no family, no friends. There would have been no one to miss me. But no, I'm okay."

His answer seemed to be acceptable to Dr. Simonson. "Good, because I really don't want you to regress like that. It may not feel like it, but you are making progress. Anyway, we're just about out of time. Before you go, why don't you tell me something good that's happened recently?"

"Um... I got a cat. I know you're probably thinking, 'How can he possibly take care of an animal when he can't take care of himself?' She's a rescue. Someone had shot her, and I saved her."

"I actually wasn't thinking that at all. Sometimes, pets can give you a purpose, a reason for pushing through the bad days, because they, like a child, depend on you."

"Oh. Well it is nice to have someone, well something that needs me. I admit, I haven't felt as miserable since I found her."

"How long have you had her?"

"A few weeks."

Dr. Simonson smiled. "Before next week, I want you to talk to your best friend. You said that no one knows you've been going to therapy. I want you to talk to Stiles about this. If for nothing else, you have someone, besides the two of us, who is invested in your progress."

Derek nodded in assent, but actually doing it, he suspected, would be a hell of a lot easier said than done.
I'm throwing the childhood scenes away
I'm through ripping myself off
I'm done ripping myself off

Well I'm child and man and child again
The toy broken boy soldier

Derek stopped running to let Stiles take a breather. Their hour long run had so far been silent, which
didn't bother him, and didn't seem to bother Stiles either, with that whole, human stamina and
conserving energy thing and all.

"You fucker, keep me running for an hour without a break!" Stiles winced. "Fragile human and all."

"Shut up, Crybaby. You're not as fragile as you think you are." He chuckled. "We haven't done this
in like, what? Since you convinced me to keep, Molly. Has it really been three weeks?"

"Tell me about it. Stupid school has kept my ass busy; any free time has been filled up with work."

"So what have you been up to? Patch things up with Scott yet?"

Stiles practically growled. "No, I don't actually want to talk to him right now. It's childish, I know,
but he hurt me. So, I thought I'd give him a taste of his own medicine. We'll get there."

"Things still going good with Alex?"

Stiles laughed. "No, I dumped him a couple weeks ago."

"And you didn't tell me?" He feigned shock and disgust. "I am hurt."

He winced. "Yeah sorry, man. Totally slipped my mind, man. It was better I did it then, rather than
let things go farther."

"What happened?"

Stiles ran a hand through his hair. "Is being sexually incompatible a legitimate reason for dumping
someone?"

"Um...I don't actually think it is."

"Well, too bad because that's what I'm going with."

Derek swallowed a large gulp of water. "Okay." His eyebrows furrowed in confusion. "I don't..."

"Incompatible personalities as well. He got too much out of bossing me around. Being ordered
around, does that even sound like something I'd like?"

"You let me boss you around."
He wagged finger at him. "Au contraire mon ami. No, no I don't. I take orders, but I totally call you on it if I think you're being a dick."

"Actually that's true."

"So like he was really nice when we first got together. The first time we had sex, he was so sweet. I mean, aside from the fact that I figured out that I'm not a fan of catching." Stiles paused and then smacked himself in the forehead. "I can't believe I just said that out loud. That was like a definite TMI moment, wasn't it?"

"S'fine." Derek screwed the cap back on his water and toweled off his sweat drenched face. "Any more detail than that though...it will cost you coffee and an apple fritter."

Stiles threw his head back and cackled. "Understood. Well anyway, after that it was like he expected me to be this passive guy, while he makes the decisions. And in sex? Fuck, don't even get me started. He wanted me to be a submissive little bottom and let him drill me into the mattress. There is nothing about that sentence that appeals to me. Come on. Me, submissive? Ha!"

"So yeah, when I asked if we could switch things up, just once...well that was a massive headache of a fight. I don't know, like he thought since he is gay he should be the authority on how our relationship should go. I told him he was being ridiculous. His response was to tell me I was just using him as my big gay experiment, and I obviously didn't know what I wanted. Seriously, come the fuck on. I knew I was also attracted to guys well before he and I started dating. Well, that was my breaking point. I told him to fuck off and cut him loose. I swear, Derek, just because I'm bisexual, it doesn't mean I'm fickle, or confused, or greedy. I just don't care what parts the person has or what they identify as. If I'm attracted to them, I'm attracted to them. So damn sick of the stereotype."

"I think, technically, that makes you pansexual."

"Well whatever. I'm pansexual then. That relationship would have become toxic pretty quick."

"That's not so bad then. I'd hate for you to end up in one of those relationships. Believe me, they suck."

He gave Derek a pained smile. "I know, but it was nice to be in a relationship for once. I just wish it would have been a good one. All those pack double and triple dates...it would have been fun to be able to go to one of those. Instead it's just our half of the pack that seems to be painfully single."

Derek winced. "Not entirely true. Peter has apparently been seeing some woman in Florida, although to what degree it's a healthy relationship, I haven't asked, not sure I want to know. I am torn between being happy for him and leaving a lengthy message on her voice mail about how he's a narcissistic psychopath. However, I am pretty sure Cora has a boyfriend. She doesn't tell me anything though."

"Ah, afraid you'll pull the older brother card and scare him off?"

He shook his head. "No, so long as he's not a hunter or non-pack wolf, she's pretty much safe from any guy, well physically at least."

"Well, Isaac is still pining after some mystery girl he refuses to acknowledge. So you and me really are the only ones without prospects."

With break time over, they continued their run. "At least you're not in a dry spell over a year."

"Ah, ah, ah. You can't pull that card. You did this to yourself. No one would have faulted you for a few random hook-ups."
"Well I did date two women who turned out to be killers."

"No, you just chose to live like a monk after Witchy Woman."

Derek stopped and doubled over with laughter. It took several minutes for him to contain himself. "That's what we're calling her now?"

"What? You don't like? I have other options for you to choose from. Unfortunately for you, I do not have access to the little movie presentation I made for it."

He glanced up at him. "You made a movie?"

"Oh yes indeed, my follicularly advanced friend. It was an attempt to distract myself from a biology assignment. Totally worth it. So let's see. There is Two-Face, Bad Teacher Blake, and my personal favorite: Threefold Bitch, but I thought that might be a bit much." Stiles offered Derek a shit-eating grin. "Too much?"

He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "No, it's perfect. Let's go with Threefold Bitch."

"You won't regret your choice, my friend. In polite company, we shall call her the TFB."

"Oooh, shall! How civilized." Derek grinned

"Without me, this world would be a miserable and colorless place, devoid of any humor and you know it. Your dry wit is lost to most people."

"Whatever you say, Stiles. How about this? When we both wind up with a decent girlfriend, boyfriend or whomever in between for you I guess, you know one who isn't a complete psycho, we'll have a one of those pack double dates."

"Sounds like an excellent plan, Derek. Anyway, what about you? How have you been?"

"More of the same. Actually, I've been seeing a therapist."

"Really? Using a page out of the How To Be A Better Alpha handbook?"

He gave him a light shove. "No matter how many times you try and convince me of the contrary, that book does not exist."

"Yet. I've been taking meticulous notes. Just you wait. It is going to revolutionize the concept of Alpha-dom."

Derek picked up a small twig and threw it him. "Sure it will."

"For how long?"

Hands still resting on his knees, he looked up at him. "Six months."

Stiles smacked him on the shoulder. "And you didn't tell me?"

"I didn't feel like broadcasting it. Private you know."

"Yeah, but I could have taken you out to dinner. Sort of a 'Congrats! You've finally admitted you have wounds that aren't healing and have decided to seek medical attention. We're all happy for you.' kind of thing."
"It felt like admitting a weakness, not exactly good for my alpha status, too easy to exploit."

"Exploit your weaknesses? Does that really sound like something I'd do? Come on, Derek. I thought we were friends. That's what we are right? I didn't misread our relationship like I do just about everything, did I, and I'm simply a human beta, nothing else?"

"No, we're friends. Truthfully, you're the only actual friend I have, and isn't that just pathetic? The having one friend part, not the my only friend is you part.."

Stiles' eyebrows raised so far on his forehead, it probably looked like they were about to float away.

"I mean it, Stiles. It's just..."

"Admitting you need help can be scary? Look, it's a good thing; it can only help you get better. Kinda like Tony and Dr. Melfi on The Sopranos. She helped him be a better mafioso..." He scratched his chin. "Actually, that's debatable. But in your case, it can only help. Get that weight off your chest, Big Guy, and maybe everyone else can see what I've been trying to say: That you're a good person under that gruff exterior."

Derek decided to sit down on the ground of the preserve, patting the ground next to him. "Actually, It's part of my homework for next week. Dr. Simonson told me I should talk to you about all my baggage. I mean if you're up for it. I'll buy dinner if you are."

He flopped down next to him, stretching out on his back. "Of course man. That's what friends are for. I'd be a pretty shitty friend if I said no."

"Well physical injuries heal, and we don't get sick."

"Dude, I know that." He shrugged at Derek's eye roll. "Yeah I know. Don't call you dude."

"Strangely enough as I found out, that little perk doesn't apply to mental illness. So not only am I, apparently, suffering from clinical depression, the medication I was prescribed don't do a fucking thing. Given all the crap I've been through, would it surprise anyone that I'm depressed?" Derek picked at the sparse blades of grass in front of him and told Stiles all about his family, Paige (What the kid didn't know already, that is), and Kate before finishing up with once again putting a name to what she did to him.

"He's right you know, your therapist. Continuing to repress and deny it, is only going to eat away at you. Now, my job as apparently your only friend, is to keep that from happening, because let's face it, that would totally suck like a black hole if you kept getting pulled under by her. So, now that you've admitted what Kate did, are you willing to talk about what TFB did?"

"What do you mean?"

Stiles took a deep breath. This was something he'd wanted to talk to Derek about for over a year, but could either never work up the courage to discuss or could never find the right words. "Well, for starters, she knew she would need help with the Alpha Pack. From the moment she knew you were a werewolf, an alpha at that, one willing to sacrifice his body to save a seemingly innocent woman, she manipulated you. When you showed up at the school looking for help, presumably you were looking for one of the pack to get you to Deaton's, but we were away on a cross country meet... every single one of us. So she continued playing the part. Derek, anyone with half a brain and a basic knowledge of psychology could see you were suffering from skin hunger. You may not have liked being touched, but that doesn't mean you weren't starving for it. Not to mention you seem to have a near textbook definition of fearful-avoidant attachment style. You'd lost Erica, you were being threatened..."
by Deucalion, and Cora wanted nothing to with you. Your own family, your blood, rejected you. Derek, at that point you needed attention like diabetic needs insulin, and TFB used you, offering affection and physical contact to get what she wanted. She needed you alive, and she was willing to do whatever it took to keep you that way."

Derek clenched his jaw muscles. "You talk about this like I had no idea what I was doing."

"Yeah? Did you want it? In the state you were in, were you lucid enough that you could have told her to stop if you didn't? At best, what she did was questionable consent. At worst, sexual assault. You were practically incapacitated. Ever hear of diminished capacity? You were not in the condition to consent. For all you know she magically wolf whammied you. So did you want to sleep with her?"

"I... I don't...I don't know. I know I didn't want to die."

"Scott wasn't healing from his injuries either. You know what we did? I'll give you a hint; we didn't have sex with him. We stitched him up, and told him he would get better. So he did. TFB had been a pack emissary; she recognized what was going on, but she didn't give you that option."

Derek swallowed hard. It had been difficult enough to admit what Kate did. Now realizing he'd been a victim...again, was almost too much. "You didn't seem to see it that way when you were yelling at me that night in the hospital."

He sighed. "What I said was wrong. I was desperate to find my dad, worried I would end up an orphan with no one to take care of me, and I threw it in your face. I hadn't pieced together you and Kate. All I saw was a relationship. After we defeated the TFB, I figured out just how much older she was than you. I shouldn't have said that; I was wrong. It was totally victim shaming, which believe me, has been eating away at me since then. I'm sorry."

"You know I wasn't even mad at you."

"Next time you're interested in a woman, run her by me first."

Derek scoffed. "I don't need your approval before I date someone."

"No, of course you don't. I wasn't implying that you did. I'm a pretty good judge of character. You're my friend, and I don't want to see you get hurt this way again. I'm already furious that it's happened to you at all, let alone twice."

Derek's lip quivered, but he nodded. "You know, you're going to make a great psychiatrist some day. You ever think about your area of expertise?"

"I often think I'd like to work with children, but I don't think I'd be able to handle hearing about abuse and neglect."

"Don't let that deter you." He squeezed Stiles' leg. "You're good at this."

"I'll keep that in mind. So this depression thing, you can call me anytime if you need someone to talk to. I don't care what time it is, one in the morning, four in the morning. Given what I know about what happened in New York, Laura, and after Boyd... I'm still holding you to your promise to not do something stupid." Derek nodded. "See, now you're not alone." Stiles patted him on the back, but too lazy to sit up, he couldn't really reach. His aim missed its target, and Derek looked over his shoulder at him, cocking an eyebrow. Stiles burst out laughing, his face bright red in embarrassment. "Man, I'm sorry. That was supposed to be a pat on the back not some poor attempt at an ass grab. Please don't rip out my throat with your teeth."
Derek, laughing, reclined and joined him on the ground. "You really are like a walking disaster sometimes aren't you?"

"Pretty much." He sat up and threw an arm around Derek's shoulders. "Thanks for trusting me with this."

"And thanks for listening, and actually speaking the truth. You know I wouldn't ever actually rip your throat out, right?"

"Totally! Slam me into walls and smack me in the back of the head sure, but tear out my throat, no I know you wouldn't." He winked

"Hey now! I haven't slammed you into a wall in years."

"Don't think I've forgotten it though."

"And don't think I have forgotten you liked it."

Stiles scoffed. "Low blow, Asshole, but true nonetheless. Anyway, so dinner? You want to hit that new taco bar?"

"Race you back to the cars?" He jumped up and raced away.

"Hey! You're cheating!" Stiles called as he ran after him. "No, wolf speed!" Not that Derek listened any--werewolves, sometimes they were cocky bastards.

Chapter End Notes

Translation:

Au contraire mon ami- On the contrary, my friend.
Failed Peace Offering (But It's a Start)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Scott nervously fumbled with the giant cup of coffee and take-out container of Stiles' favorite banana chocolate chip pancakes and scrambled eggs from Sandy's Diner, or as it was more commonly called, the #3 combo. His knuckles rapped softly on Stiles' bedroom door.

A few moments later, Stiles grumbled from within. "Dad, I have an alarm clock, and you're an hour early."

Scott knocked again.

"Just go away and let me sleep for the love of God!"

Not willing to give up, he tried once more.

"Oh for crying out loud, Dad! Whatever it is; I didn't do it! Blame Scott for once!"

Scott waited patiently, affecting his trademark puppy dog eyes in the meantime. A loud thud reverberated through the door.

"What in the mother-fucking, dickwad, damn, shit! Filho da puta! I don't remember leaving that there."

The door flung open, and Scott tried not to laugh at Stiles' pajama shirt as he finished threading his arms through the sleeves (Really, a T-Rex slap fight? Who wouldn't laugh? And since when didn't he wear a shirt to bed?)

"Yes, I know Scott. There's a pack meeting tonight. You could have been less rude about it, and waited until school. At least Derek has the decency to text at a reasonable hour when he calls a meeting. Yeah, you heard that right, Scott. Derek 'I push people into walls for fun' Hale, is more considerate than you. Tell me what the hell is so important you had to wake me up an hour early!"

He looked down at his foot. "And now my foot's bleeding. Foda se!"

Contrite, Scott pulled the breakfast into view.

"I don't accept bribes. You'll have to do your own homework."

"It's a peace offering, Stiles."

Stiles shot daggers at him. "Little late don't you think? Three months, three fucking months since you tossed me out of your pack, and despite my numerous attempts to get an explanation, you have pretty much ignored me."

"What attempts?"

He threw up his hands in disgust. "Text, call, email, power-point, and video...not to mention I sent you a certified letter, which let me tell you, the post-office looked at me like I was more insane than
usual when I sent the letter to my own house."

"I didn't get it."

"You had to sign for it!" He walked out of his room and into Scott's, returning not even a half minute later, waving the envelope in his face. "What do you think this is? You're too young for a Jury Duty notice."

"Um..."

Stiles pinched the bridge of his nose. "You know what, forget it. You didn't get my communiques before. Fine. Now get the fuck out of my room!" He snatched the food from Scott and shut the door in his face.

"Stiles, come on. Let me in!" He didn't wait for an answer, instead opting to just open the door and barged in finding Stiles in the middle of changing for school.

"I said get out!"

Scott stared at his shirtless chest. "When did you get those?"

"They're called muscles, jackass. Stronger muscles are what you get when you workout."

"I get that but, I mean, you hide under all these layers pretending to be fragile."

"No, I wear all those layers because I like them. Just like Isaac and his ridiculous scarf fetish, which for the life of me, I will never understand. We live in Northern California not North Dakota." He pointed to his computer chair. "Sit down and start talking before I literally throw you out of my room."

"Look, I didn't realize it bothered you so much."

"Wow, man, I mean seriously, just...wow, you really are obtuse. You kicked me out of your pack, Scott! Why the hell wouldn't I be upset? I have saved your ass so many times, well not as many as I have saved Derek's but that man is a walking accident waiting to happen. I'm the one who taught you how to control your shift! We're brothers."

"I only did it because I thought you would be able to handle it. Jackson wouldn't have liked it if Danny or Lydia left, and I couldn't send Allison to Derek."

"So I was expendable? Gee, that makes me feel loads better. What I don't understand, is why you both decided to consolidate the packs, but keep control over half of it each?"

"There are two alphas; it was the only way."

"Um, no it wasn't." He brandished his fork at him. "I offered a completely viable solution, which no one seemed to listen to. Oh God, this is like Matt and the Glen Capri all over again. I said, back in December mind you, if you are forming one big pack, then we need to assimilate as such. You and Derek needed to divvy up responsibilities and lead the pack together, because this halfsies stuff was...total bullshit. Once again, nobody listened to me." He ran a hand through his messy mop of hair. "I swear I need to buy a megaphone and a blinking light to wear on my hear when I talk to you all."
"Okay, I get it. Our plan was terrible. What do you expect me to do? It's not like Derek would go along with that plan."

"Excuse me? He was totally on board with that idea."

Scott furrowed his brows. "What? You sure hang out with him a lot."

"Like every day, Scott. He's my alpha and all, and as homoerotic as that sounds, I swear it is not a euphemism. Because, he is so not my type. Okay well he is a little, but that's a topic for another day."

He chuckled. "So you like Derek?"

"That's what you took from that! No, I don't like him like him like that. He's hot. That's all. Would totally jump on that if given the chance, but I don't like him romantically."

"Says the seventeen year old virgin."

"Whatever you say Scott." Stiles gave him a sly grin, before shoveling a forkful of pancakes into his mouth.

"No! And you didn't tell me?"

"Well you weren't exactly talking to me, so why the fuck should I have? I didn't tell you about number two either. Now get out of my room so I can finish eating in peace."

"Number two?!?! No, you can't leave it at that."

"I can and will. Number one had a nice rack, and number two, well he had a nice ass, but was a total mistake...the whole relationship was."

"You were dating someone? Wait, a he?" He shook his head. "What happened to us?"

"You did, Scott, you happened to us. End of story. See you at school." He ushered Scott out of the room and shut the door, more than a little pleased at the embarrassed and repentant look on his face as he left.

Scott called through the wood of the door. "So we're good right?"

"No! You have so much more atoning to do! But I will consider this a baby step in the right direction."

Well done Stilinski. Well done. Stiles finished his breakfast in peace, feeling happier than he had in weeks.

Chapter End Notes

Translation for Portuguese used in this chapter:
Filho da puta - son of a bitch
foda se- fuck! (As an interjection not an action)

Once again- not fluent in Portuguese (In this case it's supposed to be European Portuguese not Brazilian). Feel free to correct me if I am incorrect.
Derek towel dried his hair after his shower, and Molly's ears perked up when he walked into the room. After the first day where she sat on the counter while he showered, she hadn't so much as gone in the bathroom during one since. Hell, the cat seemed to practically turn around when he changed, almost as if she were put-off by human nudity. It was just another peculiar, but not otherwise bothersome behavior for Stiles to add to his growing list of reasons why Molly was not a normal cat.

"Good morning, Sunshine. I know I scared you last night. I didn't mean to. Just, sometimes I shift during the really bad dreams. Can I see your leg?" He gingerly picked her up from the bed and inspected her hind leg where he'd accidentally scratched her with one of his claws. When he'd woken up, panting and covered in sweat from the nightmare, he smelled fresh blood. Initially, he thought he'd clawed through his hands or scratched himself, but upon inspection found no dried blood on himself. That only left Molly, who still refused to sleep anywhere other than curled up next to him, and his stomach dropped like a stone when he realized he'd hurt her. Luckily, the scratch was only superficial. It didn't make him feel any better though.

Relief flooded through his veins to see the wound much smaller than he thought the night before. He kissed her head. "I'm so sorry, Bambolina. Next time you hear me having a nightmare, go hide. Capisce? I don't want you to get hurt worse."
Horrific dreams had plagued him non-stop ever since his conversation with Stiles regarding Jennifer. They weren't even about her...or Kate. Half the time, he didn't even know what went on in them. Hazy swirls and shapes, invisible demons made of only air haunted him at night. Not once, could he see what attacked him, but he knew how the nightmares made him feel. Every night he woke up convinced he was suffocating, pawing at his chest in an attempt to fling off whatever had been assailing him in his sleep. It's like talking about his failed relationships, and about the fire to someone outside the pack, turned his subconscious against him.

He needed a few days away from Beacon Hills. Everything bad that ever happened in his life, occurred in this stupid town. Some days, like today, he couldn't remember why he even stayed. He was an alpha, he could build a new pack somewhere else. If only things were that easy.

In due diligence, he'd found a hotel near the beach in Eureka which would allow him to bring Molly. "Do you want to take a little trip? I don't work today, and my homework is done for class next week. What do you say?" He grabbed his phone and texted Stiles.

To Stiles:

08:11

Taking wknd trip. Need 2 clear my head. I promise I won't do something stupid. Don't worry about me. Only contact me for pack 911. Will msg u when I get there.

Then, he shut off his ringer. He made short work of packing a small duffel and gathering Molly's favorite toys and "blanket". From his hall closet, he grabbed one of the disposable litter boxes and what remained of the box of litter. Once he had her dishes and food packed into a cooler, he turned to her. "Okay, I'm going to load up the car. I promise I'll be back for you. Sit tight."

Like understanding him took no effort at all, she rolled onto her back, craning her head towards him. "Rrrowwe, rrrowwe."

Derek obliged and rubbed her tummy, and a rough tongue licked his hand in appreciation. He adjusted her necklace, as Lydia called it. The ribbon had been replaced by a beaded bracelet she'd found in a thrift store near the high school, in which the elastic had been stretched out. The purple beads contrasted nicely with the pink silk flower, and Lydia declared Molly a classier lady as a result.

Packing the car took no time at all, and soon they both sat in the Camaro. Molly looked as pleased as could be lying on her blanket. Not so much a blanket as Derek's fluffiest towel, the one she'd dragged from his bathroom that first day and curled up in to nap. The whining she made when he tried to wash it convinced him to not even try again.

He looked over at her. "So pretty lady, we're going to the beach. Not sure if you've ever been to the beach, probably not. It's going to be kind of a long drive," he reached behind her seat and shook the litter box he'd set up on the floor, "but I made you up a box back here. We'll stop for lunch and take a walk halfway. Sound good?"

"Meow."

"Once again, I am taking that as a yes. It's my turn to pick the music. So I don't want to hear any complaints about it, capisce?"

"Meow."
Smiling, he turned on the music. "This is another group Laura liked a lot. I know what you're thinking. Why do I listen to music my sister liked when I prefer Alt and Garage Rock. Well, I'm not sure what was going on in that dream last night, but I remember hearing her voice trying to tell me everything would be fine. It didn't help. I guess I just need to feel close to her today." The sounds of Egypt Central filled the car as a comfortable silence fell over them, and for about seventy miles neither of them made a peep aside from Derek's occasional, albeit extremely off-key, singing.

"You know I wanted to be a teacher, back when I still thought I could, back when I still had dreams, back when I wasn't what I am now. I was never supposed to be this, an alpha. It was always supposed to be Serena, but when everyone died, it became Laura's responsibility.

"Then Peter happened, and I try to forgive him, to be civil. I keep telling myself he wasn't in his right mind, that the fire damaged his human side allowing the wolf to take over, but she's still dead. Every time I see him walking around, it's like a knife to the heart. It hurts; it hurts so fucking much sometimes it's hard to breathe. For six years, Laura was everything I had. After the fire, I was a wreck. She saved me.

"I found some witches who sold me a fifth of wolfsbane vodka, and I drank most of it. I wanted out; I couldn't live with the guilt and the pain of the loss. The only reason she found me in time at all was because her evening class was cancelled. I was still conscious at that point, but not coherent enough to talk to her. When she asked what I was thinking the next day, I lied. I told her I didn't realize how drunk I was, that I drank because I missed them all so much. I mean it was partly true.

"She either believed me, or wanted to believe me so badly she never pressed the issue. I don't know, maybe she just couldn't deal with my grief while she was busy mourning too. I've only told Stiles about that night, that I did it on purpose. God if others knew, the pack would be in danger. Do you think I want to be known as that suicidal alpha? It's why he always tells me on my bad days not to do anything stupid." He sighed.

"Anyway, I miss her like crazy. She was my best friend, only friend really. Half the time, I wish I had let Scott kill Peter the way he'd wanted to. I would still be the happy little gamma I should have been. I can't even bring myself to tell the pack about gamma wolves. That they're just the drones, not good enough for leading or being second, only a hair better than omegas. The rest of the time... I guess I'm growing into the role. The thing is, Scott became this True Alpha, and he hates my shoot first questions later approach. Just sometimes, he seems reluctant to do what is needed, even if it is an unpleasant solution. Sometimes, you have to take out the threat right away. You don't have time to analyze. Neither one of us is all that rational, and we need an alpha like that. One who can assess situations and strategize in the blink of an eye."

"Purrr." She climbed onto the console, nuzzling his arm.

"How are we going to build a strong pack that way?" He rubbed his face. "Fuck, I wish Stiles would take the bite. He'd be a fantastic wolf." The car pulled to a stop at a gas station. "I'll see if I can find you a treat. I'll be right back."

When he returned to the car, he placed an empty hotdog boat on the passenger seat and spooned some plain Greek yogurt and a small handful of blueberries in it. What remained of the berries, he dumped into the container of yogurt before emptying almost half a jar of honey into it. After a quick stir, he tasted his concoction before deciding that he needed more honey. "All done, Pretty girl? Come on. Let's go for a quick walk." Yogurt in one hand, leash in the other, they explored the small rest area adjacent to the station. "Since you've been such a good girl, I'm not even going to lock the leash. Go ahead, have fun with twenty-five feet of cord."

"Meow" She chirped.
After he realized the first leash he purchased was way too short. Molly was a well-behaved cat; she deserved more leeway. So, he'd gone back to the pet store and bought the extra long retractable leash, the kind reserved for dogs over one-hundred pounds. This, in turn, made walks so much more enjoyable for both of them, even if the people in his neighborhood liked to laugh at the sight of a cat on a leash.

Molly seemed to delight in chasing leaves as they blew across the ground, jumping on several and ripping them to shreds. A moth in the corner of her eye caught her attention. She stalked it for several minutes before pouncing. Pleased with herself, she trotted over to where Derek sat on a park bench with the moth in her mouth. She jumped up onto the table and dropped the insect beside him as if to say, 'See how good I did. Look what I brought you.'

"Thanks, Molly." He said with a mouthful of yogurt.

"Rrrowwe, rrrowwe!" She hopped around the table like a little bunny while he finished his snack.

"Shall we?" They headed back to the car, and once on the road again, he found himself lost in his head, thinking about his sister...

...Derek walked into the apartment he shared with Laura and set his backpack on the kitchen table. He'd spent the day in the main branch of the New York researching and filling out graduate school applications. By the time he made it back to his place in Long Island City, he was dead on his feet. There had been an incident on the 7 train just before the train was scheduled to leave Grand Central Station. Cops were called, and no one was allowed off the train. "Hey Laura, I'm home." The nighttime Manhattan skyline shone across the East River from their windows, creating a stark contrast against the January night sky. "Hey what do you want to do for dinner? I'm starving."

In a flurry of activity, Laura rushed into the living room, her long, dark brown hair whipping behind her. "Already ordered Indian. Should be here in half an hour. Ordered you the chicken Tikka Masala. Well, two orders and the garlic Naan with that mint coriander chutney you like." She disappeared out of the room just as quickly as she entered so quickly that she'd become a blur of dark hair and pink sweater.

"I applied to Columbia today." He called out as he sifted through the mail, which his sister had conveniently forgotten to get...again. Bill, bill, junk, bill, ooh a new cupcake place, buy one get one! Sold... what in the- "Hey Laura, apparently AARP wants to offer you homeowner's insurance." He fought back a chuckle.

"Sure they do. Pretty sure I'd need to own a home and age a few years or thirty to qualify. But, it's nice to know they care." She said as she carried a basket of dirty laundry into the living room. Derek couldn't keep back the laughter this time and broke out in a fit of giggles, one that took several minutes to contain. "Wow, haven't heard you laugh like that in a while. Are you okay?"

"Well, I got detained on the train with about seventy other passengers, potential witnesses to a knife fight which resulted in paramedics being required. I, of course had my headphones on, you know, dead to the world. So I didn't see a thing. Instead I got to sit there," he cracked open a beer, "waiting forever for the cops to get statements and send us on our way. Well minus the parties involved obviously. I have been starving since three-thirty."

She took his face in her hands, squishing his cheeks together. "You poor baby."
He swatted away her hand. “Stop that.” His eyes fell on a paper sitting on the kitchen counter. The picture on it showed a dear with a spiral carved into it lying dead on the ground. As he read over the paper, his eyes widened. "Where did you get this?"

“That,” she snatched it from his hands, "is not your concern."

“But it's in Beacon Hills.”

“I know that. I can read too, Der.”

Warily, he watched her rush about the room, hastily throwing clothes and other things into a suitcase. "Going somewhere?"

"Obviously."

"Where?"

"My aren't you nosy today! It's our family's old territory. It's my job to check it out. I need to make sure another pack isn't going to move in and cause trouble."

He dropped his beer bottle. "No, it's not! All that town holds now is a burned out shell of a home and a lot of bad memories. Please don't go back there.

"You say it as though they ran us out of town. We left on our own."

"After hunters destroyed our lives. Now you just want to go back there, and do what? Investigate?"

She rolled her eyes at him. "It's probably nothing. I'll be gone a week, two tops. Always so dramatic, little brother."

"And what if you aren't?" As she continued packing, a sick feeling settled into the pit of his stomach. He looked over the printout several times. "Someone did this because they wanted to start something. Did you stop to think that it might have been done solely to lure us back, to lure you back? What if the Argents are trying to finish the job? Laura, please, I don't feel good about this."

"Derek, you never feel good about anything. I have to make sure they stay away from Peter, and it's been too long since either of us have visited their graves. Maybe, I just want a little vacation from babysitting my twenty-one year old brother who still-" She stopped herself when she saw the hurt look in his eyes.

"I'm sorry I've been such a horrible burden. I'll keep it all to myself from now on.” He didn't say another word and walked into his room, quietly shutting the door. In that moment, all he felt was fear. Crushing fear that threatened to choke him. He pressed his palms to his eyes. I am not going to cry. I am not going to cry. Instead, he pushed open the sliding glass door to the balcony. There was a reason he didn't fight his sister for the en-suite bathroom, and his own door to the balcony was it. Light snow had begun to fall since he'd arrived home. He folded his arms against the railing and rested his chin on them, staring across the river. He stayed out there so long, he actually began to shiver, and those pesky tears he fought in vain not to shed, froze to his cheeks. Eventually, he heard the living room's door to the balcony slide open, but he couldn't bring himself to look at her. Knowing she actually felt stuck here because of him, just made it all worse.
"Hey."

"Why didn't you ever tell me I was trapping you here? I'm a big boy; I'll learn to be okay by myself. Contrary to what you think, I'm not incapable of taking care of myself."

"I didn't say that."

"You kind of did. The implication was there all the same regardless."

Laura walked over to her brother. "I'm sorry. I didn't think." She rubbed his shoulder. "I know you're trying. Come here." She pulled him into a hug. "Don't worry about me, Derek. I'll just pop in for a few days, visit their graves, see Peter and come back. It's our family. What would you do?"

He sniffled into her shoulder. "But I'm your family too." He held her tighter. "You have all these friends; you're never alone. But me? I'm not like you. What will I have left if something happens to you? I'll have nothing, no one left who cares about me. Don't go back there, please. For once, just let that town be someone else's problem."

"I wish it were that easy, Der. But I have to do this." She kissed his forehead and went back inside.

No longer feeling like socializing, he grabbed his dinner, retreating to his room to eat alone. Somewhere between dinner and the second period of the Rangers game, he fell asleep. He didn't even hear his sister coming in to kiss him on the forehead, telling him she'd be back before he knew it. If only she'd known how wrong she was...

... He didn't even get to say goodbye to her, give her a hug before she left, tell her he loved her and that would forever be something he regretted. Derek pulled the Camaro into the hotel, and after a quick check in, he unloaded his things, before driving down to the beach. Molly had a blast digging in the sand and chasing bugs.

There was something so calming about watching the waves roll, new ones ready to take their place as they broke on the shore. He could almost forget about the demons in his head...almost.

Chapter End Notes

Translation for Italian used in this chapter:
capisce- do you understand
bambolina- baby doll (term of endearment)
They Keep Me Locked Up In This Cage (Can't They See It's Why My Brain Says Rage?)

Chapter Notes

Chapter title comes from Metallica's "Welcome Home (Sanitarium)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V6Dfo4zDduI

I see our freedom in my sight
No locked doors, no windows barred
No things to make my brain seem scarred

Sleep, my friend, and you will see
That dream is my reality

Yawning, Stiles poured his dad and Melissa a cup of coffee, before indulging in some himself. When John grabbed for the creamer cow, he snatched it away from his dad's reach just in time. "No, no half & half! There is skim milk in the fridge." He gave Melissa a generous splash of cream. "Here you go, Mel. Two sugars right?"

She smiled. "Thanks, Sweetie."

"Why does she get the good stuff? This," John held up the jug of skim milk, "tastes like chalky water."

"Because your doc said to cut back on fat & cholesterol, that's why." After a good long sip of his coffee, Stiles went back to preparing breakfast, longing to be back in bed. He served some bacon, eggs and pancakes to Melissa. "And for you, dad, egg whites, turkey bacon and whole wheat toast."

"You can be a real slave driver sometimes, you know that?" John tried to steal one of his fiancée's pancakes, but she smacked away his hand.

Before he was able to help himself to a short stack and a wholly unhealthy amount of bacon, the doorbell rang. "It's okay, Dad. I'll get it."

"Who would be ringing at 8:00 a.m.?"

Stiles opened the door. "Hey Derek. Come on in. Just finished making breakfast. You want some?"

"No, I already ate, thanks." The alpha inhaled. "I would love some coffee though."

He looked down to see Molly leading the way. "You have her leash trained? How in the world did you manage that?"
Derek scratched his chin and yawned. "Not actually sure. I bought the harness and the leash with the anticipation that it would take forever, but she's like a natural at it."

"You Missy, are one strange kitty." Stiles scooped Molly up in his arms and unhooked the leash. "But you're such a good girl."

"Thanks so much for watching her. Isaac was going to be home this weekend, but scheduled all his college visits next week. He left last night, because the flight to L.A. was cheaper." Derek handed him a small cooler and duffel bag. "So there is a disposable litter box in the bag. I would set it up in your bathroom, so no litter gets on the carpet. There are a couple of her favorite toys and her blanket. It's the towel. Don't try to wash that towel; she'll get pissy. All her food is in the lunchbox. She gets one bag twice a day, but she already ate this morning. The little containers are treats. She likes blueberries and plain popcorn. So if she's being a good girl, you can give her those. I also put a small scratching post and the no scratch spray, but I don't think you'll need it. She's good about only scratching the post. Haven't had a problem yet."

Stiles cradled her and rubbed her tummy. "That's because she is a sophisticated lady, Derek. And sophisticated ladies don't destroy their domiciles."

"What is that?"

He put the cooler in the fridge. "It's a cat, Dad. We talked about this. Derek is going to visit Cora this weekend and asked if I could pet-sit. In fact, you actually said it was fine."

John smacked himself in the forehead. "I thought that was next weekend. I agreed to watch that German Shepherd Parrish has been fostering. He'll be over in twenty minutes."

"Well they'll just have to get along."

"Or the dog will eat her alive."

Derek's eyebrows shot up. "What?"

"Easy there, Wolfman Jack. Molly's going to be fine. I'll wear her around in my backpack if I have to. Trust me." He held up Molly in front of his father. "Look at this adorable kitty. How can you say no to her sweet little face?"

Melissa took her from Stiles. "Oh aren't you just precious!"

John shook his head at his family's infantile tones and went back to the crossword puzzle in the paper. "Don't take this the wrong way, Derek, but you don't strike me as a cat person."

"I'm not. Molly kept showing up at my house. Eventually, I gave up ignoring her. She's well behaved, and doesn't seem to want to claw my eyes out."

"And we're counting that as a win." Stiles held up his hand. "Come on, man. Don't leave me hanging." When Derek high-fived him, he grinned. "She's not well behaved, Derek. She's a saint. Seriously Dad, this cat acts the least like a cat I've ever seen. Still not convinced she's an ordinary cat."

Derek opened the cabinet above the coffee maker. "Can I borrow a travel mug? I'll bring it back when I pick her up."
"Sure. Mine's in the dishwasher. All your favorite coffee fixings are in the fridge."

"You stock my favorites at your house? I don't know if I should be touched or concerned." When he opened the dishwasher, Derek stared at the top rack for quite a while before picking up the mug, waving it in Stiles' face. "What is this?"

He smirked while enjoying another sip of coffee. "That would be my Hello Kitty travel mug."

"Okay let me rephrase the question. Why do you have a Hello Kitty coffee mug?"

"Because I am a 21st Century kid who likes to drink coffee out of a Hello Kitty cup. But hey, it's black like your soul." Derek scowled at him. "Just kidding. It was a white elephant gift, but seeing as I dropped my Mets mug and broke it this week, this is my backup until Amazon delivers my new one." He watched his friend dump almost a cup of sugar, a healthy splash of cream, and not one, not two, but three shots of Hazelnut syrup into the mug before topping it with a cloying amount of Redi Whip. "On behalf of coffee drinkers everywhere, I am embarrassed by the way you take yours. Would you like some coffee with all that sugar. I swear; it's like watching you drink your way into a diabetic coma."

"Gee thanks. Love you too buddy." Derek clapped him hard on the back.

"Don't be an asshole. It's not allowed before 09:00 a.m."

Without missing a beat John scolded, "Language."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. Go on, get out of here. Go drive for eight hours only to be dragged along to some college party where you will frighten everyone with your eyebrows and death glare: Patent Pending."

Derek rubbed Molly's head, scratching behind her ears. "Don't let that dog boss you around. You show him who's the alpha."

"Go. She'll be fine. Drive safe. Give Cora a hug for me."

He practically had to push Derek out the door and returned to his breakfast.

"Care to actually chew your food, son?"

"I' a c'oowig my foo'." Stiles said with a mouthful of pancakes. He managed to scarf down his pancakes in record time and went back for seconds. In a span of three minutes tops, he'd devoured the rest of breakfast, save for the plate he'd put in the microwave for Scott.

"You sure you haven't been turned into a werewolf without your knowledge?"

"Positive, pretty sure it's another growth spur." John rolled his eyes, muttering to himself regarding one of his clues on his puzzle.

"Honey, you're talking to yourself again."

"Sorry. I'm stuck on this one."
"What's the clue?"

"Cymbal maker Aved-"

"Zildjian. That's Z-I-L-D-J-I-A-N." Stiles topped off his coffee when he saw Molly jump off the table and sprint for the door. "Dad, I think Parrish is here." He grabbed the cat, her supplies, and his mug. "I'll be upstairs."

* * * * *

Later that afternoon, Stiles lounged in the living room with several other members of the pack. Scott and Allison were, for once, not trying to devour each other's faces, while Jackson, Danny and Lydia argued over what movie to play next.

"I don't care, I am not watching any movie adapted from a Nicholas Sparks movie!"

Stiles didn't look up from his book. "Luckily for you, I don't own any. Just pick something already."

"How about How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days?" Lydia browsed the DVD case.

"Why do you even have that, Stilin-"

"It's Melissa's." He turned a page. "All the movies on that shelf are hers."

"Danny, help me convince Jackson for one of Mama McCall's movies. I can't watch another action flick."

"Just because I'm gay, it doesn't mean I like chick flicks. Put in Goonies and call it a truce."

Stiles glanced up from his book as Molly started walking along the back of the couch, settling behind his head. "Trying to read?"

"Rrrowwe, rrrowwe."

"Well it's not all that much fun. Frankly, I don't get why everyone loves this damn book. It's one great big contrived plot device. 'Oh what's that you say, Dear? Revolutions are in vogue this spring? Well then, ready the carriage and pack a lunch. We're off to Paris. No, never you mind about those blasted guillotines.' Don't even get me started by the run-on sentences." Seeming to share his sentiments, Molly hopped down to the floor, curling up against the warm belly of the German Shepherd. The proverbial catfight his father had anticipated, not only didn't happen, but nothing even close to a territory dispute occurred. In fact, after a brief scenting session, they had waltzed around like best friends. "You really are a strange cat, Molly."

By the time the movie finished, Stiles was the only one still awake. It was only five, so he picked up his phone and ordered pizza, making sure to get everyone's favorite toppings, and a pizza each for Danny and himself, one for the ladies to share, and two each for Scott and Jackson. At times like this, he was glad Derek gave him 'Pack Money,' which no one else knew about, thankfully.

He'd sat too long in one position, but at least he finished that ridiculous book and the ending he
called about a quarter of the way into the book. Stretching his limbs, he climbed the stairs to his room to liberate a fifty from his secret hiding place. He glanced at his reflection in the mirror as he walked past. "Good God, I look horrible. I have got to start sleeping better." He figured he had a few minutes to dedicate to researching into what Molly could be if she wasn't just a well behaved regular cat.

When the doorbell rang, he clambered down the stairs to pay, offering the pizza man a thanks and a tip. "Pizza's here. Ladies, here is your veggie lovers plus chicken. Danny, your Hawaiian with extra hot peppers. Scott, two meat lovers plus mushrooms, and Jackson, your two Supremes. He took his buffalo chicken with bacon and settled back onto the couch. Oh wait; it's dinner time. "Come on furry friends." He whistled and the animals followed him into the kitchen. Once Molly's dish had been filled with one bag of her food, he set the ceramic bowl on the kitchen counter out of the dog's reach. "All right buddy, here is your much less appetizing blend of kibble." His tail wagged as Stiles poured two and a quarter cups of food into his dish, placing the metal bowl onto the floor.

As soon as he sat down after passing out cans of soda to everyone, both Jackson and Scott craned their heads towards the kitchen.

"Why does it smell like raw meat?"

"That's Molly's cat food. Derek makes it himself. It's mostly raw meat."

"He spoils that damn cat." Jackson grabbed another piece of pizza.

Lydia corrected him. "He probably thinks the canned and bagged food must taste as bad as it smells."

Scott grabbed The Expendables from the shelf and put it into the Blue Ray player, and everything seemed to be going great. Everyone chatted and ate their pizza in a companionable atmosphere. Scott and Stiles even traded bad jokes back and forth.

"Hey Stiles?"

"Yeah Scotty."

"How did the hipster burn his mouth?"

"I don't know. How?"

"He sipped his coffee before it was cool." Scott gave him a full dimpled grin.

Stiles chuckled. "Oh that's bad." He scratched his chin. "Okay, I got one. How do you stop strips of bacon from curling in the pan?"

"I don't know Stiles."

"Take away their little brooms."

It took Scott a few seconds to get it, and then he giggled, actually giggled, like a little kid. "See that's not too bad. I have another one. Why did the cowboy get a wiener dog?" He watched Stiles shrug. "To get a long little doggie."
"That's worse. What's the difference between ignorance and apathy?"

"No idea. Four letters?"

"Ha! I don't know, and I don't care." The punchline earned a squeak of amusement from Lydia. "Liked that one did ya?"

"I missed this, man." Scott wheezed as he tried to catch his breath after laughing uncontrollably for several minutes.

"Me too."

"We seriously need to hang out more. I've been a huge dick, major asshole, and I'm sorry. Want to catch a movie sometime this week, my treat? I know you're busy on Thursdays until seven."

"Aww Scotty, you know my schedule. I'm touched,"

Scott looked embarrassed. "Well not exactly. I just read the one you have taped to the outside of your bedroom door."

"Close enough. The 300 sequel is out, but that's about it."

He clapped him on the back. "That sounds excellent. How about Wednesday?"

"You know, just hearing you say the words 'I've been a huge dick,' totally counts as an apology. We're not back to before, getting there though. Sounds good." Stiles crumpled up his can. "Do you think I can make it to the recycling bin from here?"

"No."

"Yeah, me neither. Anyone else have trash?" He collected the garbage from dinner and walked outside just as Molly had returned to the living room.

She nuzzled up against Allison, then Lydia, and Scott. However, when she tried to get attention from Jackson, he shooed her away. "Oh come on, Jacks. Pet the cat. She's been such a good girl."

"I don't like cats, Lydia." Molly tried again to push her head against his palm. "Stop it; now go bother someone else." Still, the black cat persisted, drawing more annoyed responses from him with each attempt.

Stiles walked back into the room from taking the trash outside and a pit-stop for a piss break just as Jackson decided he'd had enough. Apparently weaving a figure eight around his legs as he stood to stretch was the last straw. "That's it!" He picked her up by the scruff of her neck and placed her in an empty box under the end table, closing her up inside it.

No sooner than he tucked the last flap under, she began yowling and thrashing wildly. Paws scratched at the walls of the box; her little claws desperately trying to dig a way out. After several seconds, in which Stiles stood completely frozen by the scene in front of him, the yowling turned to near feral hissing. This snapped him out of his temporary stupor. "That's cruel! Get her out of there!"

"Not until she stops freaking out. She'll scratch me."
"You're a werewolf! You'll heal. Let her out of there before she hurts herself!" Suddenly as if on cue, the box went silent. "Way to go Schrödinger!" Stiles jumped over the coffee table and snatched the box from Jackson. He carefully opened up the box. "Molly, come on out. He's just a big jerk. I won't let him near you again." When she didn't respond, he felt bile rise in his throat. "Scott come here." He pointed to the cat. "She's not dead is she?"

Scott listened carefully. "No, there's still a heartbeat. I think she's unconscious. She smells terrified though, and I think she scratched herself. There's a little bit of blood in the box."

"Check her out. See if you can pull some pain from her." Stiles, absolutely calm, walked over and socked Jackson in the jaw. For once, he didn't hurt his hand doing so, as he'd channeled all his available rage into the punch. "You ass! Derek is going to kill you."

At the sound of Molly's distress, the dog had returned to the room from Stiles' room, where he decided that he would be sleeping for the night. His lips curled back, and a low snarl rose in his throat.

"Jack-off, just get out of here! Go home!" Stiles waited until the offending party had left out the front door before approaching him. "Hey buddy; he's gone." The growling persisted. "Ladies, slowly back out of the room and into the kitchen. There should be room in the panty. Close yourselves in there." He cast his gaze downward when he looked at the angry canine. "Calm down, buddy. She's going to be okay." When normal shows of submission didn't get the dog to back down, he resorted to the be all end all of territory disputes. "Scott, a little help here."

Scott left Molly on the table just in time to flash his alpha eyes at him, because the dog looked right about to attack. He backed away with his tail between his legs before making his way over to the table to nudge Molly with his nose. She didn't move.

"I'm screwed. I made a promise to Derek that she'd be fine, which thanks to Douchecanoe, I have broken. He's never going to trust anyone again. He might actually kill me this time, after Jackson though. Maybe that will give me enough time to flee. I'll have to make sure my bags are packed and Roscoe is stocked with food. Oh God, I don't have enough money to run. I'm dead. So fucking de-"

Scott grabbed his shoulders and shook him. "Stiles, calm down. Derek isn't going to kill you. This was all Jackson's fault. Just take her up to your room and keep an eye on her. Her heartbeat is strong and she's still breathing. I couldn't find any serious wounds, only a little scratch on her cheek."

"What if she never wakes up? What the hell is he going to do with a catatonic cat?" He chuckled. "Good Joke, Stilinski." Gingerly, he scooped her up in his arms and retreated to his room; his panic had only slightly subsided.

* * * * *

Stiles rolled over and stretched out his limbs. He'd only managed to fall asleep at four in the morning because he couldn't keep his eyelids open any longer. Molly hadn't stirred at all, and he was beginning to fear the worst. The thought of becoming yet another person to have betrayed Derek's trust weighed heavily on him, even if it had been through no fault of his own.
He looked over at her blanket nest by his dresser. Yep, still sleeping, just like he wished he was. Checking his phone for the time (10:15), he noticed he had several text messages including one from Derek stating he hoped everything was going well with Molly. Well? Try the opposite of well, not well...or poorly. Yeah, that was a better word for it.

A t-shirt in hand, he checked on the cat before venturing downstairs in search of breakfast only to find Scott working on a paper at the kitchen table. "I went to breakfast with Allison this morning. I picked you up a #3."

In trademark fashion, he managed to trip over nothing while he tugged his shirt over his head, practically face-planting on the kitchen floor. Naturally, he played it off as a moment of 'Totally meant to do that,' not that Scott believed him. "Thanks for breakfast."

Scott didn't look up from his laptop. "Not problem. I figured since you make breakfast all the time, I should probably get some for you. You know, since I'm making up for being a jerkwad."

"Ah, so in the past twenty-four hours you have referred to yourself as a giant dick, huge asshole, and jerkwad. I appreciate your use of the last one; it makes me think of Futurama." He shoveled way too many scrambled eggs into his mouth than he could actually handle, and began coughing. After finally swallowing, he nodded. "So, in hindsight, that bite was too big."

"How's the cat?"

"I dunno, Man. Starting to worry about my near and imminent death."

Scott looked up at him. "I told you, he is not going to kill you. There might be a little maiming, maybe some mangling but no death. That's what I call an important distinction."

Stiles stared at him, mouth agape. "I am shocked, shocked and appalled, Scott McCall! I can't believe Allison told you about that." He took another bite of eggs.

"Relax dude. You'll be fine."

"Did you forget about the part where I am 170 pounds of fragile humanity and sarcasm without a supernatural ability to heal?" He tossed the empty takeout container into the trash just as the front door opened and in walked Danny.

"So, Lydia doesn't want to come today, but Jackson is still trying to convince her. I saw Allison's car at the gas station on the way over. You coming too, Stiles?"

"Coming where?"

"Bowling."

"Yeah....no. I need to make sure the cat is okay."

"She still out?"

He nodded. "Besides, this is the first I'm hearing about bowling." He looked over to see Scott wince. "Forget to mention it, did you?" He lightly smacked Scott on the back of the head on the way upstairs to shower. When he returned about ten minutes later, clad in purple skinny jeans, a grey baseball tee with purple sleeves and stripes, grey Chucks, and a black Mets ball cap worn
backwards, Danny burst out laughing. "What?"

"The next time you ask me if you are attractive to gay guys as a joke, I am going to tell you no. When you ask why, I will point to this outfit. I can't actually believe you own that pair of pants. They look like women's jeans."

Stiles glared at him. "Pretty sure they're not."

"Are you sure?"

"Positive. One I found them in the men's section of Macy's along with several pairs just like them, and last time I checked, women's pants were not sold by waist/inseam. Nice try, Danny." He opened the fridge for a Cherry Coke Zero and popped the tab. "And for you information, I never once asked that question as a joke. Call it research."

Allison furrowed her brows at him. "Why would you need or want to know that?"

Scott laughed, saving his work and closing the laptop. "Oh didn't I tell you? Yeah... he apparently bats for both teams. Found out a couple weeks ago."

"Both? Try all teams." Stiles winked. "Anyway, as much fun as it will be to discuss my sexual orientation further, I'd really rather not."

"What kind of twisted conversation did I walk into now?" Jackson shut the front door.

"One that is over." Stiles watched Scott's eyes cast towards the ceiling. "What?"

"Dude, I think the cat's finally conscious."

"Yeah? Oh thank you, I am not a dead man then."

Stiles moved towards the stairs just as a blur of black fur came rushing down the stairs, hissing and spitting as she did so. With laser like focus, she honed in on Jackson, jumped to the back of the sofa and lunged at him. The whole action took less than three seconds and caught the werewolf by surprise before he had a chance to react or even protect himself. She hit him in the groin, and he toppled over. Claws tore through his shirt and drew blood. "Someone get her off of me!" He snapped. Somehow, he managed to get back to his feet and throw the cat off him. That's where things got really strange. Molly leapt for him again, and in a flash, a whole lot more of her appeared. It seemed that she was no ordinary cat after all. She ran at him catching him him around the waist, threw him over her shoulder and body slammed him to the ground, her own body falling on top of him. Before anyone could process, the cat-- no woman, she was definitely a woman now who was more than definitely naked and had him in a choke hold.

"You put me in a box?" She growled. "I. have. spent. the. last. seven. months locked in a fucking cage while they tortured me! And you stuck me in a box!"

Finally Stiles, came to his senses and rushed into the laundry room to pull a pair of his sweatpants and a t-shirt from the dryer. When he returned he found Jackson still flat on his back, but the woman now straddled him, pinning him to the floor by the throat. She snarled at him with a set of fangs that definitely were not feline. Two long teeth on top and two on bottom, every time she snapped her jaws shut, they interlocked while they stuck out from her lips. Trying to avert his eyes, Stiles handed her the set of clothes.
"What are these for?"

"Um," He looked up at the ceiling, "you're naked. Thought you might want something to wear."

Her fangs shifted back to human teeth. "Of course I'm naked. You didn't think I'd wear clothes under my fur, did you?" She climbed off Jackson and pulled up the pair of sweats, which were too short.

"Sorry, no one in the house has pants longer than I do."

When she unfolded the shirt, she stared at it in disdain. "Do you have something else?"

"Why? I didn't give you my 'I Support Single Moms' shirt, did I?" She turned the shirt around to show him. "Hey, you should feel honored; I wouldn't let just anyone wear that. All Time Low is my favorite band."

"Then you have terrible taste in music."

Begrudgingly, she pulled the shirt on over her head, and finally Stiles could get a good look at her face. "Holy shit!" He took out his phone. "Hey Dad. I'm going to need you to come home. No, like right now. I assure you, neither Scott nor I burned the house down. I swear on my life the house is still standing." He listened for a few seconds. "Because we just found your missing woman."
Cambia shuffled behind the Sheriff as he led her to the admissions desk at Beacon Hills Hospital, her glazed-over expression, haunting. She'd been reluctant to ride in the cruiser to the hospital, stating she was not a criminal and didn't want to be treated like one. Only after he'd let her sit up front with him did she surrender. He would have been inattentive if he didn't notice her checking over her shoulder constantly, looking for the exits and flinching at every loud noise. When they'd passed by a transformer, and she heard the buzzing sound they make, she'd hyperventilated almost to the point of passing out.

The nurse at the front desk looked up and smiled at him. "Good Afternoon, Sheriff. What can I do for you? Here to see Melissa?"

"Well not exactly. I need to admit a patient as part of a criminal abduction case. Our sons found her hiding in the preserve. She needs an evidence collection kit done, and well Melissa usually handles those."

"Sure." She switched on the intercom, "Paging Nurse McCall to admissions. Paging Nurse McCall to admissions." When she released the com button, she motioned for Cambia to join her. "Can you follow me, Miss? We'll just get your information."

While the nurse led her to a desk, John waited. Melissa smiled at him as she approached the desk, kissing him on the cheek. "Hi John, come to bring me lunch?"

"No. I have a unique case for you." Unique being their code word for cases involving the supernatural. "Seems one of missing people showed up at the house. I need you to process her, and be present when I get her statement."

She nodded, and soon the three of them found themselves in a private hospital room. "Okay Cambia, I need you to change out of your clothes and into this gown. I'm assuming since I've seen those clothes before in the wash, those are not the clothes you were found in. Open the curtain when you're done." She pulled John out of the room. "How did you find her?"

"Derek found her half dead on the hood of his car. He took her to Deaton's, but that's all I know. The cat Stiles has been pet-sitting all weekend, because Derek is in San Diego visiting Cora, is this woman."

Melissa glanced over her shoulder. "Wait out here. I'll come and get you when I'm done." She shut the door behind her.
John took a seat, picking up the latest issue of *Sports Illustrated* from the table next to him.

"Hey Dad, is she okay?"

He looked up to see Stiles walking towards him looking at him earnestly. "She's in with Melissa."

"Stop looking at me like that. I did not invite trouble this time. We had no idea Derek's pet was actually a person. We thought at worst she was a familiar, at best an actual cat. How were we supposed to know?" The frazzled teen ran his hands through his hair. "I need to call Derek. Fuck, he's going to kill me." John furrowed his brows. "Yeah I know, language." He excused himself and found an empty room to call his friend.

"Hello?" He grumbled.

"Sorry, man. Did I wake you up? Wait a minute it's one in the afternoon."

"Stiles. Late night. Cora's friends like to party, and she insisted that I come out to the clubs with her. Then they dragged me to a house party. Fuck it was horrible. I can't tell you how many drunken co-eds felt the need to hit on me."

"Oh poor baby."

"Shut up, Stiles. I got home at six this morning. Can this wait a couple more hours?"

Stiles rubbed the back of his neck. "Well no actually it can't. It's about Molly. You need to come back. Meet me at the hospital."

"What?" Derek's voice bellowed through the line. "What happened to 'You can trust me, Derek. I'll take good care of your cat.'?"

"I did take good care of her. She even got along with the dog Parrish has been fostering. Apparently, I'm not the only one who volunteered to pet-sit this weekend. They were inseparable. I didn't anticipate Jackoff closing her up in a box because she rubbed up against his leg. How could I control that? She freaked the fuck out, and until about two hours ago had slept for eighteen hours straight."

"Why is my cat in the hospital? What did he do to her?"

"That's the thing, Derek. She's not a cat anymore. Some of the pack stopped by this morning, and as soon as Jackson stepped foot in the house, Molly came running down the stairs and jumped at him, clawed him to pieces. Then she turned into a person during the fray, used some kind of judo throw or something and put him in a choke hold."

"What?"

"Oh yeah, she took him down before he could even block an attack. You should have seen how uncomfortable he was being beat up by a naked woman."

"No, what do you mean she turned into a person?"

"Molly is actually that missing woman I had you look into."

"The hot one that smelled amazing?"
"Yes that one." Stiles' eyebrows shot up. "Wait, you didn't tell me she smelled good."

"Well she does. She smelled fantastic, at least to me, anyway. So she's in the hospital?"

"Yeah, they'll probably keep her for observation. Before she changed, she kept looking for you...wait a minute." He smacked himself in the forehead. "That's why she got along with the dog. That's her dog. I have to go liberate him from whatever deputy my dad passed him off on. Just get here as soon as you can." He hung up and tried to sneak away but his dad came looking for him.

"Stiles, can I get your help?"

"I need to go get her dog."

"He'll be fine. She asked for you."

"Why me?"

"Don't know. If you don't want to be present for her statement, since you're still a minor, I can tell her no. It's most likely going to be tough to hear. I'm your father, if you don't want to be in there, you don't have to be."

"I can do this." I think. If I can't handle hearing about this, then I sure as hell won't be able to deal with abused children as a specialty. When they entered the hospital room, he tried to look as confident as possible. "Can I ask you a quick question, Moll- I mean Cambia?"

She stared down at her hands as they knotted themselves in the bed sheet. The I.V. line for her saline drip fluttered with each motion. "You want to know why you?" Her voice was smaller than Stiles anticipated after hearing the way she yelled at Jackson earlier.

"Yeah."

"You're Derek's best friend, right?"

"Yeah. How do you know that?"

"He talked to me a lot when I was a cat. I understand language just fine in animal form. He trusts you, and I trust him. So... since he's not here..."

"You're trusting me."

She nodded. "I mean if you don't-"

He stopped her. "It's fine. I'll stay."

John opened his notebook and began. "You can tell me to stop at any time. First, can you tell us how they, and I'm assuming it's they because of your martial arts training, how did they manage to grab you?"

"I stopped for gas outside of town at that Shell station. I forget the cross streets. It was late, and there was only one other car there besides mine. I should have driven farther into town to find one that had an overnight attendant. This guy seemed to be watching me while he pumped his gas, but I didn't
think anything of it at the time. So anyway, I came to that downed branch. It didn't look that heavy, and I'm deceptively strong. I planned to move it out of the way and keep driving. I didn't even hear the truck pull up behind me. The same guy from the station grabbed me, and I got in a couple blows, but before I could unlock my mace, the other guy came out and stuck me with something. Next thing I know, I'm in the back of a delivery truck with three other people and two werewolves. They were all still passed out. I guess they didn't anticipate needed so much sedative for me. I'm sure they saw a woman and thought I'd be lighter than I am...well than I was. I don't know how long I was out, but when I woke up, we drove west-southwest for about fifteen minutes. Stopped at what I think were a few stop lights. Then drove for ten more minutes in the same direction, but with a right turn in there somewhere.

"They were not expecting me to be awake when we got there. It was an industrial building of some kind, like a warehouse, and there was nothing else around it. I wanted to run, but I was still sluggish. If I had more time, the sedative would have been completely out of my system, and they would never have caught me."

"How can you be sure?" John asked.

Cambia canted her head towards Melissa. "I know I saw her yesterday morning, but does she know about Derek's unique skills?"

"She knows all about things."

"I would have flown away. It's how I knew what direction we drove, my inner compass as a bird."

"They had you for seven months. This is probably a tough question for you to answer."

"You want to know what they did?" She swallowed hard.

"Remember, we can stop at any time."

"Well, they turned out to be a group of hunters who had a couple werewolves working for them."

"Why would werewolves help hunters kidnap other supernatural creatures?" John asked.

"Brainwashed, tortured into helping, offered something too good to pass up, or they figured if they helped then they wouldn't be hunted. You take away every sensible option some people have, and you'll be surprised what they do to survive. They thought I was a wolf, because I know I smelled like one."

"This group photo we found in your car, Derek thinks it's was your pack. His mother knew your alphas."

"Well they're all dead, all but me. Don't ask me to go into detail about that. I promise it's not relevant, and will only make things worse." She twisted her hands in her blanket. "Mostly they had wolves, shock collared in holding cells, but there were eight humans, an emissary, a witch, and me. I'm a shapeshifter, but they didn't ever figure that out. I only shift when I want to, but they kept the rest of us so drugged, I couldn't do it. They would constantly torture the wolves, but they left the rest of us alone for the most part. For a while anyway. After a while, they realized they had a bunch of collateral dead weight, and that's when things got bad. Three of the humans didn't last long after that. All of us were either part of a pack or had been recently involved with wolves. I don't think it was their plan to take anyone other than werewolves."

"They visited the weaker ones of us first. I was too much of a threat I think, even when drugged I
can still fight. They would taser us, not because it could teach them anything, but just for fun. I watched them chop limbs off wolves. In case you were wondering, they do not grow back. People, or curious hunters I guess, paid to do whatever they wanted with the wolves. I do mean anything. "Eventually, they started paying to use the rest of us. I'm not stupid; I know what I look like. Aside from having a few cigarettes put out on me, they didn't seem to think torture was the best idea for me." She swallowed hard, her lip quivering.

"It's okay. Take your time."

"Can we take a break?"

John nodded. "Sure. We'll leave you alone."

"Use your call button when you are ready to finish." Melissa smiled.

When Stiles tried to leave, she grabbed his wrist. "Can you stay?"

"If that's what you want."

"Derek says you like to talk. He said he finds your rambling soothing sometimes."

"He said that?"

"Don't tell him I told you. Tell me more about, yourself, Stiles. I don't care what you say, just keep talking."

"Um, I love comic books, video games, sci-fi and action movies. I play the drums. My mom made me take up drumming when I was a kid, because of my ADHD. Seems to help a little bit. Love music."

"I play bass guitar. Started learning guitar when I was nine."

"You should come by and jam when they let you out of here. I mean if you decide to stay."

"I guess being out of contact for seven months means my job in Seattle probably isn't there anymore."

"We have a pack, and it doesn't just have wolves in it. We have me and Danny; we're the humans in the pack. Lydia is a banshee. Allison is a hunter, but she's not like the ones you dealt with. Beacon Hills could be good for you. I mean it's up to you, but consider it."

"I will. Tell me more."

"My mom died when I was eight. Melissa and my dad are engaged. Her and Scott live with us, but you maybe figured that out. I want to study psychology in college. What about you? Did you go to college?"

"Yeah. I started at the University of Minnesota but finished up at UNR."

"What did you study?"

"Music. Lot of good it's done me."
"You have family?"

"My parents have been dead for eight years."

"I'm sorry."

"Me too, about your mom I mean." She rubbed the top of his hand.

"What's your favorite color?"

"Purple. You?"

"Red. Yeah I know. I totally understand the irony of liking red and hanging around with wolves."

She chuckled. "I haven't laughed in over eight months. Feels good." She pressed her call button. "Do you play a sport?"

"I'm on the lacrosse team. I was a bench warmer until this season. So that's nice."

"I never could get into lacrosse."

"What about you? With your height, the basketball and volleyball coaches had to be tripping over you."

"Yeah they were, but I was a hockey player. I fenced too."

"What position did you play?"

"Left wing."

"Fencing, eh? What sword?"

"Sabre and épée, but I prefer épée."

"That's cool."

'Thanks for staying in here and talking to me. Derek is right to trust you; you have kind eyes."

"You're welcome. I'm sure you don't, but I'd feel awful for not offering. Would you like a hug? You look like you could use one." When she nodded, he pulled her into an embrace just as John and Melissa walked back into the room.

"Thanks."

"Ready to continue? I hope my son was not too much."

"No, he's fine, a nice kid."

"So, stop me if I inferred incorrectly. When you said they didn't really torture you, did you mean to imply sexual assault?"
She worried her bottom lip between her teeth, and nodded. "I can't even tell you how many times or how many people." She chuckled nervously. "And to think I regretted getting Implanon after the fact. Totally don't now, but I don't actually like it. So while I'm in here, can I have it taken out? I liked the pill better."

Melissa smiled. "I'll see what I can do."

"After a while...well I found that just shutting off my brain and well... don't judge, just going with it, kept me from losing my mind. Remember when I said removing all good options? It's not the first time I'd suffered abuse. Sometimes just checking out is all you can do."

Melissa seemed to understand. "You did what you had to do."

John didn't press the issue further and moved onto his next question. "How did you escape?"

"They had a new guy. I'd watched him torture the emissary they took with taser wand. He was too rough with her, and she didn't make it. He didn't even take her body away before coming for me. There was no way I was letting him...please don't make me say what he was going to do with it." Tears streamed down her face.

"I get the picture."

"I guess they didn't fill him in too well on how things went, because he forgot to give me my latest sedative. I had only a little left in my system, but played along like I was sedated. When he opened the cell, I let him get close enough and I bit him."

"You bit him? And he didn't chase after you?"

She cackled. "No." She opened her mouth and dropped down snake fangs. "Did you know the venom of a black mamba can kill you in as little as 15 minutes? I got him right in the neck and sank my fangs into his carotid. I used all my venom on him. There is no antivenin for that bite in the US, not that I have been able to locate anyway. I keep track of those sorts of things in case I were to accidentally bite someone. He's dead. Hell, there is probably a confused medical examiner wondering if they need to bust up an animal smuggling ring, because how else is he going to explain a dead snake bite victim with that particular venom in his system. I used the taser wand on another guard on my way out, and I ran. They saw me leaving, but I was determined to get out of there. God, I ran so far. Made it back to Route 9 and kept going east. I tried to shift fully. I really did, but because I was still feeling a bit of the drugs, I couldn't. "I have control of my shift, unlike wolves. I only shift if I want to, but several factors can prevent me from being able to do it fully. Drugs, exhaustion, malnutrition, and so on. Anyway, I must have ran for at least ten miles, at least. I kept expecting my adrenaline to wear off, but when it didn't, I just kept going. That's when Derek found me, well he didn't realize it then. He tried to help, but I didn't stop running. Finally, when I could shift, I'd stupidly picked a deer. He shooed me off. I shifted to something less noticeable, a cat, and somewhere in that, I got shot. Somehow, I managed to get out of the preserve and into town. Despite my best efforts, no one wanted to help a "stray" cat. It's purely luck that I passed out on his car later that night. I just ran out of gas."

"I couldn't change back until I was healed enough. That surge of adrenaline when Jackson stuck me in that box triggered my shift when I woke up. If Derek hadn't fed me meat and had space for me to play, I'd look a lot worse than I do. Your evidence kit is going to be useless. The family that Deaton found for me, gave me a bath. Derek had to as well a few days ago when I knocked over something in the kitchen and got it all over my fur." She took a shuddering breath. "Oh God, I don't think Derek realizes how close they were to grabbing him. Stiles, you have to tell your pack to be careful,
especially Derek and Scott. What they'd do with an Alpha..."

"I'll make sure they know. Derek is on his way. He should be here by nighttime. I told him to stop by if that's okay?"

"Thank you."

Melissa broke the tension. "Okay, I think she needs some rest. In light of what you told me, do you want something to help you sleep or will being sedated be traumatic for you?"

"No, that would be nice. Hospitals make me nervous."

Melissa left the room, returning shortly with a syringe full of medication she injected into the I.V. line. "There we go. You should begin to feel sleepy soon. Would you like me to send Derek in when he gets here? Even if you're still sleeping? I can list him as family if you want, your cousin or something."

"I would like that. Than...than..." Her voice trailed off as she fell asleep.

Melissa joined the pair in the hallway, where she found Stiles with his head buried in his father's chest. She rubbed soothing circles into the teen's back. "I know running with wolves has made you tough, but-"

"It's just hard to hear. I keep being told wolves are monsters, but more and more I find humans are worse. You're right, Dad." He sniffled against his father's uniform. "I shouldn't have gone in there. Fucking hunters. Torture and rape, it just keeps getting worse with them. The sad thing? That's not the first time I've heard of a hunter going to those extremes."

John opened his mouth to chasten his son's language, but thought better of it. "Couldn't agree more. Why is she so trusting of Derek?"

Stiles straightened. "Are we really going to do that again, Dad? I've tried to tell you all; he's a good person. Really, he is. Why won't anyone listen to me? He could have left her to die, but instead took her to Deaton...and paid for her treatment. He doesn't even like cats, but took care of her for a month. He couldn't put a collar on her, because it felt cruel. If I were her, I'd probably latch onto him too." He wiped his face. "I need...I have to go." He pulled out his phone.

**To: Brows of Doom**

14:31

*When you get here, Mel will have your name on allowed visitors list as her cousin. Molly (Er, I guess we should start calling her Cambia) is in room 418*

He felt his phone vibrate as he unlocked the Jeep.

**To: Stiles**

14:43

*She's okay though?*
To: Brows of Doom
14:45

Yep. You should be so glad you weren't here to listen to her statement. She wanted me in the room, because she trusts you, and you trust me.

14:45
It was tough. Can I swing by later? I so need a drink, and my dad still doesn't know I've actually had alcohol before.

To: Stiles
14:54

You know you don't actually have to ask to come over anymore, right? Even if I'm not there, Isaac should be home tonight.

Stiles drove home without paying attention to anything other than the road in front of him.
Nervously, Derek drummed his fingers at the reception desk at the hospital. He'd broken so many speed limits on the way up there, making the nine hour drive in just under eight.

"May I help you?"

"I received a call that said my cousin was here. I wasn't given any details. Her name's Cambia Di Pellicce, room 418." He handed her his I.D.

Once she checked his information, she slipped a green wristband onto his wrist. "It's after visiting hours right now, but since you're family, this wristband gives your 24 hour visitation privileges. Fourth floor. Take the elevator at the end of the hall" 

"Thank you." He would have loved to say that the trip up four floors was the longest elevator ride of his life, but that would have been a lie. No, that horrible distinction belonged to that cluster-fuck of a ride with Jennifer, wait, Threefold Bitch. The one where he thought his sister was dying, and helping that woman was the only way to save her as well as find the missing guardians. Then she her Darach hoodoo and left him for dead on the floor of the elevator. Certain that he'd never again feel comfortable in this particular elevator, he cursed himself that he didn't take the stairs.

Somewhere between the third and fourth floor, the elevator stalled, and he felt the world begin to shrink around him. No, no, no. Not here. Not now. The longer the car remained motionless, the more he felt his brain come unhinged. Hyperventilating, he slid down the elevator wall, clutching his head in his hands. Breathe, Derek. Come on, Derek. Minutes ticked by (How many, he couldn't say. It could have been five of fifteen for all he knew), and he ran his hands through his hair. He needed to get out of here, and ASAP. Panicked and trembling, he repeatedly pressed the button for the fourth
floor. "Come on. Open up. Come on, come on, come on." Of course nothing happened. "Please open up." He slammed his fist against the door. "Somebody let me out of here!" He was just about to press the call button, when he felt the car start to move again. As the bell dinged signalling the fourth floor, and the doors opened, he fell out of the elevator. On his hands and knees, he took a cleansing breath, lest he start shaking again.

He looked up to see a nurse at the station staring at him with wry amusement. "Got stuck between floors. Believe it or not, it's not the first time I've been stuck in that same elevator. It's like the thing's from hell. Last time, the power went out, and I was stuck in there a while. It makes me nervous. Room 418?"

She pointed down the hall. "Go down to the T-junction, turn right. Should be about five rooms down on the left. If that elevator bothers you, try the one at the other end of the floor. Works like a charm. Never had a problem with it."

"Thank you." When he found Cambia's room, he only managed to get his hand on the handle when Melissa came walking out.

"Derek, you got here quickly."

"I may have driven above speed limits, but nothing you can prove. How is she?"

Melissa smiled. "Better than expected considering what she's been through. The doctor was pleasantly surprised that she was not more malnourished or dehydrated given her ordeal. I suppose you had something to do with that?"

"I made her food instead of buying that dried food stuff that smelled vaguely of fish and sawdust; the stuff can't possibly taste much better. So she mostly ate meat. Gonna be honest, Melissa, I'm really going to miss my cat. I hope she's just as discreet as a woman as she was a feline. I talked to her a lot this last month."

She rubbed his upper arm. "Well, she trusts you, she told us as much. Don't be so quick to think she'll betray your confidence."

"I know; it's just...hard for me...to trust people. Is she awake?"

"Not at the moment, but I have you on her...ah I see they gave you a wristband. They are keeping her a couple of days. Her vitamin counts on her blood panels are a little low, so they have her on a drip. Her gunshot wound, which Stiles told me Deaton fixed for her, is all healed. She's waiting on a minor procedure tomorrow morning, but other than that, she's going to be okay. Assuming all the tests come back okay. For her sake, I'm really hoping they do."

"Minor procedure? Tests?"

"She's been through hell. She said hunters took her. I have a feeling you might be more than a little knowledgeable of their tactics; you'll figure it out. I can't go into specifics." She patted his shoulder. "Well, I'm beat. I've been here for twelve hours today. I put an extra pillow and blanket on the chair in there if you want to stay. A nurse should be in after midnight to give her a new banana bag, and to check vitals."

"Thanks for doing this, letting me skirt the visiting hours."
"Well she's asked for you a couple times already today. It's probably in her best interest that you're here anyway."

Derek slowly pushed the door open, closing it behind him. The lights, though dimmed, still left enough light for him to see her. Thinner than her pictures, she still looked fairly healthy, a welcome relief. He hung his jacket up on the hook behind the door and sat down in the chair next to her bed.

She'd been smiling in the picture he'd seen. Now, he could see her lips were fuller than they looked. Even with her lithe figure, which he attributed to her recovery from the bullet wound and captivity, she still had good muscle definition. Plus, if she'd been able to take down a werewolf with bare hands and well placed attacks, well then he figured she was still pretty strong. Despite this, her facial features were soft. He didn't know for how long she'd been a cat, but her skin still looked sun-kissed, just a tad lighter than Scott's. Up close, she was definitely just as pretty as her picture, more so, because in person there her face had depth and highlights. Three dimensional, in the flesh, would beat a photograph any day.

Even though he'd spent the last month, nursing her back to health, taking care of her, playing with her-- holding her hand seemed like it crossed a boundary that didn't exist when she'd been a cat. Instead, he chose to pull the chair as close as he could get to the bed and curl up in it. He'd talk to her when she woke up. The long drive took a lot out of him. The lack of sleep didn't help either. Soon, he felt his eyelids grow heavy. Sometime later, he felt a light squeeze on his hand.

"D'rek." Cambia croaked out, her voice heavy with sleep.

He rubbed his eyes. "Hey, how are you feeling?"

"Thirsty."

On the bedside table, a large cup with a straw sat probably looking like an oasis to her. He held it for her so she could take a long drink. "You're not a cat. You really were magic. Stiles is never going to let me forget that."

"But I'm still me, though now I'm in the flesh as it were, it's nice to meet you, Derek." She weakly shook his hand.

"You too. Why were you a cat for so long? Was it because you were scared of me?"

"No, not at all. When I get hurt, seriously hurt, if it happens when I'm an animal, I'm stuck in that form until I heal completely." She sighed. "I knew I was right to trust you."

As the room grew brighter, he recognized her eyes. He'd seen those pale sage green orbs before, and not just on Molly. "You were that black deer too, weren't you?"

"Yeah."

"Can I ask you a question?" When she nodded, he continued. "Why did you choose my car?"

"I didn't. It was a last ditch effort to get someone to help me or I was going to die." She sighed. "I knew I was right to trust you."

"Why did you?"
"I like werewolves, Derek. Aside from about six bad seeds, most I've met have been wonderful. See, my kind, are really uncommon, more so than yours. I have to be able to trust my instincts. One, I could tell right away what you were, and an alpha at that, but your eyes...they were ones I could trust."

"But-

"No, I think it's safe to say, you blame yourself and don't think you deserve anyone's trust. You're wrong; you saved my life. You could have just left me on the side of the road, but you didn't. You could have kept ignoring me, but you didn't. When you decided to take me in, you could have chosen the cheapest food for me to eat, but you didn't. You could have left me all alone in the loft while you were gone, but you didn't do that either. There were a lot of bad choices you could have made regarding me, but you didn't make them. You poured your heart out to me; you trusted me, granted I was a cat, and you had no reason to believe I could talk, but hey. All those things together...that's as good a reason to trust you as I can think of."

He patted her hand. "Can I ask you something else?"

"Yeah, but if it's about what happened to me, can it wait for a day or two?"

"You don't have to tell me that if you don't want, ever. No, that's not it. Did you know what your name meant when you picked it?"

"Sì, ho fatto. Italiano è la mia lingua madre. Sono nata a Firenze"

"And that is something I will definitely appreciate when I'm not exhausted, but right now, we're lucky my English is making sense." He rubbed his scalp. "Your complexion is dark for a Tuscan. I mean...oh my god that was rude. I'm so sorry. If you could just forget I said it, that would be great." He continued muttering under his breath about inappropriate questions and being an asshole.

Cambia smiled. "My maternal grandmother was from Rabat. That's in Morocco, if you didn't know. My grandfather, her husband, was Calabrian from Catanzaro. I take after my mother in that respect."

"Ah, that makes sense." He stretched his arms. "Are you hungry? I can scope out the vending machine."

"No, I'm good. Thanks."

"You're welcome. So, when Stiles brought me to the station to help his dad work on your case, the Sheriff said you used to be warm and open, but something changed. What was it?"

She swallowed hard. "I lost someone I loved with every fiber of my being. That kind of loss leaves a hole in your heart forever."

"Was it hunters?"

"No, and I'm not ready to talk about it. Maybe I never will be. Who knows?"

"Fair enough." He leaned back in his chair. "What are you going to do now, when they let you out?"

"I don't know."
"You know, when you kept showing up around me, at first I thought I had been cursed or about to die. The thing is, when I opened my home and let you in, you helped. When I was upset or angry, stuck in a nightmare, you helped, well as much as a cat can. It would be incredibly selfish of me to ask, but would you stay...in Beacon Hills? I just feel after all that effort you made to follow me, we are supposed to know each other."

She gave him a tiny smile. "Are you asking?"

"Yeah. We have a pack, and you'd be welcome if you wanted."

"You're the second person to offer that today, but I will think about it." When he stood in an obvious gesture to leave her to rest, she grabbed his hand. "Stay? I don't want to be alone. When I woke up from my nap earlier, it was hell, being in here by myself. Even TV couldn't distract me from the shitstorm in my head right now. Hooray for traumatic experiences." She raised her fist in mock celebration.

Derek settled back into the chair and tried to recline, but the back of the chair was not high enough for his pillow. The thing kept falling on the floor. After picking it up the fifth time it fell on the floor, he noticed her scooting over on the bed.

"The bed's not big enough for both of us, but you can put your pillow here. It'll be just like resting your head on folded arms only softer. However, you can't get mad at me if i start petting your head in my sleep. Consider it payback."

"I did not pet you in my sleep!" He laughed, but obliged her.

"Oh you did, but I'm gonna let it slide."

After a quick adjustment of his pillow, he agreed with her. "You're right; this is way more comfortable. Buonanotte, dormi bene, Cambia."

"Call me Cam. Sogni d'oro." She smiled. "Oh and Derek? What I went though... you helped me too."

Derek closed his eyes and enjoyed the proximity of her. Even when masked by medication and the antiseptic smell of a hospital, her scent was still there, under all that. This time, instead of derailing him, the aroma settled into the pit of his stomach changing into warmth, one which spread through him like hot cocoa, at once both igniting and soothing. After a few minutes, he noticed she'd fallen back asleep, and just like she'd predicted she would, carded her fingers through his hair. Just that simple action, had him relaxing into the mattress.

Even in the slightly uncomfortable position, he slept like a baby.

Chapter End Notes

Translation for Italian used in this chapter. (Thanks to Shadows_Den for pointing out a minor mistake on translation. The meaning remains the same, just a word ending changed)

Sì, ho fatto. Italiano è la mia lingua madre. Sono nata a Firenze- Yeah, I did. Italian is
my mother tongue. I was born in Florence.
Buonanotte, dormi bene- Good night, sleep well.
Sogni d'oro.- Sweet dreams.

If anyone wondered, in my head, I pictured Cambia looking a bit like model Nataniele Ribeiro but with black hair and less..."model-y".
Derek had just dumped a bucket of baseballs into the hopper of the pitching machine when Stiles walked in, tossing a batting helmet to him.

"I hope that one fits."

He checked the fit. "It's a little snug, but it'll work."

"So there were no 34" bats. But hey, here's a 32" one."

"It's like being in Little League again." Derek scowled.

Stiles crossed his arms. "Well excuse me, Grumpy Ass. If you wanted a 34" one so badly you should have brought your own?"

He rolled his eyes. "I forgot it, okay? I stopped here right after class. I thought I left my bag in the car, but clearly I didn't."

"You Hales should just patent that particular eye roll. Full of sass, you all are."

"Very funny, Yoda. You want to go first?"

The younger man shrugged and walked out of the cage to stand behind the batter's box. "Knock yourself out big guy."

He set the pitch speed on the machine and walked to the box, tapping the switch on the wall before taking his stance. He knew Stiles would insist on talking all the way through his turn, per the norm.

"So, like I thought when I started actually getting dates, that I would get better at this. What am I doing wrong? Is it me?"

Derek swung and hit a ball at the back wall. "And you're asking me for dating advice? With my track record?"

He laughed. "Shut up; you know I'm asking you because I value your opinion."

"Fair enough. So spill it. What was so bad about your date last night?" With a ping, a ball left the bat bound for the back wall.

"That is the last time I am ever going on a blind date. Especially if Greenberg insists I will love the person. I don't care if she is his cousin or not. And you know what? That should have been a red flag right there, because I don't really like Greenberg for that matter, but whatever. You can't judge the whole family based on one person. I mean, Peter, hello?"

Derek gave him a chuckle and a quick glance before swinging again. "Who is Greenberg? See, I hear that name all the time, and never once have I seen this kid around. I mean he is a kid right, you know, at your school and not some random adult I keep hearing about?"
"Yes. He goes to our school."

"And he's the one that's in love with Coach?"

Stiles squeaked out a giggle. "No...well actually...huh. Now that I think about it, the way I describe him totally paints that picture. Anyway, he's on the lacrosse team, but even when I was nothing but a bench-warmer, he was loads worse than I was. I gotta tell you man, Coach was surprised as hell when I showed up for the first practice this semester to find I actually had muscles."

"You're welcome."

"I didn't say thanks."

"It was implied."

"You're right; it totally was. Before Kittygate, I don't even think Scott knew we hung out."

There was a loud crash as Derek's line drive smacked into the pitching machine.

"Again? You do that every time."

"It's fine. I'm sure I'm not the only person who's hit it before."

Stiles grabbed a discarded straw from off the ground, stuck it through the fence and jabbed Derek in the back. "Derek, I am pretty certain, we are the only customers this place ever sees. Seriously, how do they manage to stay open. I never see anyone else here besides us. You'd think there would be more, because let's be honest, Wolfman. Beacon Hills is not teeming with fun activities. I mean really, there are like ten things for young people to do in this town which aren't illegal and don't involve alcohol."

"Stiles, stop rambling. You were saying?" He needed to keep Stiles on topic before he quit caring about the blind date disaster. Although, Derek actually would rather he did just that and forgot about it, but perks of being a friend. Perks...a total misnomer. Whatever. You take the good with the bad.

"Oh right. Let me just start with, Greenberg is a terrible judge of character! My date, she shows up at the diner, because she was too good to ride in Roscoe. So that set the tone for the evening right there. Lydia, goddess of Beacon Hills High has ridden in it, while in formal wear mind you, and even she kept her mouth shut about my car. I will admit, I am not terribly picky; just because someone is not my exact type, it doesn't mean I won't consider them. However, the girl was hot as hell. She had beautiful eyes, but her personality...fuck me, she was as dumb as a bag of hammers and laughed like a hyena."

The last ball shot out of the hopper, but Derek timed his swing poorly and missed it. "So the date sucked because she was stupid with a bad laugh?"

"No, I could overlook that if everything else about her was on point. That's the thing though; it wasn't. It was so far off point that... Oh god, I can't even make a comparison it was so bad. The girl zapped all my Stiles...ish energy right out from my pores. Derek, let's be honest. My personality is like 90% of my charm and appeal. What the hell am I going to do now?"

"Stiles! Back on topic before I get lost and quit listening."
"Right. Sure thing, Alpha my Alpha. So, she hates comic books and superheroes, loves country music, and ballet. Whatever, I can work with that. Country music aside, that sounds like Lydia, and I like her. So this girl, I am choosing to call Angry Birdy, she almost swore at the server because the diner was out of low-cal Italian dressing for her greens only salad. That wasn't for an appetizer; that was her entree order! I can't do it. Derek. I can't date a woman...or man for that matter who is afraid of calories. You've seen me eat! If I were hungry enough, I would chew off my own hand!" He helped Derek pick up the baseballs scattered around the cage. "Then she goes on a pseudo-political religious rant about how the gays are ruining the country with their insistence on marriage rights and sinful ways. The speech was filled with Bible verses and commentary from renowned Christian leaders." He gesticulated wildly with his hands. "The Greenberg's are Jewish! How can you make a compelling argument about what Christianity says about marriage and homosexuality, when you aren't Christian and don't subscribe to the tenets the first place? It makes no sense, Derek. Why didn't she reference the Talmud or Torah to solidify her viewpoint? At least that would sound less hypocritical. Her diatribe was almost ten minutes long before I could even get a word in edgewise, but by that point, I was so angry all I could do was open and close my mouth repeatedly. I'm sure to the surrounding tables I looked like I was trying to imitate a large mouth bass and probably with great success. Not my finest look if you must know."

"You mean this one?" Derek gave his impression of a speechless and confused Stiles.

"Wow, I mean wow. You really have that one perfected, don't you? I bet you practice it in front of a mirror often." Derek rolled his eyes again. "Okay, so probably not. Well, that was the last straw. I left the money to pay for the meal and walked out. I didn't even get to eat my dinner, which totally sucked because I really wanted that lasagna! Not even Emma Watson is hot enough for me to overlook all that for a hook-up."

"You're right; that was a terrible date. I think you're off the hook. Nothing about that seemed to be your fault."

Stiles cocked his head to the side and gave Derek his bitch-face. "That's it? That's all you have to say about it?"

"I would say, have more confidence." Derek really had no advice for him, but have more confidence sounded like a solid suggestion.

Stiles chose that moment to forget he had an armful of baseballs and flung his hands into the air. He shrieked as the balls rained down around them before hanging his head in embarrassment. "Can we just forget that happened? Especially the part where I squealed like a little girl?"

Derek laughed so hard, his sides started to hurt, and he wrapped his arms around his midsection. "I wish I had that on a video."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. Laugh it up, Fuzzball. Have more confidence. That's your advice? I have tons of confidence. I went into that date with high expectations given the way Greenberg described her. Confidence is easy, control over spastic hand gestures and rambling is a different story, as my actions of the last five minutes have clearly demonstrated."

"Seriously Stiles, I mean it. It's like once you joined my pack or half of the pack, the fumbling, flailing, and clumsy kid vanished."

Stiles gave him a playful punch in the arm. "Thanks buddy, love you too." Derek rolled his eyes at him. "What are you talking about? I'm still flailing and clumsy."
"Not like you were. It's weird. The awkwardness is gone. Did you just wake up one morning and say, 'I see pride! I see power! I see a bad-ass mother who don't take no crap off of nobody!' and decide to stop giving a fuck what other people thought?"

"Did you? You did. You just made a joke, and not sarcasm either, a legitimate joke. I've been Cool Runnings'd by Derek Hale of all people." He set his desired pitching speed, which was a hell of a lot slower than Derek's (But nobody had to know that) and walked to the box, laughing the entire way there. "It was something like that. You know Scott's pack doesn't really do the "training" thing? Jackson, Danny, and Scott all play lacrosse so they get enough training from that. Lydia and Allison kind of work on archery sometimes. Lydia's not big on it. You and Isaac showed me how to fight, to win one as myself, even without extra wolf powers." He flicked the switch. "I don't know. I guess you guys made me accept myself the way I am. Long overdue if you ask me. Plus, I don't know, I think I am finally beginning to grow into my body. I no longer feel like a fawn on ice when I move. Of course, now that I've said that, I will probably grow four or five inches and be just as awkward as I was before." He hit a ball foul. "So um, thanks for that."

"Don't thank me. I didn't do it as a charity case. We're pack. That's what a good pack does."

He laughed and missed the next ball. "You know, when you first started out. You were the worst alpha, not gonna lie."

"I know I was. I was terrible; I let power go to my head, but I don't regret turning them."

"What changed?"

"Honestly?"

He turned around and glared at him as a ball whizzed past him. "Yes, honestly. Friends don't lie to each other, at least we don't anyway. That was our rule, remember?"

Derek sighed. "When Cora got sick, and healing her almost took my Alpha spark. Peter said it would do that, if I tried it. Yet, here we are. Anyway, I was scared of Scott challenging me for control of my betas once he went all True Alpha. That would have destroyed me, especially if he took Cora with him. It was enough of a shock to my system to make me want to try harder, to be better."

"Yeah and he's done a bang up job of that." Stiles swung as hard as he could at the ball. He missed. However, the bat slipped out of his hands and flew towards the wall, taking out the pitching machine in the process.

"Way to go, Stiles." Derek laughed.

"Shut up. I plead temporary insanity." He picked up the pitching machine, relieved when it turned back on and fired a test ball just to be sure. "I didn't know you were worried about losing your position. For what it's worth though, I'm glad to be in your half now, especially now that I am not so fragile."

Derek nodded. "You know...all you have to do is ask."

"For the bite?"

"If you want it; it's yours."
He shrugged. "I don't. I like being me and bringing what I do to the table."

"I like that too, but still. The offer stands if you ever change your mind."

He bumped the switch on the wall turning back on the now empty machine to drown out their conversation. Walking out of the cage, he shook Derek's shoulders to make sure he had the man's complete attention. "I don't want it, but... if something happens, and I'm dying... you can give me the bite, but only if I'm dying. I mean like bleeding to death from a hunter's case of mistaken identity, bad car accident, a cruel inherited degenerative brain disease, or death by Snu Snu, whatever. Only then, and only from you. Not Scott. I don't care if we become best friends again. I don't want him as my alpha; he had his chance and blew it. Are we clear?"

"As crystal."

"Come on then. I'm starving. How does pizza sound? We can grab Isaac from the loft on the way over."

"Sounds great." He clapped the teen on the back. "I'm glad you're in my pack too. You help keep me sane, even if by doing so, you drive me a little insane."

"You know that makes no sense right?"

Derek smiled. Stiles' rule was one he could follow, knowing that he had an out if the unthinkable happened when they faced a big bad they couldn't beat. Losing more people he cared about would most likely be what broke the proverbial camel's back.

Chapter End Notes

Two tidbits from my personal headcannon: 1) I believe Stiles is like Bambi and just needs to finish growing, at which point he won't flail around so much. 2) Derek totally sucked as an alpha, but towards the end of 3A, I saw some improvement from him and feel he would have grown into a pretty good alpha with time. He just had baggage that needed to be worked through. I will forever be a little sad the show went the route it did (Not saving Cora. That was sweet. I miss her and want her back on the show).
Three Times is a Pattern

Stiles rapped on his bedroom door. "Hey Cambia. So Derek is here, and we're going for a run. Would you like to come along?"

"Just a second. I'm not dressed yet, but I'd like that. I have to dig through a box of clothes for my workout clothes."

"Great. You could bring Titan along too if you wanted." He bounded down the stairs. "Yeah man, she'll come along."

Derek's face lit up. "Great."

She'd been out of the hospital for a week, and at Melissa's insistence, had been staying at their house. Even though Cambia hadn't said so, both Stiles and Derek were fairly certain she intended to stay in town, instead of continuing onto somewhere else. He'd been so busy with work and class, he hadn't seen her since he dropped her off at the impound lot to retrieve her car, which happened to be a near mint condition vintage muscle car. He learned soon after that, she'd named it Apollo. "How about we run through town instead? We could show her around and have lunch. It's like sixty degrees outside. I saw some people seated on the patio at Arturo's on the way over."

Over his shoulder, Stiles heard Scott bustling around in the kitchen. "Scott, you want to come running with us? We're gonna catch lunch after."

Scott poked his head into the living room. "No thanks, man. Going ice skating with Allison, Jackson and Lydia. Thanks for the invite."

"Did you forget the part where you are a terrible skater?"

"Not at all, but it was Lydia's idea...so..."

Stiles nodded. "Your protests fell on deaf ears."

"Yeah. Have fun though guys." Scott patted him on the shoulder on his way out to the driveway. "See you later. Hey Derek."

"You two sound like you're on better terms." Derek said.

"A little I guess. He's working on it."

"Hi Derek." Cambia waved at him as she finished braiding her hair as she came down the stairs.

He tried not to stare at her mostly bare legs beneath a black running skirt, but he was pretty sure he failed. "Hi." He choked out.

"Is it nice out? I don't want to try and find a jacket."

"You could borrow one of my hoodies." Stiles offered.

She opened the front door and walked outside. "Yeah, no I'm good. Anything above forty-five, and the most I wear is a long sleeved shirt. Four years out of the upper Midwest, and I still have not lost my hardiness in chillier temperatures. She pointed to her Minnesota Wild t-shirt. "Should be fine. I'm
going to leave Titan here though. The big baby is on nap number three today. I don't know what Parrish did with him since August, but the dog is just not up for much I guess.

They climbed into the Camaro and drove towards downtown where Derek parked the car in one of the public lots near the warehouse district. Soon, they were off. Derek led them past the only two night clubs in town. "So this is Ravenous. Not that it matters, but it's a 21+ club. Um, I hate the place. They're a big fan of the smoke machine, which as you can imagine...unpleasant for my kind. Over here is Jungle, and though I haven't seen it, from what I hear their drag show is pretty entertaining."

Stiles laughed. "More than pretty entertaining. Leah Moncello, she's got a crazy set of pipes. Her set is always great, but Kandee Buttons looks the best in a miniskirt."

Cambia looked at him. "So I take you're a regular there?"

"I go a couple times a month. Safe place to dance with guys and not worry about getting my ass kicked. That and the Queens love me. Can't tell you how many times they've tried to convince me to give drag a go. Me in heels? Yeah that's a broken ankle waiting to happen. Plus...the chest hair kind of ruins the illusion."

"Quite a few of the pack like going often. If you have an open mind, it's pretty fun." Derek said. "I'm not real big on clubs though. There is a bar in downtown that has live music, if that's more your thing."

"I have no problem with gay clubs. They are great places to pick up interested women."

Stiles choked. "So you like girls?"

"Occasionally. It's about eighty/twenty in favor of men, but yeah I like them."

There wasn't another building of interest for almost a mile. "Now we're closer to Stiles' house. Sandy's Diner is across the street. They have great breakfast."

"And hangover food." Stiles added. He took over, listing notable places as they passed by. "Down this street is a Rite Aid. If you keep going about a mile past that, you will get to Beacon Memorial. If you take Elmhurst Avenue for about ten blocks North, you will hit the high school, once again, not an interest to you. Going south on Elmhurst two miles will take you to BHCC, or Beacon Hills Community College if you're interested in taking classes." They turned onto Main Street. "This is, as you can probably see, Main Street, but Beacon Parkway runs parallel to it. Just about anything other than the Safeway and the mall are going to be in this area. Beacon Park runs all the way from Elmhurst to Cedar Avenue, which is about sixteen square blocks in total. It's a nice place to exercise if you don't live near the Preserve. Target is about a mile and a half East on Cottage Drive from here."

Cambia signaled she needed to stop, and hands on her knees took several deep breaths. "Sorry, my stamina is still shot. Before I could run fifteen miles without a breather, but I've been channeling my inner animal for the last mile. Can we walk for a bit?"

"Sure. Actually, Derek suggested lunch. We're only about four blocks from the restaurant."

"Sounds good." She took a long drink from her bottle. "So, if I choose to stay, what is the tallest high-rise residence building in town?"
He scratched his head. "I think Allison's building has ten stories."

"Not high enough."

"You'll want Beacon Tower then." Derek said. "Twenty floors. It's pricey though."

"Not a problem."

As they crossed the street, Stiles asked, "Why do you want to live so high up?"

"I have found most complexes over fifteen stories don't have external fire escapes. At least in my experience. When you have been stalked, you look for as secure a building as you can get. That building being pricey means secured entrances at every door and likely a 24 hour front desk."

They snagged the last table on the patio, which was perfect because it sat just outside the bar, where the nearest television happened to be playing the Cal State basketball game. Cambia perused her menu.

"I was thinking we could split a couple pizzas. You okay with the Spaniard today, Derek? Cambia, you can pick the second one."

"You can call me Cam if you want. Ooh White Chicken Florentine. I want that one."

They all stuck with water to drink when the server stopped by their table and put in their pizza order. Stiles crumpled up his straw wrapper and flicked it at Derek, hitting him in the side of the head.

"Really Stiles?" He raised an eyebrow at him before grabbing his own straw and blew the wrapper at him. "I can do that too."

Cambia sat and watched their exchange with wry amusement. Then she grabbed her own wrapper, ripped it in half and repeated Stiles' action. Both men turned at looked at her. "Okay, that was fun. Now what?"

While Stiles and Cambia talked, Derek's attention was glued to the basketball game. "So Cam, do you have siblings?"

"No."

"I grew up an only child too; so did Scott. Actually, come to think of it, we have a lot of only children in our pack. Allison, Lydia, Jackson, me, Scott, and you. I mean Isaac had a brother, but he died in combat. Peter had a sister, Derek and Cora's mom. So really it's just Derek, Cora and Danny with siblings. That's so strange. Change of subject, what is your favorite sports team?" She pointed to her shirt again. "Oh right. You did say you were a hockey player. I imagine that's pretty common in Minnesota."

"Yeah. We have some high school teams I suspect might actually beat a few of the smaller colleges from some other states. You?"

"The Mets, huge Mets fan. I am familiar with their minor league line-ups too. Ask my dad if you don't believe me. The only utility I am responsible for is the MLB package I made him add onto our cable plan, because as you might have noticed...we are out of the Mets' broadcast area. You like baseball?"
"A little, I guess. I mostly watch hockey, but I really like watching UFC too."

"Derek here, if he ever chooses to join into the conversation, is a Golden State and Oakland A's fan. Isn't that right, Der?" When he received no response, he shook the man's shoulder. "Hellooooo? Earth to Derek."

Instead of saying anything, he just pointed to the TV where an Amber Alert flashed over a breaking news bulletin. He listened carefully.

"We interrupt regularly scheduled programming to bring you this special update. The Shasta County Sheriff's Office has issued an Amber Alert for Redding teen, Zachary Jimenez, Jr. Witnesses reported seeing two Caucasian males in their late twenties grab and force him into a new model black Chevy Tahoe in the parking lot of the Redding Safeway at around 1:15 P.M. Jimenez is sixteen years old, five feet eight inches tall and approximately 130 pounds. He is described as Hispanic with brown hair and eyes. He was last seen wearing blue jeans, black sneakers, and a red t-shirt. A witness was able to get a partial California license plate ending in 716. Said vehicle reportedly headed east on W Cypress Avenue towards Interstate Five. If you have any information please contact the tip line at 530-555-0174 or your local law enforcement office.

"We move from one abduction to another. Cal-State Sacramento junior Ashley Beckett was last seen leaving Social Night Club in Sacramento Friday night around midnight. Her abandoned vehicle was found in the parking lot the following morning. Police report that vehicle showed signs of foul play. Beckett is twenty-one years old, five feet four inches tall and approximately 119 pounds. She is described as Caucasian with dark blonde hair and brown eyes last seen in black pants, a purple tank top, and heels. There are no other leads at this point, but if you have any information, please contact Sacramento Police. We return you to regular programming."

"Derek?" Stiles asked. "Everything okay?"

"No, I know for a fact both of those missing people count as unique cases. Jimenez's father is the Redding Pack alpha and Beckett's mother is a beta under Alpha Lopez's pack in Sacramento. You know that phone list we've been working on for our California pack project?" Stiles nodded. "We need to call them all and get contact information for as many others as we can, because that is two in forty-eight hours. Remember that San Jose State sophomore that went missing on his way home from the library last month?"

"Yeah, um Mike something."

"Mike Matsui. My sister Serena knew his oldest brother. She had classes with him at UC Davis. Their parents are the Alpha pair of the Monterrey Pack. It just seems a lot. If we can get a spreadsheet together, maybe we will start seeing a pattern. After lunch we are going to see your dad. See if he'll show us the missing persons reports for the last two years."

"Derek, there were fifty-three last year, for just Beacon County alone."

"I know, but just call it intuition. Given what Cam told us about where she was being held and how many wolves they had. It scares me, okay? I want to make sure we all stay safe." By the time the pizza arrived, he had lost his appetite.

*   *   *   *   *

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The Sheriff's Station was fairly empty for the time of day when Stiles and Derek arrived. Only one of the usual six deputies per shift sat at his desk, and of course Parrish to be the one who remained. He was pretty much the only competent one left now that Deputy Graeme was dead. *I hope you're at peace, Tara. You didn't deserve what happened to you.* "Hi Jordan. Oh wait. Sorry, I forgot. At work... Deputy Parrish."

"Hey Stiles. You're here to see your Dad I guess. He'll be right back."

Stiles yawned. "That's okay. Where is everyone?"

"We sent Campbell, Morales, and Xiong as well as Detectives Akins and Fujimoto out to Shasta county to help with an Amber Alert. Wainwright is out on a three car pile-up in Paradise, and Escobedo...was just here." He looked around the room. "She must have got a call."

"We're going to wait in my dad's office if that's okay."

"Knock yourself out."

Stiles pushed open the door and plopped down in one of the chairs, while Derek texted furiously. They'd dropped Cambia off at the house, all three of them deciding it was best not to involve her and derail any progress she'd made in the healing process. In the process, both had changed into more suitable attire, those that weren't drenched in sweat. Stiles swore, if anyone actually went through the bottom drawer to his dresser, they would be very confused. It not only contained at any given time, two changes of clothes for Derek, one for Isaac, and the odd assortment of Cora's for moments precisely like this one. While they were there, Stiles grabbed his laptop and one of his many flash drives disguised as innocuous geeky toys. This particular one was hidden inside a Yoda figurine he'd found at Savers, and hollowed out to hold a fairly sizable encrypted drive. It contained some highly sensitive information regarding about twenty-five California packs. For the last year or so, Derek and Stiles had been working with Danny to build a database of packs. Their hope was, when they presented the project to them, that the packs could form an alliance for the state. This sort of thing could be invaluable when unfriendly hunters decided to invade like Genghis Khan. With just a quick text or phone call, any pack could know about rogue hunters or other threats coming their way. Stiles likened it to the weather service's early warning system for severe weather. Though, it also helped when a pack member needed to attend college or anyone in any pack went on vacation.

"Hey Stiles, what was so urgent it couldn't wait for dinner?"

He opened up his laptop and removed the flash drive from its plastic panic room, keying the PIN onto the key pad and tried not to notice the suspicious gaze his father gave him. As he waited for the laptop to wake up, he walked over and shut the door. "It's bigger than Cambia or at least we think it is."

"What?"

"Hear anything back yet, Der?"

"Yeah." The alpha passed his phone to Stiles. "I moved all relevant texts to their own folder."

"Dad, we need to see all open missing persons cases, homicides, suspicious circs but not enough to declare homicide for the last," he looked to Derek for guidance.

"Two years?"
"Stiles, that is close to a hundred cases."

"I didn't mean for Beacon County. I meant for the whole state."

John looked like he would keel over in shock. "Do you have any idea how many cases that is? Los Angeles alone had 255 murders last year."

"Uh huh." Stiles didn't look up at him while he filtered through his spreadsheets with the information Derek had received back from other Alphas, including some from packs they didn't know about. It seemed their idea was gaining popularity. "We have search parameters." He slid over his laptop so it sat adjacent to his fathers and pulled over a chair. Derek did the same on the other side. "First narrow to exclude all people over twenty-five. That should take out a good chunk. For all homicides filter to include anything Cambia told you she saw happening where she was being held. So that means sexual assault, electrocution, dismemberment, aconite poisoning, and Derek what else is a hunter attack?"

"Cut in half, ingested mistletoe, missing fingernails and teeth." He didn't dare elaborate on their psychological torture tactics.

"Right and all those, plus unsolved animal attacks."

"Want to tell me what this is all about and why it suddenly made you need to come in here?"

"Your abducted teen from Redding is a werewolf and so is the missing woman in Sacramento. I know both their alphas. The missing San Jose State student from last month is too. If you factor in Cam-"

"Once is an accident. Twice is coincidence. Three times is a pattern. Four times...that's a big deal.""

"Then what is 118? Stiles, I'm going to need more information." He pinched the bridge of his nose. "I get that this probably makes sense to you, but not to me."

"You know what, narrow the search to only include people under twenty-three and include unknown black fluid."

John typed away on his keys. "That cut the list down to 74, but it's still weeding things out." When the computer chimed, he looked at the screen. "We're down to 67.

"I need you to search the following people, then take their descriptions and apply them to the bodies found." Stiles proceeded to rattle off the names of 52 people, all names of missing pack members from other packs, and in five cases, witches missing from friendly covens.

Derek's phone chirped. "Add Agnes Solorio, Damien Connelly and his sister Erin."

"More wolves?"

"A huldra and two fae. They are friendly with a pack out of Ojai."

Once more John took to the keys, and after less than ninety seconds the search was complete. He stared at the screen in shock. "Boys, I think you just helped me identify 36 corpses."

Derek and Stiles both looked like they were about to be sick.

"So Dad, I guess notify the precincts, and have them call in their families to come in. Maybe they can
bring in a DNA sample or something."

"I know how to do my job, Son. How am I supposed to explain why I came to this conclusion?"

"I don't know, Dad."

Derek, after an awkward silence, spoke up. "Cam. You took a witness statement last week, and after she gave you some additional information, you decided the M.O. was pretty specific. What she told you, led to the search."

"Well there you go. He's smarter than he looks."

"Thanks asshole."

"It's your own fault you look like a cast member of Grease. Now, I need to stop by the grocery store and pick things up for dinner. Derek, you want to stay for dinner?"

"Sure. What are you making?"

"Tacos sound fantastic. I'll make enough for Isaac too if he wants to come."

"Agreed. Sheriff, is it okay if I text Alphas Jimenez, Lopez, and Matsui to contact you? Oh, Lopez is Ashley Beckett's alpha. It might make them feel better to know someone in law enforcement is in the know."

"Yeah that's fine."

Derek gave him a nod while Stiles waved to his Dad. "See you at dinner. If you're going to be late, text me, and I will make sure to save you a plate."

He watched his son's back as he left. As he slumped back in his chair, he ran a hand through his hair. Supernaturals or not, they were still human and he just didn't want to deal with a group that could murder almost forty people and not bat an eye.
Derek made a quick look around, picking up pieces of dirty laundry, which should have been put in the laundry room in the first place. He straightened the shoes on the mat by the front door, and otherwise ensured the house looked spotless. His palms were sweating. Why did he care what the pack would think of the new place? He loved the way the home turned out. Elements from his memory of his childhood home imbued the rebuild. Maybe that was it; he wanted them to see it the way he did.

Gorgeous walnut floors ran throughout the whole house, with only the bathrooms and kitchens having tile. For pack meetings or pack bonding nights, he made sure the kitchen had been built spacious with top of the line appliances. He even bought a 60 inch flat screen TV for the living room, even though, aside from a few programs and sports, he had never been that big of a television watcher. Video games on the other hand... well they looked awesome on the thing, especially when coupled with the home theater system.

His favorite element of the house had to be his shower. With the ceiling rain sprayer, wall sprayer panels, and built in sound system, he spent way too much money on it, not that he cared in the slightest. It was his house. Okay, his Cora, Isaac and Peter's house, but they had her own rooms, which they designed themselves. Though, he had to say, he was a little jealous of Isaac and his sister's whirlpool tub. After some heated arguments, they decided that they could use the each others' bathrooms provided that a) They asked and b) Could not complain about the overall messiness of the room. Derek knew it would most likely be a problem for him. His little sister was a complete slob.

He turned on the fireplace, hoping to add a comforting ambiance to the room. Yes, he was very pleased.

"Knock knock!" Cambia called out as she opened the front door. She walked around the wall, precariously balancing several grocery bags. Her eyes lit up when she saw him. "Hey Derek."

He rushed over to help with the groceries. "Here let me." He took in her appearance. She wore a pair of distressed skinny jeans and a tight fitting Killswitch Engage t-shirt with a black and white checkered scarf. Her pair of studded ankle boots made her taller than him by a few inches. He hadn't realized how long her hair actually was when she first phased out of cat form. Even with its natural waves, it hit her lower back. She looked a hell of a lot better than she did when they met, but he supposed anyone would look better than a bleeding mass of black fur.

Two weeks after she'd been released from the hospital, she found a 'bartender wanted' sign at Guitar Pick, a local bar and grill known for their extensive beer list and live music. She'd only stopped by for more information, but the owner had been looking for an experienced bartender for several months and hired her on the spot. After that she realized she couldn't stay at the Stilinski/McCall house for too much longer as she felt terrible that her stay in the house put Stiles onto the air mattress in Scott's room. So, she'd been in touch with a realtor and found a condo in Beacon Tower right away. One of the perks of not needing to secure financing was a quick close.

"Cool bracelet." He smiled and drew attention to her leather and chainmaille cuff. "You look nice." Nice, that's the best you can do? How about telling her she looks beautiful? Her efforts to get back in
shape had clearly been paying off.

"Thanks. I've been spending damn near all my free time at the gym or running." She handed him an insulated food carrier. "This needs to go in the fridge."

"The kitchen is this way." He set the bag on the counter, taking a peek inside. "Ooh, what are we having for dessert?"

She grinned, smacking his hand away from the lid. "Surprise."

After he completed her first task, he turned to her. "So, how can I help?"

"Well, in that bag by the sink, is all the chicken. You have a dual oven. That's fantastic." She preheated both ovens, but then smacked herself in the forehead. "I left a box in the car."

When she turned to run outside, he stopped her. "That's okay. I'll get it. Where are your keys?"

"They should be in the front pouch of my purse."

He found her keys easily and strolled out to her car. God, he would have to convince her to let him drive this thing someday soon. She'd been spot on; Apollo was an excellent name for it. Beautifully restored, the interior had been redone in black leather. She'd left the vintage radio, but he noticed an auxiliary port and dock for her phone. He'd love to keep admiring the details, but grabbed the box from the back seat and retreated inside.

"Find it okay?"

"Yeah."

"You better not have drooled on my interior. I'll take you for a drive in it sometime. He has a lovely growl when I turn him on." She smirked and watched Derek flush. "Can you hand me the bag of breadcrumbs from that box? It's just the Ziploc bag."

"You make homemade breadcrumbs?"

"And you don't? They taste so much better. All you have to do is save the ends from the loaves of bread, wait for them to dry out, and throw them in a blender. Anyway, pour some in a shallow bowl. In another bowl make up an egg wash. You're going to dredge the chicken breasts in the wash, then the breadcrumbs. Do you have big cooking pans? If not I brought some pans."

He pulled two hotel pans out from a cupboard next the stove. "Will these work? Stiles said I needed to buy them for pack dinners."

"Those will be perfect. After you bread the chicken, put it in the pan in a single layer."

"Cam, I know how to make chicken parm."

"Oh excuse me, Mr. Alpha." She joked, pulling out the tomatoes for the sauce.

"The skinny drawer behind you has the cutting boards." He opened the closet and pulled out a couple of aprons. "I hope you don't mind pink. That one's my sister's."
"I don't particularly like it, but it's better than getting sauce all over my shirt. I prefer to ruin band t-shirts in ways that do not involve cooking." She went to work dicing the tomatoes, throwing them in a pot with chicken stock, minced garlic, and tomato paste. "I didn't bring herbs and spices."

"Next to the microwave." He watched her open the cabinet and stare at the spice jars, opening several to smell them. Before long, the mixed scent of anxiety and frustration reached his nose, and he strode over to help. "Something wrong?"

She rubbed her forehead. "Not really. I can't find oregano, basil, and parsley. Dried herbs aren't as easy to identify by sight."

He pulled the three jars and handed them to her. "They have labels. I mean they are clear, so they're probably hard to see."

Her nervous chuckle didn't lessen her anxiety much. "Oh right. Well thank you. This needs to simmer for about half an hour."

He placed the last breaded piece of chicken in its pan. "Well this will take about 40 minutes if I remember right."

"About that. An extra ten minutes on the sauce will only make it tastier." She set a pot filled with water on the stove to boil.

Should I ask her now? Wait till later? What if I've totally read her wrong? He sighed. She'll just kick my ass if I have. That won't be so bad. Wait a minute. You saw how she manhandled Jackson, that could be you... God how I want that to be me, but later after she's had time to recover fully. Yeah, later. Like months later... or years. He felt his palms begin to sweat. No just forget it. "Would you like a tour, something to drink?"

"I'd love a tour, and I'd love a drink."

"Well follow me, if you would." He gave her an in-depth tour, more thorough than he'd probably give the rest of the pack, but hey, they were there alone and she made him nervous. A good nervous, definitely a good nervous. "This is Cora's room. I don't think she'd like me showing you, but trust me, you don't want to see it. It's probably a disaster; even as a kid, her room was never clean. This one next to hers is Isaac's. They share a bathroom." He opened the door to reveal a perfectly clean room. "I know. I don't know how they manage to share a bathroom either. I like to imagine Isaac in there with industrial cleaning gloves and declaring war."

She laughed. "Why does Isaac live with you? You never said. I thought he was still in high school. Where are his parents?"

"His mom died when he was younger, and his dad was a real piece of work. I turned him so he could fight back against the bastard, but we had trouble with a kanima, and Mr. Lahey got caught in that mess. Anyway Isaac lived with Scott and his mom until they moved in with Stiles and his dad. My loft really didn't have the space for both him and Cora. I don't think he minded though; he was just happy to have a home." He closed the door and pointed to the one at the end of the hall. "This door here is my uncle's suite. I don't even want to know how he's decorated the place. Knowing him he has an Iron Maiden in the corner and probably shrunken heads hanging from the ceiling."

"That's morbid."
"Yeah it is, but, in all likelihood, it's probably true. When you meet Peter, you'll understand. First three rooms on the right are guest rooms." They walked back towards the stairs. "So on the second floor is Scott's suite, another bathroom plus bedroom, and the library. Third floor is my suite, Stiles' room plus another bathroom, and the game room." He took her up to the third floor and walked to the other side of the house.

"Any particular reason your room is on the opposite side of the house all the other bedrooms besides Stiles'? What do you get up to, you naughty boy?"

His face flushed. "Um, not me. I'm in a bit of a dry spell."

She looked at him incredulously. "No offense, but men who look as good as you do, don't really have problems in that area."

"It's self-imposed. I have terrible luck finding the crazies." He rubbed the back of his neck.

"Oh yeah. Right."

"Yeah. I even made the extra effort had the bedrooms soundproofed as best as possible, but of course, you can still hear a little. Anyway, I don't want to hear anything Cora might be doing in her room, and I certainly don't want to know with whom. Same goes for Isaac's and the guest rooms, and definitely not Peter. He's um...well how do I describe him? You know it's probably best I didn't."

"Well that's certainly open minded of you. Most guys I know, like to pretend their baby sisters don't even do so much as kiss boys."

"She's my sister, not my kid. I don't care what or who she does. I just don't want to know about it. Stiles' room is up on this floor because..."

"Because he's your confidante and you don't want the rest of the pack knowing you have late night chats?"

"Yeah, how did you-"

"Did you forget I spent a month as your pet cat? I imagine he's had to wake you from a nightmare a couple times."

"Yeah, and he stays over a lot when his dad and Melissa have the night shifts. Those nights, I have been told are usually when Scott sleeps at Allison's and vice versa. Draw your own conclusions. They're probably correct. The bedrooms on the third floor have thicker walls and floors, and...well there is a pocket door that can slide shut and block off the stairs." He pulled it out to show her. "They all know it's there, but nobody asks about it. Stiles lets them think he has chronic insomnia and doesn't want to disturb anyone, but really, it's for me."

She poked her head into his room. "Oh very nice. I like the color scheme, very masculine. I mean navy blue is only a small step up from black, but glad to see you expanding your color choices." She flopped onto his bed. "Comfy."

He shook his head, chuckling slightly. "Why? What color is your bedroom?"

She thought for a few seconds. "You'll just have to come by and see it sometime."
He swallowed hard. "So this is the bathroom." He pushed open the door and followed her in.

She whistled. "That is quite the shower."

"Yeah, I've been ecstatic about it so far."

"Ecstatic eh? You could get up to a lot of trouble in a shower like this."

"Absolutely. I know it looks confusing, but I could show you how it works, or you could use it sometime if you wanted. Shit!" He covered his mouth, more than a little embarrassed, his face flamed. "That came out so wrong. I didn't mean it like that."

"Yeah you did. You spend too much time around teenagers, Derek. If you want to make innuendo, go ahead. I'm a big girl; I can handle it, and if I can't, I'll let you know."

He thrust his hands in his pockets, shuffling out of the room before he could further embarrass himself.

"I'd like that drink now."

"Don't you want to see the game room? There's a pool table, and it's a big one. High end, great quality. The felt is really soft."

Patting his cheek, she smirked. "Because that's not at all suggestive."

Oh God. I've turned into Stiles. Fucking hell, shit damn, I've turned into Stiles around women, the way he was two years ago. Not the way he is now. Pretty sure his game would put me to shame. Ugh kill me now. His face was on fire. He'd have to get this blushing thing under control before the rest of the pack showed up. He'd never hear the end of it otherwise.

"Brooding, handsome, with a commanding presence, who loves muscle cars and leather jackets, but still manages to fall apart around a pretty girl? Oh Derek, dove sei stato tutta la mia vita?" She scampered back down the stairs and into the kitchen where she gave the tomato sauce a good stir. "This is ready to go on the chicken. Want to do the honors while I slice the cheese?"

He pulled the chicken from the oven and began ladling the sauce over the top, as he tried to ignore Cambia. The way her tongue stuck out slightly from the corner of her mouth as she concentrated was more than a little endearing. Endearing? Can you even hear yourself? You don't deserve someone like that after your poor choices in women. Get over it.

She laid a slice of fresh mozzarella atop each piece of chicken, and then topped that with freshly shredded Parmesan cheese. Derek returned the chicken to the oven and dumped the dry noodles into the boiling water.

"Is there bread? Isaac and Stiles are kind of addicted to carbs."

"You mean like this?" She pulled four loaves of Italian bread from a grocery bag. "Do you want to slice the bread or melt butter?"

"There is softened butter in that dish right there." He pointed next to the fridge. "No not that one, the little stone crock thing. Yeah that one. If you need the butter actually melted, that container can go in the microwave." He set out a few cookie sheets.
Cambia opened a container she’d brought from home, pulling from it a couple heads of roasted garlic, handing one to him.

"What am I supposed to do with this?"

"Squeeze the cloves into a bowl." She popped the butter into the microwave. "See like this." She demonstrated, and soon, the bowl was filled with the garlic.

Derek grabbed the butter. "Do I just pour this into-"

"Yes. Now we add dried parsley and shredded cheese. Then we just brush the bread with it." With the two of them working together it did not take much time at all. "The bread only takes five minutes. We can put it in when people get here."

"Thanks for doing this. Normally, Stiles or I cook for bonding nights."

"It's no trouble. I'm good at this sort of thing, you know, taking care of people, or at least I used to be."

He thought about asking what changed, but the look on her face begged him not to ask. So he didn't, but he figured it had something to do with losing her pack. Instead, he crossed behind her to the liquor cabinet. His sister teased him about it. Why have a liquor cabinet if werewolves can't get drunk without WolfWhiskey? To which, he reminded her that he happened to like the taste of alcohol. He for one, loved wine, and what about their guests, more importantly the human members of their pack? Not that any of them were old enough to drink, but he figured if he kept their keys and they didn't get alcohol poisoning, who would know about it? It wasn't like none of them had fake I.D.'s and drank at parties already. Way to be a role model, jackass. He neglected to tell her about the two bottles of Wolfsbane laced alcohol in the back of the cabinet. "I picked up some Scotch just for you, but I also have wine, beer, and just about anything you might want for a cocktail."

She eyed him warily. "Who told you I like Scotch?"

He turned bright red. "Um... crap. Well... so like a week before Kitty Cambia sneaked into my loft, the Sheriff asked me for my help. He thought your disappearance seemed "unique," which is our code for supernatural. He had me look at some of the evidence." Once again he clamped a hand over his mouth, the bright pink blush returning to his cheeks. "Your scent..."

"What about it?"

"There is a subtle whiskey note, but it is definitely barley based with a little bit of vanilla." He pulled out a bottle. "I didn't know what brand, but the clerk at the liquor store recommended it."

Sweet merciful heavens, it was a label she recognized. "Glenfiddich 18 year. Not my favorite, but it's good."

He pulled out a glass. "Do you need ice?"

She shook her head, and he handed her a glass.

"Just out of curiosity, what is your favorite?"
"Glenmorangie Quinta Ruban 12 year. It's fruity, sweet, with oak and a port finish. So good, and surprisingly not too expensive."

"You seem well educated on it."

"Bartender remember? Plus, thanks to a couple of my forms, I have excellent sense of smell and taste." She watched him pour a glass of red wine. "I wouldn't have pegged you for a wine drinker." She took the bottle from him. "You like reds?"

"Yeah. I'm not big on white wine, and Malbec is my favorite especially that one."

She made a mental note that he liked South American wine, and took note to memorize the way the label looked. "So you got that I am a Scotch drinker just from my scent? What else does it tell you?"

He rubbed the back of his neck. "I forget." Total lie.

"Then get reacquainted." She held out her wrist.

"May I?" She nodded. "I've found that," standing behind her, he moved the hair out of the way, "the spot right beneath the ear, is the best place for me to discern the subtle...nuances of a person's scent, without worrying about other, more intimate scents interfering...if you catch my drift." His breath lingered over the skin of her neck.

She froze and pulled away. "Um, is it now?"

"It's okay. I'm just a little jumpy still. Flirting is one thing, but that was a little intimate too quickly. I'm not ready for that, yet, you know after..."

"Oh my god. I am such a jackass." He smacked himself in the forehead. "I completely forgot, and I touched you without asking. I am so sorry."

"S'okay." She swallowed hard. "I wish I could forget. But," she held out her wrist and smiled softly, "I'd still like to know."

He held her wrist to his nose. "Your scent is intriguing to me. Besides the hint of scotch, there is olive, and basil I think. There's bougainvillea, ocean water, and clay like wet terracotta tiles. What I smell most is coconut, though." He couldn't tell her he also smelled sorrow underneath all the other notes.

"Ah the coconut. I love that stuff. When I was younger, I ate it all the time, so much so my mother told me once that my blood probably tasted like it. I believed her until I bit my cheek at dinner once. My blood totally does not taste like coconut. Why is my smell interesting?"

"Because it's different than a lot of women who have heavy floral or citrus notes. Yours is earthy. Aside from the coconut and bougainvillea, it's almost masculine."

She pulled her arm away from him. "I smell like a guy?"

"No, it's a good thing. It smells like strength, richness, marinas, and lineage." He paused. "Actually,
you smell like Liguria."

Her eyebrows rose. "You've been to the Italian Riviera?"

"Short visit. I studied abroad for a semester in Venice."

"Did you now? I thought your Italian had a Venetian accent."

"Yeah, there's Italian on my mother's side, but they all came from Padua. Venice was a good choice. Anyway, I didn't mean to imply you smelled like a man. I think you smell um...fantastic." He covered his face with both hands. "God, I am a walking embarrassment tonight."

"Well, I'll let you make it up to me." She beckoned him closer and took his arm

The smooth skin of her cheek felt cool up against his wrist as she scented him. "You smell like hazelnut coffee with cream and a disgusting amount of sugar, and you use Tide laundry detergent and Downy original scent fabric softener. There's shampoo, shaving cream, and deodorant in there too, but it's not as strong as everything else, and I can't pinpoint the brands. You use a waxy product in your hair. Pomade, I think. Those smells though, are just not that important. As for you, your personal scent, below all that is definitely leather, fallen leaves, campfire smoke, and black pepper. How'd I do coach?" She looked over at him to see him smirking. "What?"

"That's one hell of a nose you have there. I'm curious, which form gives you that?"

She leaned into his ear. "Maybe I'll tell you...after you earn it."

"They're here." Quickly, he pushed away from her and put the bread in the oven under the broiler. Get a hold of yourself. It had been quite some time since he felt uncomfortable around a woman, but this time it was a good discomfort. He liked the feeling, and he missed it.

*   *   *   *   *   *

"Oh my God! It smells like heaven in here!" Stiles called out as he, Scott, and Allison walked in the front door. "You didn't have to cater, Derek."

He groaned inwardly, more than a little upset his moment with Cambia had come to an abrupt end. "I didn't. Cambia cooked."

"You cook too?" Stiles crossed the kitchen to wrap her in an enthusiastic hug. "You'll be a great addition to the pack."

"Who said I was joining?"

He beamed. "Since you've bought a condo and have a job in Beacon Hills now, you've obviously decided to stay here. Well, Big Guy here, has this thing about Omegas. He doesn't want anyone to be on their own, which is why he gave you the offer of joining in the first place. He has this pathological need to protect people, and even though you, my street fighting shapeshifter, can clearly take care of yourself, you need us. If your food tastes half as good as it smells, we need you too."

* Stiles, you may talk way too fucking much, but sometimes, I'm so glad you do, because then I don't
"have to say a damn thing." "Though as a formality, we do have to discuss it at dinner. I mean, I get final say, but I have to worry about pack dynamics."

"Totally understood."

As Stiles went to raid the liquor cabinet, Derek leaned forward and whispered, "If you want to join, it's already a yes." He looked over to see Stiles pouring a large glass of Bourbon over ice. "Keys now!" He held out his hand.

Grumbling, the teen placed them in Derek's palm. "Yes Sir, Grandpa." Derek silenced him with a glare.

Cambia took the bread and chicken from the oven. "I hope everyone gets here soon or the food will get cold."

"Hi Derek." Cora called out and walked down the hall to her room, carrying several shopping bags, but not before staring long and hard at Cambia. Derek told her that his cat Molly, was actually a shapeshifter named Cambia, but he'd neglected to describe her other than dark hair and she was tall. She decided the woman in the kitchen must be her.

"She may be my niece, but I am never going shopping with her again. Eight hours, Derek, eight long hours! I mean, I know I've been away for like five months now, but come on. That was cruel and unusual punishment, cruel and unusual. Why don't you give me the thumbscrews while you're at it? By the way, don't think Isaac is any form of company, because he isn't. Seriously, how many scarves does one person need?" Peter groaned and just like Stiles had, went straight for the liquor cabinet. "What do we have here? When did you become a Scotch drinker?"

"I didn't buy that for you."

This caught his uncle's attention. "Why Derek, I'm hurt. After all this time, you finally develop a taste for it, and you don't want to share? I thought we were family"

"I bought it for her." He pointed to Cambia.

"This must be Cambia." Peter's eyebrows rose. "You're certainly a lot taller than I expected." He measured himself against her. "Derek, she's taller than me. Why is she taller than me?" He whined before continuing. "Anyway, Cora says you can shift into a black cat and you spent a month as Derek's pet, which he named Molly. I hope that's not code for a kinky BDSM relationship."

He pinched the bridge of his nose. "No Peter, it isn't. I really thought she was a cat. The going theory was a witch's familiar or a child of Bastet. Stiles convinced me to let her stick around until he figured it out, and well he didn't. Turns out she's just a shapeshifter who was stuck in cat form."

"Well, that's not particularly scary, especially if you can't heal the way wereanimals can. The last thing we need is another Stiles."

"Hey! I heard that Uncle Creepy!"

"No offense, kid. You're lionhearted with a good brain, but--"

Derek could smell his irritation. "Lay off him, Peter! Stiles spends a lot of time with his dad and Mr. Argent at the firing range. I'm pretty sure he can take care of himself. You also shouldn't mess with,
Cam. She has a fiery temper. Just ask Jackson when he gets here."

"A housecat against a werewolf? Not scared."

"Whose car is that? It's quite the classic."

Speak of the devil. There was just something about Jackson's voice that grated on Derek's last nerve. He opened his mouth to speak, but Cambia silenced him with a finger to the lips.

"Keep your rich boy claws off my car, Abercrombie!"

"You know, Peter, she was in Tabitha and Charlie's pack." Derek said.

"Really? Tabby's standards must be dropping then."

In one smooth and swift movement, Cambia grabbed Peter's shirt, spun him and slammed him against the wall pinning him place at the neck, which took him by surprise. He hadn't been expecting her to be so strong. Taller than him, sure, but strong enough to push around a werewolf? Well that was interesting.

A low growl rumbled in her throat. Knowing he was responsible for Laura's death and how it haunted Derek, was reason enough, but she'd be damned if anyone was going to insult her former alpha, especially not this smarmy asshole. Werewolf or not, she knew she could knock him down a peg, especially if she went full grizzly bear, though she had no intention of letting this man know just how much of a force she could really be. Her mother's advice echoed in her head: Be careful to whom you show your true form, Tesorina. You are special.

Derek rubbed his temples. He'd been trying so hard to hide the fact he really liked Cambia, waiting for the appropriate moment to ask her on a date (Though he figured that would take some time, for the both of them), and his stupid uncle was going to ruin things. He watched her fingernails morph. From where she held Peter, the claws were long enough to poke him in the jaw.

"I have those too." Peter winced, flashing his own at her.

"Yours don't look like these." She let go of him with one hand only to wave her four inch long claws in plain view as if no say 'Neener, neener, neener.' He bared his fangs. She replied by partially shifting, revealing fangs, which happened to be longer than her nails. "Mine are bigger. Want to see my other trickssss?" She hissed, literally, as a forked snake tongue darted out from between her teeth and hit him in the face. "You know? I've found snake venom to be useful at immobilizing enemies. If I really concentrate, I can spit the venom with pretty good accuracy." She switched from her jaguar teeth to snake fangs before turning to Allison, the skin of her arms turning into black scales as she spoke "You're an archer right?"

"Yes."

"Get yourself a snake milking kit, and I'll give you all the venom you could possibly need in several varieties. Imagine what arrow tips coated in that could do."

"I gave everyone the tour and per your expressed wishes, kept them out of your room." Isaac practically jumped out of his skin when he walked into the kitchen. "Holy shit! What is the hell is that, and why are creatures attacking on Pack Bonding Night? I just wanted to watch a movie."
"That's just Cambia. She's going to join our pack."

"But what is she, Stiles?"

"Shapeshifter with a couple unique skills: The ability to shift into many forms, and apparently several at once." He grinned. Ever since the man kidnapped him several years ago, he loved seeing Peter suffer. "You know her better as Molly."

"Wait...Derek's cat...was actually a woman?"

"You probably shouldn't have been out of town that weekend or been holed up in your room non-stop for the last month."

"How many forms?"

"Let's just say it's more than five. It takes quite a bit of work to conquer another form, but I'm nothing if not committed." She winked and let go of Peter, retracted both her claws and fangs, flexing her neck as she quickly returned to her normal form. "My point is, Peter..." The way she said his name with such disdain caused a slight chuckle to escape Derek's throat. "I'm useful, because, though I can't heal the way you werewolves do, I never have to worry about my inner animal taking over and consuming me. When I phase, it's still me in here." She tapped her head. "I'm also impervious to Wolfsbane, and as my true shape, my strength is comparable to you wolves... well, probably stronger given the animal."

"What is true shape?"

"In my kind, each child is born with an animal that is their true shape or Vero Corpo. It's stronger than any of that animal species would be, definitely superhuman, and larger than they would be naturally. The bigger the animal, the stronger you are."

"Which animal is that?"

"Wouldn't you love to know? I don't let her out very often. She's rather conspicuous. Anyway, shall we eat?" Feeling more cheerful, she turned and moved the pans into the dining room leaving only Derek and Peter in the kitchen. "Buon Appetito kids."

Peter rubbed his neck. "Anger issues aside, I think I like her. You should definitely ask her to be in the pack. Oh wait. She's not another maladjusted teenager is she?" He looked at his nephew, who appeared to be in his own little world as he watched her return for the pan of bread. "Hello?" He passed a hand in front of Derek's face. "Come in, Alpha."

"I'm sorry. What? No she's twenty-four."

He inhaled. "Oh...I get it."

"Get what?"

He pointed to his nose, earning a death glare from his nephew. "It's damn near oozing from your pores. It's nice to see you showing an interest in someone who isn't a Darach or evil huntress, though only time will tell. You really do have terrible luck with women."

Cambia popped her head into the kitchen. "Coming, Derek?" She turned to Peter. "And testa di
"Cazzo?"

"Wha-"

"She called you a dick head."

"Why don't any of them like me?"

"Because you're a narcissistic asshole, who rubs everyone the wrong way." Derek snickered, letting his irritation with Peter roll off his shoulders. He was going to enjoy himself tonight, despite what anyone tried to do.

Chapter End Notes

Translation for Italian used in this chapter: (Thanks again to Shadows_Den for helping out with my Italian translation). Facce di cazzo changed to testa di cazzo

Dove sei stato tutta la mia vita?- Where have you been all my life?
Tesorina- Little treasure (term of endearment)
Testa di cazzo- Dick head

As usual, please let me know if my Italian is off.
Chapter Notes

Not sure how I feel about the second half to the last chapter. Ah well. There is a time to fix it, and that time is...later. I am too tired to fix it. Dialogue heavy and shamelessly filled with pop culture references.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

In the dining room of the new Hale house, Cambia set the pans of food in the middle of the large table and moved to sit at the far corner next to the window.

"Oh no you don't, my raven-haired Amazonian Princess. You are sitting by me." Stiles took her arm.

She cocked an eyebrow at him. "Why?"

"Because I love your pop culture references. Plus, you can protect me from Uncle Bad Touch and Daddy's Money."

"Um okay."

God Stiles wished he had a camera at that moment just so he could capture the insulted and shocked look on Peter's face.

"Uncle Bad Touch? I'll have you know Stiles-"

"You kidnapped me! That's close enough to a Pedo as I ever want to get."

When everyone had food on their plates, Cambia served herself.

"You know, you didn't have wait. We don't technically have any omegas in this pack." Isaac smiled at her. "Once Derek and Scott get food and start eating it's fair game."

"It's not that, but I'll keep it in mind."

"Oh my God!" Stiles couldn't even swallow before telling her what he thought of her cooking. "I think I love you. This is seriously the best thing I've ever eaten."

"Yeah, it's really good." Allison added, and several others nodded in assent.

"Thanks."

Derek stood up. "So if you haven't met her yet, this is Cambia. You all should know I asked her to join our pack."

"Before any of you say no, for those that weren't there, you should also know she totally manhandled Jackson when they met and almost made werewolf mincemeat of Peter in the kitchen. She's-"
"Shut up, Stiles."

He gave Derek a weak salute. "Sure thing, Big Guy."

"Wait, she threatened Peter?" Lydia asked.

Stiles grinned at her. "Not so much as threatened as performed a demonstration of her skills. It was awesome."

"If she got to Peter, that's good enough for me."

"Really Lydia? After all we've been through."

Allison spoke up before Lydia could offer a rebuttal. "We could use another woman in the pack."

"Yeah, Derek, I agree." Isaac nodded. He really missed Erica. Well, both her and Boyd, but mostly Erica.

"Well I for one would be thrilled to have another person other than Derek and myself who isn't a teenager."

Cora quirked an eyebrow at her uncle.

"What? I happen to like aggressive women."

Without missing a beat Cambia cut him off at the knees. "So not gonna happen." She cut her chicken with her fork. "I would break you in half."

"Parlor tricks aside, remember I am a werewolf. I could take you in a fight."

She smirked. "I wasn't talking about fighting."

Derek and Stiles both choked on their chicken, before the Alpha reeled in the conversation. "Does anyone object?"

"Don't take this the wrong way, but what does she know about being in a pack? She spent the last eight months in a cage."

"She's been in a pack before, Jackson."

"Well, then we should worry about her loyalty, because if she left them--"

"Says the douchenozzle who killed a number of innocent people as a lizard monster puppet to a vindictive and deranged teenager puppeteer." Stiles looked quite pleased with himself. "Oh yeah, we remember about that." Before he could stop himself, he started humming "I've Got No Strings" from Disney's Pinocchio, which earned more than a few giggles from the pack.

"You know, Jackson has a point."

Derek pinched the bridge of his nose. Peter, always fucking Peter, because why not?
Cambia finished chewing her bite of chicken and swallowed. "I was in my pack for three years before we encountered trouble with a new pack in Reno who wanted our territory and power. They started off by picking off our patrol guards, whittling down our ranks until we only had eight left. See about a year after I joined, our Alpha, Tabitha and her mate, Charlie instituted a new rule. We all had to sign up for it, or we would have to leave. They turned us into a Last-Soldier Pack."

"What is that?" Isaac took a bite

Derek sighed. "It means if their Alpha should find herself mortally wounded by a member of a rival pack, the next in command puts her out of her misery."

"Why would they want to do that?"

"One, to end her suffering, and two, so they keep control of the pack within their ranks instead of letting it fall to an outsider." Derek had an idea where Cambia was going with her story.

God, retelling this story hit her right in the gut, and she hadn't even come to the difficult part yet. "Right. So after their demented Alpha ripped Charlie apart, limb from limb, Tabitha was a wreck. I mean they'd been together for seventeen years. We were all on edge and close to broken from their attack a few days before, but Tabitha, she wasn't in her right mind anymore, and the rest of us, well we weren't doing much better. At least, I know I wasn't." She shuddered. "Keep it together. There is a time and a place for tears...and that place is not at the dinner table. "We tried to keep her out of the fight, but she had nothing left to lose and was determined to go down fighting. I mean, after the death of her mate, she knew she wasn't going to last long. Well, the Alpha went after her first. The next in line, Vincent, Tabitha's brother, tried his best to protect her. He failed as did James, his subordinate. That Alpha was beyond powerful. For all our power, we were hardly a match."

"So what happened?"

"Care to guess the next in line after James?" She pointed a thumb at her sternum. "Me. By the time I found Tabby, we were the only two left. She'd run away to die. One jaguar bite to the back of her skull was all it took. Did you know that jaguars are the only big cat to do that, kill from the back. Tigers, lions, leopards, and cougars they all go for the throat and crush the windpipe. It takes so much more effort and time. A jaguar uses its powerful jaws and long teeth to pierce the skull and brain. This bite was quick, painless and merciful, which was great because that meant I didn't have to look at her eyes when I did it. She was like a second mother. When it came down to it, even if Vincent or James had managed to find her, I don't think they could have done it."

"Unfortunately, there was no way I could take on six wolves on my own. Three maybe, but six? Not when I was already exhausted. I had no intention of staying only to fight, die, and have them eat my carcass. So I ran, making sure to leave a scent trail in all the wrong places. I rubbed on trees, splashed in the creek, rock. They looked for me for six days, finally deciding I must have gone somewhere to die."

"How did you escape them? Werewolves have great hearing and sense of smell." Lydia had trouble wrapping her head around it.

"They saw me in human form, and they saw me in wolf form. They were looking for the wrong animal. I made it to the lake and spent the next six days as a sturgeon. Thank god I didn't end up on a hook. That would have blown like a cheap whore. Escaping six angry werewolves only to end up caviar. Anyway, basically, what I'm saying, Abercrombie, is you are looking at not only the remaining member of a twenty-five person pack that was all werewolves except for three, but technically, their surviving alpha. Seems to me, a pack with three alphas and a former alpha might be..."
pretty damn hard to beat. Did you hear that Peter? A shifter survived over twenty-two werewolves. Strong enough for you? Io non sono fragile." She balled up her napkin and flung it at him.

He held up hands in surrender. "I meant no off-

She halted him with a hand of her own. "Vaffanculo. You had a chance to make a good first impression. You failed."

Derek held a balled fist over his mouth, biting his thumb trying not to laugh at his uncle as a stunned silence fell over the group.

Minutes ticked away as everyone quietly ate until the awkward silence bubbled over, finally breaking Stiles. "So aside from the fact you should only speak Italian, like all the time, because it's super hot, it sure seems like everyone else wants you to be one of us. So really it's just Peter and Jackson being difficult as usual?"

"Yep." Derek took a drink from his wine glass. "Before we get carried away with other conversations, we are all stepping up training. Stiles and I helped the sheriff uncover a string of missing and/or abducted supernaturals throughout California. Most of the abductions have been from public places, so we doubt it's regular hunters, especially ones following the code given the particular wolves taken, which includes a large number of teenagers. I've asked Mr. Argent to come and help us with fighting off hunters and train the non-wolves on fighting skills." A couple people in the group groaned their displeasure. "No, I don't want to hear it. We are not having a repeat of Erica and Boyd okay? I don't want that to happen to any of us; I don't want to lose any more pack mates."

He poured himself a second glass of wine. "That would..." He wanted to say how it would practically kill him to lose anymore pack mates, but held his tongue. "Well it would suck."

"So... you're from Reno? Did you grow up there?" Isaac grabbed his third piece of garlic bread.

"No. I grew up in Mahtomedi, Minnesota, which is a suburb of St. Paul on White Bear Lake. So should we ever need anyone who can drive a boat... I'm pretty good at it. Anyway, I was born in Florence though but moved to Genoa when I was two."

"Where's Florence?"

Stiles rapped his head against the table, groaning while he did so. "Seriously Scott? Birthplace of the Italian Renaissance. I worry about you. Seriously. I think you should spend a little less time studying Allison, and a lot more time on school. I should tell your mom to ground you."

"How old were you when you emigrated?"

"Aren't you a curious cat, Isaac? I was eight. My father took a professor position at a university in Minneapolis."

"What did he teach?"

"European History, and my mother was a neurosurgeon."

"Are they like retired now?"
To keep her hands from shaking, she occupied them with her garlic bread. "No. It was a drunk driver. They were coming to pick me up from a New Year's Eve Party. Since they were both only children, and their parents had died before we left Italy, I've been on my own since I was sixteen. I mean one of my high school teachers was sort of my mentor for those last two years, but the court granted emancipation. One of the perks of having decent grades and attendance. I'm pretty glad I got naturalized before they died. I really don't think I would have wanted to be deported." She paused. "Actually, I know I wouldn't have wanted that. There would be no one back there to take care of me either."

Derek raised an eyebrow, knowing the salary those two jobs could bring. He remembered the sheriff saying her family was dead and understood all too well the survivor's guilt that came with life insurance money.

"So you're all alone?" Isaac looked down at his hands. "Derek that settles it. You have to let her join. She has no one. How many of us can understand that?"

"Welcome to the pack then."

She looked around the table to see a lot of fallen faces. Yikes! Who kicked the proverbial puppy? "I'm sensing dead parents to be a commonality here. Oh dear God, it's like the Island of Misfit Toys."

"I call dibs on Bumble." Stiles laughed, but found no one understood his joke. "The abominable snowman? Oh come on, Scott! Don't you remember when Matt asked what I turned into at the police station?"

Scott giggled. "You said the abominable snowman."

"Well damn." Cambia sighed. "If you are Bumble, I call dibs on the ostrich riding cowboy."

Stiles whistled. "Well that was depressing... So, as chairman of our fun committee-"

Peter turned to him. "We have a fun committee?"

"Well no, but somebody has to be in charge of pack bonding. Derek doesn't remember how to have fun unless I help. He's twenty-four going on eighty with a permanently blown funny fuse."

In a truly out of character action in front of the whole pack, Derek began laughing. Unable to stop himself, he continued until tears of mirth fell from his eyes. His laughter caught on like a flame, and pretty soon he had the whole table in stitches.

"Dude, what... what..." Scott struggled to take in enough air to speak. "What is so funny?"

"Funny fuse, but this isn't The Big Lebowski, quit calling me dude." His face was bright red as he fought to get control of himself.

When the cackling died down, Stiles resumed his speech about fun. "Before we go watch a movie, which by the way Cambia, I think you should get to pick, because you made this wonderful dinner-"

"There's dessert too." Derek smirked.

Stiles practically made heart eyes at her. "Yep, I definitely love you, Cambia."
She smiled. "I'll go get it."

"Do you want help?" Derek asked.

"No, that's all right." She placed a hand on Derek's shoulder, halting him.

He tried to hide the sudden rush of warmth that coursed through his veins when she touched him, but judging from the look Peter gave him, he had not been too successful. He glared at him. However, no one else seemed to notice the way his heart skipped a beat the moment her fingers brushed his skin. I am in so much trouble. Sure his tough guy exterior would be undone by their newest pack member, he focused on calming his breathing.

"So," Cambia started as she returned balancing a pair of platters on her right hand and forearm, "this is vanilla bean panna cotta, which is like a custard. I myself prefer coconut, but it's a hit or miss flavor."

"Neat trick." Stiles pointed to the trays.

"You should see me change a keg." She set a ceramic ramekin in front of each person.

Instead of Stiles being the first to comment on the taste of the dessert, Derek did with an appreciative moan that sounded far more sexual than he probably intended. "Oh fuck that tastes amazing! It's like there's a flavor orgy in my mouth."

"If he'd told you no to being in the pack, you could have baited him with baked goods. The man has one hell of a sweet tooth. I'm sure you saw him make coffee once or twice."

Derek scowled. "Oh come on! It's not that bad!"

"Dude, I've seen you wolf down half a sheet cake." He chuckled. "Wolf down... ha. I made a pun. Changing subject, we are going to do a small icebreaker."

"Nobody likes those things." Peter leaned across Cora to grab Stiles' shirt.

"Help! Stranger danger!"

He released him. "Well fine. You kids can play your little game. I'm going to my room."

"Aww, does someone need a timeout?" Derek joked.

Peter thought about saying something to him, but it had been so long since he'd seen his nephew look even half as happy as he did tonight. Look, Peter was many things, many, many bad things, but even he couldn't rain on the kid's parade at the moment. He was just glad to see the guy laugh again. He retreated to his suite and shut the door, thrilled the soundproof walls would keep him from hearing any of their ridiculous conversation. Stupid werewolf hearing.

"Did you really yell stranger danger just then, Stiles?"

"That I did, Derek. That I did."

"Do we need to get you a whistle or a Bad Touch Bear?"
Stiles stared at him.

"A can of mace? We can sit Peter down and make him watch a video on harassment and inappropriateness if you think it would help. Hell, I'll even hire Sexual Harassment Panda if you want."

"He shouldn't be too hard to find. He lives in the east beneath the willow tree." Cambia giggled, and surprisingly Derek joined her. They both enjoyed their shared joke.

"Seriously? Since when do you watch South Park? Why didn't you tell me that? You're making jokes and laughing. Who are you and what have you done with Derek Hale? And Cambia? I've known you three weeks, and so far you've made Buffy, How I Met Your Mother and South Park references. If you make one about Star Trek, I'm in big trouble."

"Ah well, the time will come young Padawan."

"And Star Wars now. You're...real right? I didn't just make you up, because it's looking at a mirror image of myself. Well, a female, older, tanner, slightly shorter, and more attractive version of myself."

She leaned over. "Has anyone ever told you talk too much? Is it like all the time, or just a nervous tic?"

"And now it's like I'm talking to a female, much less hairy and tanner version of Derek."

"So I'm not cuter than Derek?"

He looked back and forth between her and his alpha several times, before inhaling sharply through his teeth. "It's a toss up."

"I'm going to give you a piece of valuable advice. Before you say anything and start rambling, take a deep breath. It gives you a little bit of time to compose yourself." She gave him a genuine smile, the kind that reached her eyes.

"Derek can go first, and we'll go to his right." A couple groans emanated from around the table. "Quit complaining or I'll make the questions hard and embarrassing. Or...I'll keep talking about absolutely nothing, nonstop, until you all leave. Don't think I can't or won't do it. I am ready to recite the 92 Theses at a moment's notice. So let's start with what is everyone's favorite movie? It's not too hard."

"Mine is Back to the Future."

"Now you Scott."

"The Hangover."

"10 Things I Hate About You." Allison followed.

"Well I love."

"Don't say it, don't." Jackson groaned.
"It's a great movie."

"It's a fucking terrible movie, Lydia."

She turned to her boyfriend, playfully punching him in the arm. "I don't care. I love The Notebook."

"I can't tell you how many times she's made me watch that piece of garbage masquerading as a movie. Peter almost ate me alive in a video store because she had to have that movie. Hoosiers."

"Oh here we go again. You said I would like that movie, which I absolutely did not, by the way."

"Says the woman who is obsessed with The Notebook."

Derek looked shocked. "How can you hate Hoosiers? What's next? You're going to tell me you hate Major League."

"It that the terrible baseball movie with Charlie Sheen."

"Noooo! You take that back!" Derek sounded as though he'd had the wind knocked out of him. "You devil woman!"

Cora silenced their argument. "I like Gone in 60 Seconds."

"I personally am quite fond of Star Wars, even though a certain friend of mine has still never seen it. I'm talking to you, Scott."

Cambia looked at Scott like he had sprouted wings. "Seriously? How the hell have you never seen Star Wars? You're an American teenaged male. It's like a right of passage right up there with learning to shave and change a tire."

"I keep forgetting to borrow it from Stiles, and I don't know how to change a tire."

"Seriously?!!" Both Cambia and Derek yelled in unison.

"No."

Still floored, she focused on the question. "That's incredible. I am going to have to fix that. Scott, everyone should know how to fix a tire, change oil and spark plugs. Anyway, my favorite is Die Hard. I could watch that movie every day. In fact, it's my favorite Christmas movie."

Lydia scrunched up her nose. "That's not a Christmas movie."

"Takes place on Christmas Eve at a Christmas party. It qualifies."

"The Dark Knight is my favorite. Is there more dessert?" Isaac looked at Cambia with pleading eyes.

"There are I think two extr-"

"Dibs on the second one." Derek called, earning a groan from Stiles. "My house, my extra dessert."

Isaac disappeared into the kitchen, returning with both ramekins, handing the other to Derek, who grinned like a kid who'd been given sugar for the first time.
"Next question. What was your favorite subject or activity in school?"

"Italian, but it's tied with baseball and basketball."

Lydia turned to him. "Beacon Hills doesn't teach Italian."

"Not anymore." He laughed. "Signora Benedetto retired the semester after I left. I guess they had trouble finding a new teacher. Why do you think I decided to finally go through with grad school? Next."

Scott scratched his head. "I am having a hard time imagining you teaching high school." Derek glared at him, not the standard angry glare. No this one was the one Stiles called The King of Sass Glare. It was very effective. Scott held up his hands in surrender. "Fine, I'm sorry. I'm not very good at school. So I guess it would be lacrosse."

"English."

"All of them. I'm very smart."

"She's not kidding. I like history."

"Math."

"I'll tell you what it wasn't... chemistry. God Mr. Harris was an asshat! I had detention just about everyday. Psychology's my favorite."

"Band."

"You'd get along great with Danny then. What did you play? You look like a flute player."

"Yes Abercrombie, if by flute you mean one with a really long fretboard, four strings, and is plugged into an amp." She looked over at his confused expression. "Electric bass, well I mean it started as acoustic guitar, but I switched to electric and then bass. I can still play guitar, just choose not to as much."

Derek spooned the last of his dessert into his mouth. "Did you play in a band?"

"Yeah for a while. Up until my parents died, I wanted to be a rock star when I grew up. What? A kid could dream."

"What about now?" He sighed.

"I outgrew dreams a long time ago, you know before life happened, and I became... this."

Isaac quickly gave his answer to cut the tension. "I liked chemistry."

"Traitor."

"Not hard to like it if your last name isn't Stilinski."

Stiles rolled his eyes. "Okay, just answer these three at once because I'm tired of the bickering, and I
want to go watch a movie. Favorite book, album, and superhero."


Cambia's head snapped towards him. "Oh my god! I love Italo Calvino. Did you read it in Italian or English?"

"It was in English, but I'd love to read it in Italian. I've read If On a Winter's Night a Traveler in Italian though. Had to read it last semester actually. He's actually becoming one of my favorite authors."

"Don't get him started on books. The guy is a closet bookworm." Stiles said while chewing.

Scott cut off their banter. "The Prisoner of Azkaban, Infinity on High by Fallout Boy, and Superman."

"To Kill a Mockingbird, Red from Taylor Swift, and Storm."

"Emma, 21 Adele, and I hate superheroes."

"You wound me Miss Martin." Stiles feigned injury. "How can you hate superheroes? It's un-American."

"Just do."

"Call of the Wild, Death Cab for Cutie's Codes and Keys, and Captain America."

"I liked The Hunger Games trilogy, Maroon 5's Hands All Over, and Black Widow I guess."

"My favorite book is the graphic novel Batman: Dark Knight Returns, Nothing Personal by All Time Low, and of course Batman."

Cambia groaned inwardly. Good fucking hell! I am not going to be able to listen to music with any of these guys. Well aside from Derek. "Neil Gaiman's Neverwhere, my favorite album? Well there's a tie between Deftones' White Pony and Pantera's Vulgar Display of Power. My favorite superhero is-"

"I bet it's Mystique. You look like a Mystique fan."

"Why, because I'm a six foot tall, sexually assertive, female shapeshifter? A little predictable, and Stiles, she's with Magneto. I mean she started with the X-Men, but she's really more aligned with super-villains. No, my favorite superhero is Deadpool. Breaking the fourth wall to talk to the reader? Genius." She scratched her chin. "Though as a mercenary, he's technically more of an antihero. Then again, so is Han Solo, and everyone loves him."

"You like action movies, science fiction books, and superheroes? I love you; marry me right now."

"Sorry kid. You're not my type."

"What is your type?"

She patted his hand and stole a quick glance at Derek who flashed a small crooked smile at her. "Over eighteen."
"For like another five months!"

"I don't think I could get past your taste in music. I'm a great wingman though. I've seen so much bad flirting as a bartender, I'm practically golden."

Isaac bit back a giggle. "Lord of the Rings, Random Access Memories by Daft Punk, and I also love Batman."

Cambia pulled her phone from her pocket, firing off a quick text to Stiles without really looking.

To: Giles
19:22
Id luv 2 b frends tho. I think wed hav a lot uf fun.

A minute later, Stiles felt his phone buzz. He tried to keep a straight face as he read before replying.

To Amazon Queen:
19:23
Sure, but this Stilinski is hard to resist.

She stared at the screen trying to read it, but put the phone away, resolving to have her phone read it aloud to her later.

"Let's go watch a movie now. I can't take anymore of Stilinski's failed attempts at flirting."

"Shut up Jack-off."

Derek stood. "So the movies are in the den. I'll show you." He beckoned for Cambia to follow him up the stairs.

She palmed the pool table. "Oooh! I see what you mean about the nice felt."

"Do you play?"

"I shouldn't; I'm terrible. I'm pretty ace at darts though. I have a lot of experience with them. Customers would challenge me on nights the bar was slow."

Derek pointed to the bookcase against the right wall. "The movies are here."

"You mean the movies are on the bookcase filled with movie cases? Wow, I never would have figured that out." She grinned. "I sure hope you get sarcasm."

"Stiles is my best friend. I better be able to understand it. Anyway, pick whatever one you want."

She sauntered over to peruse the selection. "So," she cooed as she ran her index finger along the case spines, "what's your ordering system? Alphabetical, by genre, release date?"

"Um, there really isn't one." He heard her heart rate spike, and there it was again, that anxiety. What was she nervous about?

"You know that is not logical, and highly inefficient." She pulled out cases, one by one, to look at
the covers. Robert Downey, Jr and Jude Law? Must be one of the Sherlock Holmes movies. The next one she recognized immediately as Spiderman. Repeating this for about fifteen movies, she realized it would take forever to go through them all this way.

Derek could smell her frustration from across the room. "Just pick one. You don't need to look at them all."

"Your cinematic disorganization messes with my system." Feeling irritated and embarrassed, she pulled out the next two in line. "The Bourne Identity or Hellboy?"

"Both are fun choices. I would go with The Bourne Identity."

She walked towards him, grabbing his hand on the way past. "Come on."

He froze as he felt his heart beat speed up. The feel of her skin on his sent a surge of electricity through his palm and up his arm like he'd never felt before. Think about something else. Anything else.

Cambia turned around. "Better get that in check before going downstairs."

"What?"

She give him no response, but instead retreated back downstairs. Derek let go of a breath he didn't know he'd been holding and noticed the smell of arousal in the room. Oh, that's what she meant. Shit. He waited for her footfalls to hit the landing at the bottom of the stairs before bringing his hand to his nose. The way her scent mixed with his, almost knocked him on his ass. He saw stars and could think of nothing else but bare skin against bare skin. He realized then, he was probably done for. The fuck are you doing to me? He walked into his bathroom to splash his face with cold water, and then sat on his bed to regain his composure, completely forgetting that she'd flopped onto it, declaring it quite comfortable. That's it; I won't even be able to sleep without being surrounded by her. Just go downstairs and ask her on a date. You can take things as slow as she needs.

By the time he made it back downstairs, he'd managed to get his mind and body under control, but only just. The movie had already started, and he found all the seats occupied. He thought about asking one of the betas to move to the floor, but that would be a poor host, and his mother would have strangled him from the beyond if he did that. Instead, he grabbed a floor cushion, and sat against the arm of the sofa. Though, he was a little relieved to have a little space between himself and Cambia, who occupied the loveseat with Stiles. The hyper teen grinned like he'd found a new best friend, and hell, he probably had.

Derek tuned out his surroundings, focusing on the movie. His eyes didn't notice any movement from his pack until Clive Owen made an entrance in the movie, at least an hour into the film.

"I'm getting another drink. Can I bring something back for anyone else?" Cambia asked.

Stiles rattled his empty glass.

"Another bourbon?"

"I'll take a coke." Allison added, and Lydia asked for one too. Cambia made note that they were probably supposed to drive their boyfriends home later.
"Isaac, Scott and Abercrombie? Cora?" All four replied that they'd like a beer. "Derek?"

"I'm good. Do you need help carrying? No, of course you don't. I keep forgetting you're a bartender."

She walked into the kitchen and returned not even a minute later, the four beer bottles in one hand, the sodas in the crook of her left arm, and the two old fashioned glasses in her right hand. "Beers."

She handed those out. "Your sodas ladies. Here you go Stiles."

"Move over Stiles, I think Cambia is going to steal your job as pack mom."

"She does seem pretty good at taking care of people doesn't she?"

Cambia felt her heart rate skyrocket. Her blood boiled. She took a deep breath, forcing down her emotions.

"Hey are you okay?" Stiles asked.

"I uh... I just need some air." Before anyone could stop her, she exited out the back door, drink in hand.

Derek gave her a little while, figuring she'd come back inside, but after ten minutes, he followed her outside where he found her crying. "Hey."

She immediately wiped her eyes even though she still fumed. No one was going to see tears tonight. "Lasciami stare."

He sat down next to her on the back porch. "Stai bene?"

"No."

"Vuoi parlarne?"

She shook her head.

Not willing to leave her outside by herself, when she was clearly upset, he simply sat next to her in silence.

Back inside, Stiles paused the movie. "Do you think she's okay?"

"I don't know what I said to upset her." Jackson answered.

"What are they talking about out there?"

Isaac perked his ears. "They're not saying anything." He listened for their heartbeats, knowing that hers accelerated before she ran outside and found relief that her heart rate actually had slowed down to almost normal.

"What? You have this look on your face. What's with the look? Is it bad? Isn't it? You shouldn't have called her pack mom. I mean, she's an orphan. Of course, she's probably upset about her own mom."
Plus, I mean she did lose her whole pack." Stiles flailed his hands. "Oh God, I'm rambling again. Why do I keep doing that? I'm such a spaz."

As he listened again, Cambia laughed and he heard Derek's heart skip a beat at the sound. Isaac smiled. "Yes, but I think she's going to be fine."

"Why are you smiling?"

"Because I'm happy. You guys feel it too, don't you?" He asked Jackson and Scott, who upon hearing his question began listening as well. "You do hear that right?"

"Hear what? Feel what? What's going on?"

A smile crept across Scott's face. "She's giving his heart the worst arrhythmia. I thought I heard it earlier, but I figured he was nervous about whether we'd all like the new den."

"About time too." Cora smiled

"I just hope she doesn't turn out to be evil. I mean, when you look at the man's track record." Jackson hated the fact he always sounded like a Negative Nate when he simply spoke the truth.

Stiles shrugged and turned the movie back on.

When Derek returned to the living room, he sat back on his cushion, more than a little aware of the uneasiness in the room. "Not a word."

"You should totally go-"

"I said not a word, Isaac."

"She coming back? I totally didn't mean to upset her with my comment."

"Yeah I know, Jackson."

"What did I do?"

"She didn't say."

He tried to focus on the movie, while he waited. When he heard the back door open, he felt a sense of relief until he saw a wolf trotting in the living room. Had he not known Cambia could transform into a wolf, he might have been surprised. Mostly black, she had a blend of white fur on her tail and paws. The white fur around her eyes almost looked like eyeliner. His inner wolf was practically salivating at the sight of her wolf form, and he fought to keep control. When he phased into alpha form, he was a black wolf, but purely so. "Still upset, Cam?"

The dog turned her head towards him to stare with almond shaped pale green eyes and whined.

"Dude, you really upset her Jackson. She doesn't even want to face you in human form. Way to go jackass." Stiles smacked him in the arm.

"I didn't mean to!"
Cambia perked up her ears, let out a soft bark, and nuzzled against Jackson's leg, as if to say "It's okay." She flopped down on the floor next to Derk, her head in his lap, and then turned her attention to the movie. Without realizing it, Derek began rubbing her head. They stayed like that until the end of the movie, at which point Stiles hopped up.

"Anyone want to watch another?"

"I think we're going to call it a night." Scott stretched out his arms. "Allison and her dad have plans early tomorrow morning."

Stiles groaned inwardly. After two years, he thought he'd be used to Scott spending all his time with Allison. Unfortunately, he wasn't. "Your loss. Movies are where again?"

"Upstairs in the den."

He scampered up the stairs returning not even a minute later with *Batman Begins*. He waved it at Isaac.

"Excellent choice, Stiles."

"Another superhero movie? That is all you ever pick." Lydia sighed and made for the door.

"Not you too! This is pack night, and you're all being so lame for leaving. And Danny? He didn't even show up. How is a date more exciting than pack night? Okay, well I can think of one way. But that's not the point!" He hated sounding like a whiny kid, but planning bonding nights was one of the few things no one got to help him with. That fact gave him a great sense of pride. "You leaving too, Jackson?"

"Nope. Don't give me that look, Lydia. Withhold sex from me all you want. I happen to love these pack nights."

Stiles gaped at him. "You do?"

"Just because I find you unbelievably annoying, doesn't mean I can't enjoy time with my pack, and don't think that the fact my best friend bailing on us to go out with some douche he met in a club doesn't piss me off. The current boyfriend has a permanent bitch face and reeks of cheap cologne."

With that, Lydia left in a huff. Stiles put in the movie. "Derek, you and Cambia can have the loveseat if you want. I can take the chair." He plopped down into the over-sized chair to the left of the sofa. Derek climbed up onto the loveseat, and Cambia followed suit, still choosing to stay in her wolf form rather than phase back. Once again, he almost involuntarily started stroking her fur. He found that petting her calmed him. *Oh god, I didn't even ask if it was okay. What if it bothers her?* Clearly sensing his inner turmoil, she nudged her head under his hand, rubbing against it. No, she didn't mind.

"I didn't know you got a dog, Derek." Peter said as he passed the living room into the kitchen. Cambia snarled at him, teeth bared.

"Okay...so clearly not your pet. Any particular reason your newest pack member is practically sitting in your lap in full wolf form? She really likes being in animal form around you, Derek. I guess she has a bit of a kink."
"It's my fault." Jackson replied without looking away from the movie. "I said something that upset her."

"Well so did I, but she didn't spend dinner in a hybrid jaguar and snake form. She really has a short fuse, but nice to see she can change into a wolf. Wish I could. I suppose being in a pack full of werewolves would make that a necessity. What did you say?"

"Something about her being a good pack mom."

Cambia whimpered.

"Don't bring it up again, Jackson." Derek scolded, rubbing under Cambia's chin.

"But I'm sor."

"I said don't."

Peter rolled his eyes. "Touchy subject." He whispered.

Before Derek could stop her, she'd leapt over the back of the loveseat, phased into a jaguar midair, and hit Peter in the chest, knocking him on his back. She pinned him to the ground with a mournful roar, but didn't slash or bite him, simply turned and walked back into the living room. By the time she made it back to Derek, she looked like a wolf again. This time, instead of lying close to him, she curled into a tight ball on the other end of the couch, softly whimpering.

"She tried to kill me."

"Pretty sure if she wanted to kill you, she would have. Didn't you listen to her say jaguars don't go for the throat?" Derek snapped, and everyone turned their attention back to the movie.

By the time Batman Begins finished, Stiles had fallen asleep in the chair and was snoring, the same with Isaac and Cora on the couch. Jackson, having retreated to the kitchen for three more beers after the incident with Peter, looked about to pass out any minute. Derek reached out and tapped him on the knee. When he looked over at him, Derek simply gestured with his head to the guest rooms down the hall. The inebriated man took the hint, and actually managed to make it to the first room without crashing into anything. The movement when he left the couch was enough to rouse the sleeping pair from the other end of the sofa.

Isaac stretched, yawning. "Well I'm going to head to bed."

"Yeah me too. Night Derek. Night Cambia. I was nice to meet you in person, even if you didn't stay that way." Cora kissed the top of her brother's head as she walked past.

"See you guys in the morning." He looked down at Cambia. "Do you want to stay? There's plenty of room. Why don't you phase back, and I will bring you something to wear to bed." Pulling the throw blanket from the back of the sofa, he tossed it over her. The last thing he needed once she turned back into human form, was Peter to walk back to the kitchen and finding her sitting completely naked on the couch. Too many questions would be raised. When he returned from upstairs, he felt relieved to see her wrapped in the blanket, sitting patiently on the loveseat. "Here you go. The shirt will be too big, but the pants, well they should fit okay. Where did you leave your clothes?"
"Back porch."

"I'll bring them in for you. The open rooms are the one's after the first on the right. There is one on
the second floor as well."

She smiled at him. "Thanks. Sorry about that. I come with a lot of baggage that I'm not ready to talk
about yet."

"Don't worry about it. I understand. You said it yourself. We're like the Island of Misfit Toys. You
like pancakes?"

"Who doesn't?" She grinned

"Great. I'll make them for breakfast. Sleep tight."

"Night Derek."

He waited for the door to close before retrieving her clothes from outside, which he folded neatly,
hanging them in a grocery bag from the door knob. The fact she seemed to only feel really relaxed
around him weighed on him. Either the rest of the pack had not been too welcoming, or she felt
comfortable with him. Well, aside from Stiles. Those two had a lot more in common than he thought
they would. Maybe she'd be good for the hyperactive kid, get him over some of that social
awkwardness, and maybe Stiles would help her get over whatever ghosts followed her from Reno.

Chapter End Notes

Translation for Italian used in this chapter.

Io non sono fragile - I'm not fragile
Vaffanculo- fuck off/ fuck you
Lasciami stare-Leave me alone
Stai bene- are you okay
Vuoi parlarne- do you want to talk about it
Derek stood on the front porch and watched the wolves spar with each other. Ever since he and Stiles noticed the trend of abducted supernaturals, everyone had stepped up their training. Chris Argent stopped by on a few sessions to show them how to specifically deal with hunters and to train the non-wolves. For the sake of training, Derek decided Cambia should stick with the humans since she couldn't heal, and she promised not to use any supernatural strength on the rest of them. Though she seemed bored with Argent's basic hand to hand combat drills (And by bored, he meant spectacularly so), she absorbed the archery and guns training like a sponge.

However, today Derek decided to try something new. One, he planned to arm the pack with cans of mace as well as aerosolized Wolfsbane so they could take on both hunters and wolves working for them should the situation present itself. Two, he'd asked Cambia to work with the humans first, because at the end of training they would be paired off against a wolf and would spar, the wolves under strict orders to stow claws and fangs. He hoped she would be a good teacher with some practical techniques.

One by one, the rest of the pack trickled in and they split into groups. He and Scott took the wolves aside to work on their usual techniques. Everyone else went to work in front of the house.

Stiles walked over to Cambia and the table of items she'd set up near the porch. "What do we have here? This is an odd assortment of things. Okay, so striking pads I get. Knives I get." He picked one up. "Hey! These are rubber."

"Of course they are. You think I want any of you coming at me with real knives? The guns are plastic too."

"That makes sense, but what are these for?" He waved his hand over the rest of the items, which included among other things, an ink pen, a lid to a stockpot, and most confusingly, a handful of coins.

She shooed him away. "You'll see. Okay kids, so I know Chris went over the basics in hand to hand, getting out of holds, disarming an attacker with a gun, how to block and dodge punches. I want to expand beyond that, but I want to review that first. So here's what I want you to do. I am going to put on the striking mitts, and you guys are going to each take some warm up punches. Since I can't
punch back with these things on, just focus on hitting the pads."

Allison, as expected given her training, did well. Chris, who sat on the porch with John and Melissa, looked proud. Lydia and Danny also performed well. Now Stiles, that was another story. After the first punch, he shook out his hand.

"Ouch!"

Stone faced, Cambia turned to him. "Stiles, who taught you how to throw a punch?"

"Why? Was it that good?"

"No, your form is terrible." She rubbed her temples.

His face fell. "Oh...um... Derek." Way to throw him under the bus, you idiot.

She held up a hand to silence anything else from him and turned towards the wolves. "Derek!" She yelled across the lawn.

"What?"

"Silly question. How many times have you broken your fourth and or fifth metacarpals?"

"Where are those?"

She pointed to the two long bones of her hand, the ones which connected to her pinky and ring fingers.

"I don't understand why that's necessary!" He called back.

"Because you basically gave Stiles a lesson on how to earn a boxer's fracture! Do yourself a favor, and work on your punching form!" She glanced over her shoulder to see Chris smirk. "Listen up kids, This is the proper way to punch. For starters, do not, absolutely do NOT close your thumb inside your fist. If you hit a hard surface, you will break your thumb. Next, keep your wrist straight when you connect a blow. If you break the form and hit with a bend in your wrist, the likelihood you'll hurt yourself is quite high. Also, don't hit with the flats of your fingers. You want hit with your knuckles, specifically the ones of your index and middle finger. If you lead with your index finger and pinky, you might as well walk yourself right to the E.R. for a cast. The first two knuckles in your hand should be aligned with the bones in your forearm. Danny, put these on." She tossed him the mitts. "Like so." She gave a couple example punches. "Now we are going to work with a different kind of punch today. Instead, I want you guys to open up your fists. "Instead of curling your fingers into a fist and punching that way, hit with the heel of your palm." She demonstrated a palm heel strike. "What this does is eliminate your outer wrist joint from the occasion. This can protect from injury, and it is also a stronger strike. It's useful for women who have longer nails too, as it prevents them from digging into your palm." She showed them a few more times and had them practice on her. "This type of punch doesn't need to be a forward strike either. It's great for when you're grabbed from behind. Danny, you're going to help me out." She moved him into the desired position. "If you are grabbed from behind around the shoulders, throw your elbow back as hard as you can into their gut. If you do this hard enough, they should release you. Don't stop at this though. Take that same palm heel strike and go for the groin. Don't worry, Danny, I'm not going to actually hit you." She demonstrated. "I can work with you guys one on one if you want, but partner up and practice these for a few minutes before we move onto my favorite techniques: Elbows and headbutts."
She watched them practice on each other, pleased that Stiles followed her advice on the punches. There was a free chair on the front porch, so she grabbed a bottle of water and sat down.

"You know this won't be all that useful against a werewolf, right?" Chris asked.

"Well how about this? You stick with teaching them how to defend themselves against a wolf, and I will handle how to fight hunters. Though Allison, I really think should stick with weapons. She's highly skilled with them."

"I should hope so."

She smirked at Mr. Argent. "I think you'll like when I go over improvised weaponry."

John groaned. "I dread watching Stiles do anything with weapons. This is a kid who falls out of his car on a regular basis."

"Don't worry; they're all rubber." When she jumped up to go back to training, Melissa stopped her.

"Would you like to join us for dinner tonight, Cam?"

She smiled. "Sure. What time?"

"Six or so."

"I'll be there."

As Cambia rejoined her pupils, Chris leaned over. "You let her stay with you, and you invite her for dinner? Is that wise? You hardly know her."

Melissa smiled. "I like her. She reminds me Angela when she was younger, before she mellowed out."

"Who's Angela?"

"My older sister. Cam, gets along great with the boys."

Cambia moved on to another skill. "Okay for this demonstration, I actually want to use Stiles because he's taller than me. If you do this incorrectly, it will hurt you more than your attacker. The area you want to aim for is below the eyebrows, with the nose being the best target. You want to connect with the top of your forehead. You will tilt your head downward slightly. Make sure you keep your mouth closed, teeth clenched, and stiffen your neck. You will use all of your body weight for this. Lean back and lunge forward, bending at the middle of your back, kind of like a rubber band. This should be a last resort, because it is a well known attack strategy, and to be honest, the build up to it sort of telegraphs your next move." She continued teaching the group until the wolves came over.

"I hope you learned some useful skills. I will draw names for you five." Derek said as he shook slips of paper in a cup to mix them. "Danny, you're first." He took a paper from the cup. "You're against Peter." He continued drawing. "Allison, you have Jackson. Stiles, you get my sister. Good luck with that; she's vicious. Lydia, you'll work with Isaac, and Cam...well I'm sorry but you get an alpha." He pulled out one more slip. "You're with Scott." He smirked. Oh thank God. "I guess I get to watch with the parents. So, we have some practice weapons over here on this table and...what the hell is the
rest of this, Cam?” He gestured to the various items on the table next to the knives and plastic guns.

She grinned. "Items of opportunity." At the end of the table she pointed to an ink pad. "This is washable ink." She turned to the non-wolves. "If you intend on using any of these weapons, you'll need this ink. Run the blades of the knives through the pad and daub the gun barrel against it as well. Wolves, coat your fingertips. That way we can measure how effective your strike is."

"Who goes first? No claws or fangs, remember. If you reach a breaking point, don't forget, you can tap out" Derek asked and found himself completely unsurprised that Allison volunteered. She grabbed a pair of rubber daggers and entered the ring, which was nothing more than a spray chalk border. The goal was to either break free and escape the back of combat zone past the orange line or to "incapacitate" their opponent.

Allison and Jackson circled each other for almost thirty seconds, the huntress content to wait for the right moment. Eventually, Jackson's lack of patience ran out and he charged at her. She managed to get a couple good strikes in against him, and he against her. She threw one of her knives at him, which had it have been real, would have stuck out of his right shoulder. They continued at their spar for another five minutes before Allison ran past the orange line. She smiled proudly and rejoined the group.

Danny went next and made surprisingly quick work of Peter, who didn't seem to want to be there anyway. It took Danny three minutes to knife peter in the stomach and escape. Derek shook his head in disgust at his uncle's unwillingness to play along. "You are not a team player, you know that?"

"Come on, Derek. You know my charm is my best weapon."

He rubbed his temples. "It wasn't just for your benefit, Peter. If you want to go again, Danny, I'll work with you."

"No, I'm good for today."

Lydia surveyed the table. "Colored hairspray?"

"It was the best I could do for a Wolfsbane spray analog." Cambia watched with amusement as Lydia tucked the small can into the center panel of her bra and grabbed a pistol. "So those don't shoot blanks or anything. To show an actual hit, you'll have to be in close to get the barrel against him. The trigger clicks when you squeeze it, but they're mostly for teaching how to disarm."

Lydia hesitated and put the gun back before taking the military bayonet knife off the table. Cambia applauded her choice of compact weapons, because the girl was not all that keen on fighting. To be fair, Isaac did not look thrilled to be sparring against someone almost a foot shorter than him, either. They squared off in the ring, and Isaac ran at her as she pulled out her knife. She swiped at him but missed, getting spun around in the process. There was not enough time for her to turn around before he slammed into her, which sent them both to the ground. He weighed almost fifty pounds more than her, so she could not dislodged him. However, she managed to get to the "mace" in her bra. She sprayed it over her shoulder and hoped it hit his face.

Isaac realized at this point, that had the spray been real, he would have rolled off her in agony. "I think I'm incapacitated. This is supposed to be Wolfsbane right? She got me in the mouth." He rolled off her and helped her up. "Good job."

"Thanks. Without the spray though, I was screwed." She replaced her weapons.
Stiles tucked a Ka-Bar into his sock and grabbed a pistol. "You have holsters?"

"No. I guess for the sake of the exercise consider your waistband a holster." She watched him finger another knife. "Put down the kerambit, Stiles. You wouldn't know what to do with it."

He gulped. Facing Cora didn't sound like fun either. They entered the ring and circled each other.

"She's going to destroy him isn't she?" John winced.

"Well hopefully he was paying attention when I went over grappling." Cambia said.

Derek leaned against her shoulder. "You nervous about facing Scott?" The look she gave him, the one which said 'Are you serious?' made him second guess his question.

"I have a few tricks up my sleeve. He may be an alpha, but remember, I am stronger than a human and I'm the trained fighter. I should be okay. Though if Stiles manages to escape, and I get mangled, I will feel bad being the only non-wolf to 'die' as a result of this training exercise." She looked up to see Cora collide with Stiles and knock him to the ground, trapping his gun underneath him. She straddled him, but he did the smart thing and got his arms up in front of his face shielding his throat and eyes from her. So even though she got her inky claws on the outside of his arms, she couldn't go in for the kill.

"Don't cower like a little girl, Stilinski!" Jackson laughed.

Through a gap in his arms, Stiles could see her rear back to come down with her claws again. Cambia had told them if they end up on their backs on the ground, keep the shoulders and upper off the ground. It was a less vulnerable position and easier to get up from. He waited until Cora was close enough and moved his arms out of the way and snapped his head forward into her face. His strike threw her slightly off balance, and the bridge of his hips upward brought her over his left shoulder, giving him enough room to reach the knife in his sock. He took no time in bringing the knife down into her arm and fleeing the containment zone. He gasped for air and rubbed his forehead while he walked over to the group to find Cambia practically giddy. "What?"

"You may not punch very well, but I am going to have so much fun teaching you how to fight dirty, especially the 12-6 elbow. How's the head?"

"I didn't really have the space for perfect technique. Cora, sorry about your nose. Really."

She walked over holding a hand under her profusely bleeding nose. "Good thing I'm a werewolf, or I would be pissed right now."

Derek popped up off the porch. "Let me fix it for you." He snapped her nose back in place. "I've broken my nose twelve times. It will quit hurting in about ten minutes."

Stiles looked at his arms. "I'm pretty sure it would have wound up a draw. I think with all these claw marks I would bleed to death before help arrived."

At the table, Cambia grabbed two double edged combat knives, one of a trench knife style, from the table and loaded both knives' edges with ink. She also picked up the umbrella, which she found surprising no one tried to use as a pole weapon. Her knives secured, she walked into the ring. Scott looked like he was both worried and excited, like this would be an easy take down. Instead of
waiting for the wolf to make the first move, like the rest of the humans did, she closed the distance towards him. This understandably took him by surprise, especially when she jabbed at him with the umbrella before yanking back only to slide her hand up the shaft to open the canopy and use the thing as a shield. She closed it just as fast and cracked him across the back with it. His initial surprise wore off and he batted the umbrella away, knocking it out of her hand and charged at her. Cambia dropped her center of gravity to hit him in the midsection. Alpha or not, she had the strength of a grizzly bear behind her. She drove him to the ground, only to earn some claws to the back for her troubles.

As they wrestled on the ground, it became clear that neither one of them intended to tap-out. Anytime he threw her off him to go on the offensive, Cambia was ready for him, and vice-versa. They continued this for almost ten minutes, both managing to get back to their feet twice before hitting the dirt again. The last time saw Cambia thrown flat on her back with the wind knocked out of her.

It was this motion, that internally sent her into a panic. No longer was she squaring off against Scott. Above her, instead, she saw the hunter she'd killed with a snakebite. She lost her trench knife on the way to the ground, not that she had time to regain it, because while she fumbled for it, Scott was on top of her about to go for the throat. So she went for his just as she grabbed hold of the hilt with the outstretched fingers of her left hand. A reverse grip was not ideal in most situations, but this time, the grip proved perfect as she raked the blade across Scott's neck. The knife in her right hand jabbed him in the chest. However, Scott's adrenaline had to be running high, in her mind the 'hunter' was still a threat. Neither quit the fight until Derek stood up.

"Scott, stop!" Derek called out

"Why? She tap out?"

"No, you idiot. Pretty sure she just killed you. I'm fairly certain you won't heal fast enough to offset the rapid blood loss."

Scott looked at him in confusion. "What?"

"How about you go look in the mirror?" Stiles joked.

Scott listened to the group and hurried inside. Cambia bolted for the nearest tree, ducking behind it as she continued panting heavily as she tried to catch her breath. Out of sight, and hands still cleaving desperately to both knives, she clutched at her scalp. *He wasn't real. It was just Scott. Breathe, breathe.*

"I thought we were going for incapacitation!" Scott called from inside the house.

Feeling calmer and grounded in reality once more, Cambia stood and reemerged from behind the tree. "Yeah, why would I do that in a real fight against a rogue wolf or hunter?"

"You slashed my throat!"

"And stabbed you in the chest. You seemed to forget that one. " She stood up. "So that clears that up. With proper motivation and opportunity you too can take out an alpha. And that kids, is why we practice with training knives." She clapped him on the back.

"I think that's enough for the day. See you all at pack night next week." Derek dismissed everyone,
before pulling Cambia aside. "Hey, you okay? It didn't even occur to me that this exercise might be a trigger for you."

She nodded. "I have on my big girl panties today. It was nothing I couldn't handle." She gave him a crooked smile. "Thanks though."

"Of course."

Scott sat next to Stiles on the steps of the front porch. "I lost."

"Yeah man, most of the wolves lost. It's hard to win a fight when you can't use the normal tools at your disposal."

"But, I'm the only one who died." He laughed.

"Did you forget the part where She-wolf destroyed my arms?"

"Nice headbutt though."

Cambia wedged herself on the other side of Stiles. "Don't worry about it, Scott. It's like the fable of the hound and the hare.

"A Hound having started a Hare from his form, after a long run, gave up the chase. A Goat-herd, seeing him stop, mocked him, saying: "The little one is the best runner of the two."

The hound replied; "You do not see the difference between us; I was only running for a dinner, but he for his life."

You guys were the predator in this game. It's amazing what results a proper incentive can derive. You were trying to kill me, but I didn't want to die. Plus, I will admit I panicked a little. Prior trauma and all." She reached over Stiles' head and ruffled Scott's hair. "Still a good effort, and in all honesty, unless it's a fight in a public place, I sure as hell am not fighting in human form. I'd much rather have up to 1300 pounds of fighting power and sharp fangs to my advantage as opposed to a buck fifty-five and flat human teeth."

"She has a good point, Scotty. By the way, I feel it would be remiss if I didn't mention that your bit with the umbrella reminded me of Sean Connery in The Last Crusade." The three of them had a good laugh at his joke.

She stood. "I smell like a locker room, so I will see you guys in a couple of hours. Thanks again for the invite, Mama McCall. I am starving." She waved and walked to her car.

John gave his fiancee a concerned look. "I hope you bought enough for an extra mouth."

"Oh shut it. I think I'll invite her over more often. She's funny, and it was nice having her at the house for those three weeks. The house is a lot more boring now she moved into her own place."

She threw an arm around her son, both of them following Stiles towards their vehicle. John shook his head, chuckling silently as he tred behind them, wondering just what Melissa was up to. Something nefarious likely, or at the very least mischievous. He swore his son was rubbing off on her.
Chapter title comes from Dessa's song "Fighting Fish"
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uwpBineJrSU
John stared at the clock wondering when his fiancee was coming home. She'd been out all day with Cambia, which had become a common occurrence lately. He suspected she was happy to impart some of her maternal pearls of wisdom onto the young woman. He glanced up from his spot in the living room when he heard the front door open.

"Oh my god. I haven't had that much fun shopping in years." Melissa laughed as she walked through the living room.

"Glad I could help with that. I usually shop by myself. And it's certainly been a while since I've had a pedicure. Usually, I just paint my own nails. But now I lave little robots on my big toes." She wiggled her toes in her sandals.

"Hi Honey," John kissed Melissa's cheek. "Have a good time?"

"Tons. I bought a new dress. I need an occasion to wear it. So that means we'll need to go somewhere nice for dinner." She was practically beaming at the multiple shopping bags in her hand.

"That looks like more than a dress."

"New scrubs, new shoes. That's how retail therapy works, Dear."

Stiles walked past her and into the kitchen. "Hey Mel. New haircut?"

"Just a trim."

"Looks nice." He continued to dig through the cabinets. "Hey Dad, did you eat the last bag of microwave popcorn?"

John averted his gaze. "I may have done something like that a few days ago."

"But Dad," Stiles whined, "it's movie night. Now we have no popcorn!" He searched further. "And you ate all the Sun Chips!" At the risk of sounding like a petulant child, he gave up searching and plopped down in one of the kitchen chairs with a huff.

"You're the one who does the grocery shopping, Stiles. You should have bought more."

Stiles jumped up and walked over to the dry erase board on the fridge, the same one he didn't erase after making his list the day before. Calmly, he removed it to hold in his dad's face. "You see this? This is what I made my list from yesterday. What is noticeably absent?"

"Popcorn?"

"Gah!" He threw up his hands in frustration, forgetting about the memo board in his hand. As he braced himself, preparing to get hit in the head with its inevitable trip down, he watched a hand snatch it out of the air. Cambia stuck it back to the fridge and walked into the pantry. From the amount of ruckus she made, one would assume the sky had fallen down on her. Curious, he poked
his head through the door. "Whatcha' doin?"

"Fixing the lack of movie food problem. Take these," she handed him the package of small flour tortillas, "cut them into wedges and pan fry them with olive oil." On a mission, she continued searching. "Aha!" Without so much as an explanation, or invitation to help, she whizzed around the kitchen gathering supplies. "Hey Stiles, can you look through the spices to see if you have any smoked paprika and maybe some cayenne pepper."

He laughed. "Do we have...Of course we have those. There is also saffron and just about every other spice used on the Iberian peninsula. What kind of second generation American do you take me for?"

As he dug through the cabinet, he found no cayenne. "Well damn. Guess what else wasn't on the list? cayenne pepper?" Seriously, what was the point of a damn grocery list if nobody but him wrote down anything when they used up something? It's going to be the empty the dishwasher argument all over again. He swore he lived with a bunch of heathens. "Here, have Piri Piri instead. It's spicier so use less." He placed the two jars next to her. There was quite a bit of mechanical whirring behind him. So he spun around in time to watch her scoop a dip into a serving bowl. Then, she raided the fridge for baby carrots, celery, and cauliflower.

"Ta da! I have made crudites! How's that pita bread stand-in?" She took one of the now crispy tortillas to sample. "Yum." She gave his shoulder a playful shove. "Now come, taste my handiwork."

"You made hummus? I thought that stuff took ages to make."

"Nope, you had everything but the tahini paste. No biggie." In no time, the pair of them had created a snack platter bound for the coffee table.

"Alright everyone. It's movie time." Stiles looked towards the ceiling. "Scott! Come on down! It's time to rectify one of the world's great injustices. Cam, stay and watch, because I think you might be Melissa's new best friend."

"What can I say? The girl gets me." Melissa smirked. The day had been a blast, and if their little shopping trip felt more like mother-daughter day than one out with girlfriends, well then the boys didn't need to know that. "Plus she can recommend a fantastic cocktail."

"Well yes, there's always that. And you should join us as thanks for not letting me starve to death."

She rolled her eyes at him. "I doubt you're in serious danger of that happening, Stiles." Still, she kicked off her shoes by the door and settled at one end of the sofa as Stiles fiddled with the Blue Ray player.

"Okay you can add this dip to my Dad tested and Stiles approved foods list. I mean, this is healthy right?" John asked, chomping down on a hummus covered celery stick.

"Yes. Quite." Stiles grumbled. The damn tray on the machine wouldn't open, but after a few seconds, finally listened to his silent begging. "lucky for you, Dad, it makes even rabbit food tolerable."

Once everyone else was settled, Stiles hit the light switch and crammed in between Scott and Cambia on the couch, making sure to stuff his face with as much of the tortillas as possible, if only to keep his dad from eating them. What? Someone had to act as the intermediary between his dad and the man's doctor. If that made him "the enemy," he didn't really care.
"So, what are we watching?" Scott asked.

"One of the greatest achievements in cinema ever made." He patted his future step-brother's knee just as the words "A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away...." rolled across the screen. No longer would this kid be able to say he hadn't seen *Star Wars*.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this one was so short. I had planned to put this up on Wednesday, but I was feeling pretty energetic today (Who knows if I'd have the energy to work on it a couple days from now)
Off tempo drum beats echoed through the garage as Stiles tried to put on a proud face for his student. When the kid's flailing knocked over the high hat, he took a brave glance at his phone. *Five-thirty. Oh thank God.* "Time's up, Mark."

The ten-year old looked up with enthusiasm. "So how'd I do, Stiles?"

"Well... your paradiddles have improved, but you're still having trouble with the kick drum. That section it should have been on the two and four beats, but I think you're getting lost."

Mark sighed. "I know. It's so hard to concentrate on doing so many things at once. Stupid ADD."

"Nice try kid, but that's not an excuse. I found drums really helpful for my ADHD actually. Focusing on so many things at once but using all my concentration on those tasks worked great for drums." He heard a car pull into the driveway. "Anyway your mom's here." He waved to the woman as she exited the car. "Hey Mrs. Cunningham. So for next week, Mark, work on these exercises." He handed him a few sheets of paper stapled together. "I know it looks like a lot, but most of them are pretty similar. The section on page two focuses on the bass drum specifically. You can borrow my practice pedal. It's over here somewhere." Crossing the garage, Stiles dug in the cabinet in the corner. "There you are. This feels a little different than the one on my kit, but it's close enough."

"Thanks Stiles. See you next Thursday."

Just as Mark and his mother left the garage, his phone rang. "Hey Dad, what's up?"

"I thought since Scott has to work tonight and Melissa works until eleven that you might want to have dinner with your old man. It's been pretty quiet down here; you could work on your homework."

"Sure. I just have to clean up from my lesson. See you at six, yeah?" He ended the call and moved his kit into it's usual place in the corner before making notes in Mark's progress folder. What to eat, what to eat? Inside, he packed up his laptop and the homework he'd been working on when Mark arrived for his lesson.

Twenty minutes later, with dinner in hand, Stiles walked into the station where he greeted the unlucky officer who drew the short straw and wound up with front desk duty for the day. "Good evening, Deputy Campbell. You do something different with your hair?"

She smiled. "Yes, I had highlights put in."

"Looks nice."

"Thanks. Here for your dad?"

He held up the bag of take-out from the only decently healthy restaurant in town, Toppings on Rye. "Yep. Don't get into trouble now, Maggie."

She rolled her eyes. "Says the kid who's been more than a handful for his dad since he was a toddler."
"Yes, but I have perfected it to an art form." Stiles walked through the station to his dad's office and rapped on the door. "I come bearing dinner."

John leaned forward in his chair. "Smells good. What did you bring me?"

"For you, Greek Chicken sandwich on low-carb whole wheat with low-fat tzatziki."

He arched a disapproving eyebrow at him. "What the hell is tzatziki?"

"It's a creamy cucumber dressing. Trust me; you'll like it. I also have a treat." He tossed a small bag of chips to him.

"Yes!" John looked giddy until he turned the bag over. "What are these?"

"Terra Chips. They're made with better for you root vegetables. They're lower fat, lower sodium, and lower cholesterol. Look, I'm having some too."

He didn't look convinced. "Uh huh, and your sandwich is probably some decadent sandwich with bacon and gobs of dressing."

Stiles turned around his takeout container. "Wrong. Southwest turkey and guacamole sandwich with extra tomatoes." He grinned and took a large bite of his sandwich. "It's delicious, Dad." Not one to watch someone eat, Stiles went to town on his meal, finishing it off in less than five minutes. He had no time to savor; there was homework to be done. He flipped open his laptop and removed a book from his backpack. Multiple flags of many colors stuck out from all over the pages. Corners of pages had been turned down as well.

"That's... that's quite the work-up of that book. What's with all the flags?"

"Sit back. You're in for a treat. So blue flags are for quotes I like or want to use in my paper, red for character description and introduction. The yellow ones are for themes and symbolism, orange for allusions to other works, and green ones are for sections that directly pertain to my paper topic."

John pointed to the book. "I'm not familiar with this one. What's it about?"

"Clones raised solely for organ harvesting. It's depressing as hell, but raises interesting ethical dilemmas."

He rubbed his forehead. "Sounds...pleasant."

"Oh it's a great book. I know you're not into reading all that much, but you'd probably like it."

"See, when I read the title I expected some Jane Austen era romance nonsense."

Stiles looked at the cover in confusion. Never Let Me Go? "Yeah I can see how you might get that impression, but I think dystopian novels don't really meld with the traditional values of Regency period England. Unless perhaps it was an anarchist tale of fed-up farmers' wives waging war on feminine oppression and dowries. Then I guess that would probably work with a dystopia. Especially if there was an evil king who ruled with a dictatorial iron fist, and of course he'd need henchmen. That story doesn't sell without minions in pantaloons and tail coats. The carriages would need to be mobile command centers. Yes, definitely. I think I will-"
John cut him off. "What's your paper about?"

"The images of material deprivation in the novel and why they might have been included. It's the last book we have before the exam. I mean there is a poetry unit next, which I am far from excited about."

No longer interested in the book, John went back to work on his dinner. After about twenty minutes of silence except for the sounds of chewing and furious typing, Stiles glanced up at his father. He realized he had perhaps a perfect situation in which to try an come out to his father again. "Say Dad, can I talk to you about something?"

"Sure Son. If this is about that concert down in Sacramento you and Scott want to go to in a couple weeks, I already said it was fine."

"No, it's not about that." He sighed. "Could you stop trying to set me up with daughters of your friends?"

"But some of them I really thought you'd be interested in."

Stiles ran a hand through his hair. "Well maybe I would be, but I can manage on my own thanks."

John tossed his empty take-out container into the trash. "I'll work on it. Was that all that you wanted to talk about?"

"Um no."

"You're not failing any classes are you?"

"No! Of course not. I'm pulling all A's so far this semester, I'll have you know."

John gave him a pointed glance. "That's good to hear. So what is it?"

He swallowed hard. "So... um... what's your..." Ah fuck! Why didn't I actually plan this out better? "Since you've learned about the whole supernatural mess in Beacon Hills, would you say our relationship is better? You know now that I'm not lying to you about everything?"

"Yeah." John was beginning to grow worried. What other mythical creature was going to show up now? Was the Loch Ness monster going to parade down Beacon Parkway? He'd actually pay to see that, and then he'd charge admission.

"Well, um...there is still something I have been keeping from you."

"Is it vampires? Please no vampires."

Stiles chuckled. "As far as I know, no there are no vampires. Though I have through good authority that Succubi and Incubi are real, and historically speaking, they're like vampires, but not really. I mean I haven't met one...at least I think I haven't."

"Then what is it?"

"I'm panse-" He couldn't even finish his sentence, because the scanner behind his father came to life.
"This is Deputy Morales. We have a 187 at Hwy 32 and 10 Mile House Trail. Request additional units, coroner and crime scene unit. I repeat we have a 187 at Hwy 32 and 10 Mile House Trail. Request additional units with strong stomachs."

Foiled again! Though, Stiles supposed, homicide was a legitimate reason to cut his coming out short. Wait, hold the phone! "A murder!"

John stood and pointed at him. "You are not coming!"

"I'll stay in the car! I can be a ride along!"

"No. I'm the parent here. Go home Stiles. We can talk about whatever it was you were trying to tell me later. Unless it's vampires, and then I really don't want to know." He pulled on his jacket and grabbed his keys from the mug on his desk before leaving Stiles sitting alone.

"I'm pansexual, Dad. So if you insist on trying to find me dates, could you broaden your criteria to include guys too, any trans children of your friends would be nice too." He spoke aloud to the empty office. "No, it's not a phase, and yes, I'm sure. Your support in this would be really nice." If only he hadn't stalled and just spit it all out, the weight on his shoulders would be lifted. Before he had time to think, his head slumped forward of its own volition and rapped on his father's desk. Nobody said this would be easy, but they didn't say it would be this hard either.
Windows rattled, and a few mugs vibrated in the cupboards at the Hale house when a thunderous clap of thunder broke just overhead. Derek had only just put on running shoes, opening his front door just as the clouds burst, leaving Beacon Hills in a torrential downpour. Still considering a run, his hackles rose; he knew that feeling and stepped back inside right before a bolt of lightning flooded the sky with light.

Nope, he would absolutely not be running this evening. Electricity still made him jumpy. He'd been subjected to electric shock as a means of torture too many times. Thank you, Kate.

A little known fact amongst the pack, was that not only was Derek good at them, but he also loved playing video games. Well little known except for Stiles who always seemed to be online when he was. They'd spent more hours than healthy playing Call of Duty and Battlefield. So he set up a co-op game."

"Hey Big Guy! Fantastic weather we're having. Doesn't it just make you want to go for a run?"

Stiles' bright and cheerful voice soon came through his headset.

"Yeah, tell me about it." He laughed. "I was actually about to do just that. Man, I hope this thunderstorm is short. I always seem to lose power. My generator can't power the TV."

"Well I hope I don't lose power... again. It's been raining over here for the last hour and a half. It just came back on like ten minutes ago. I've been bored out my mind. I went through my exercise regiment for both weights and cardio, which let me tell you, is difficult without a stationary bike. I banged furiously on my drum kit for like twenty minutes. I am sure Mrs. Coleman next door was none too pleased." Through the headset thou sound of him munching on a snack echoed in Derek's ears. "Oh hey, Danny and I worked on that spreadsheet during free period today. He worked out an algorithm so that any information we enter is considered by other fields."

"You mean for the California pack project right?"

"The very same. So yeah, say you punch in the name Carolina Mendez and all her information. It will scan the rest of the sheet for possible patterns."

"Who is that?"

"A beta in the Chula Vista pack."

"I see." He took a drink from his beer. "Is she missing now too?" He heard Stiles sigh through the other end of the line.

"Was. That murder victim they found outside Bidwell Park over in Chico, that was her. I was down at the station last night with my dad when the alpha showed up. She wasn't a werewolf though. She was a selkie."

"Stiles, this whole situation is really starting to scare me. What are we going to do about keeping our pack safe?" He leaned back against the couch cushion.
"Well, all our Super N's are using the buddy system and carrying two different kinds of mace. Not sure what else we can do. Tasers maybe?"

"Sounds like a good idea. I'll have Argent order enough for all of us." Derek watched Stiles' avatar take heavy fire before dying.

"You motherfucker!"

Derek heard John chastize his son's language.

"Sorry Dad." 

So no one else is around?"

"Nope. Most of the pack is on a quadruple date." His voice smacked of both jealousy and loneliness. "Well the pack plus Cora's date. Don't ask me who that is. She didn't bring him inside. Don't really care where Peter is," Stiles killed someone on screen. "Take that, you little punk."

Derek laughed. His friend was always so much more verbal when playing than he.

"What about you? Anything going for you?"

"No. The house is empty; it's nice. How long until you re-spawn?"

"Just doing it now. Where are you?"

"I'm at Charley. Need your help."

"Yeah, coming to you. Hey have you seen Cam today? I messaged her to see if she wanted to come over and play. Apparently she's a bit of a gamer. I've tried to get together with her to play several times, but she works when I play. She's not answering her phone. You think she's okay?"

"She's probably at work."

"No, she was off today."

"Well I don't know then." The doorbell rang. Who is... "Hold on a second, Stiles. Someone's at the door."

"Sure thing, man. I need to take a piss anyway."

"Charming picture." He set down his controller and walked to the front door. "Whatever it is you're selling, we don't- Cam?" He took in her appearance, completely drenched just because of the short walk from her car to the front door. Titan sat, equally soaked on the porch next to her.

"Can I come in?" Her voice sounded broken.

"Of course. Are you okay?"

She shivered. "No, not really."

Derek winced as Titan shook out his fur, the dog leaving his pants a little damp in the process. "Did
"something happen?"

"Just a bad day. Today was my mother's...today is always a bad day."

He knew what she meant with no further clarification required.

"You busy?" She pulled a DVD from inside her coat. "I just really don't want to watch this by myself."

"You know, Stiles wanted you to hang out tonight. He's been trying to call you."

"I know, but he hates subtitles."

"What?" He took the movie from her. "Cinema Paradiso?"

"Look if you're busy or don't want company, I can go." She turned to leave, but Derek grabbed her wrist.

"No, stay, please. It's okay. What's with the movie?"

"My mother, it was her favorite. We used to watch it together, all the time. It's just..."

"Hey." He handed her a dish towel from the kitchen and dried her face. "I understand. I do, really. Come on." She followed him upstairs and into his room. "Stiles and I were going to play Battlefield for a couple of hours, but after that we can watch the movie. You can play too if you want. How about you take a shower to get warmed up? My T-shirts are in the second drawer on the left, pajama pants in the drawer below that. I should have some hoodies in the closet. See you downstairs." He rubbed her shoulder, before retreating to the living room.

Stiles had left the game when he returned, but sent a message telling him his house lost power again. Derek kept playing, however, losing himself in the mindless violence. "Son of a bitch."

"What about someone's mother?" Cambia laughed. "The headset suits you."

"Another controller is in the drawer in the entertainment center."

She took one and sat down next to him on the couch. "Leave this game so I can sign in to my gamertag."

In the game lobby, she stood and pulled out her phone to take a picture of his gamertag. The mechanical voice of her text to speech app made her giggle.

"What?"

"Sourwolf4? How'd you come up with that one?"

"I was number 4 in basketball, and the Sourwolf...well that was Stiles. Apparently, I have a sour disposition." He started a new game.

She patted his cheek. "Oh, my Tetrolupo."

"That sounds so much more attractive than Sourwolf." He blushed.
Stiles voice came back over his headset. "What about you being attractive? Totally true by the way. And...who is NeraGueriera? Oh that's cute; it rhymes."

"That's Cam."

She plugged in her headset. "Can you hear me, Derek?"

"Yes."

"I can too."

"Hi Stiles." She took a picture of his gamertag and waited for it's pronunciation. "I didn't know you were Portuguese."

"What? How'd you come to that conclusion?"

"Aw, you nervous?" She laughed. "Your tag is such a give away, Joãozinho. That's so cute; you're like John Stilinski, Jr. Little Johnny. Oh that's adorable."

"Oh wow, you...actually pronounced that correctly. Technically, yes I am John Stilinski, Jr. We share a middle name."

"Which is?"

"William. Anyway, I didn't know you knew Portuguese."

"Um puoquinho. Por quê? E você?"

"Sim. Minha mãe emigrou quando ela era doze anos."

"Ainda aqui, João." Derek interrupted.

"Really, Derek? You too? I feel we missed a legitimate bonding chance over this. I get why Cam might know Portuguese. She lived on the Mediterranean for a while."

"No, I know it because I dated a Brazilian for a while."

"Oh yeah?"

"She was gorgeous. Great rack."

"Um yeah, okay... that's um. Derek?"

"Are we going to play?" The three laughed and continued playing for a couple hours. Enjoying each others company, and taking out a group of annoying teenaged boys several times in the process.

"Well guys. It's been fun, but I have to head to bed. Take care guys. Boa noite."

Derek set his controller on the table. "Night, Stiles."

"Boa noite, Joãozinho."
He turned to her. "So how did you know...his tag?"

"Showowsheenyo...really? Say it out loud slowly."

He sounded out the syllables. "Ha, he spelled it phonetically, well as much as possible." He patted her leg. "Popcorn? Drink?"

"Sure. I'll take some water." While he went to the kitchen, she set up the movie.

"I'll be right back. I'm gonna change."

The microwave dinged, and by the time she emptied it into a bowl, Derek had come back downstairs. He sat down one of the cushions, patting the seat next to him.

"Good popcorn." She handed him the bowl, and he took a handful.

"You're right." Glancing over, he noticed there was far too much space between where he sat and where she did. He snaked an arm around her waist and pulled her closer. "You look like you could use a hug."

She laughed, snuggling in under his arm, against his chest. "Thanks. Do you want subtitles?"

"No, I'm good."

In the dark of the living room, the pair watched Toto's antics, as he grew from a mischievous little boy into a man all while the movie projectionist became like a surrogate father to him. As the film went on, they went from sitting, to stretched out, lying down beside one another, Derek's arm curled protectively around her waist. Somewhere near the end of the movie, they both nodded off, and that is exactly how Isaac and Cora found them hours later. They decided not to wake them.

Chapter End Notes

Translation for Portuguese used in this chapter:

Um pouqinho. Por quê? Você?- A bit. Why? Do you?
Yes. Minha mãe emigrou quando ela era doze anos- My mother immigrated when she was twelve.
Ainda aqui- Still here
Boa noite- good night

And I really hope I translated correctly- let me know about errors. Specifically if you happen to speak European Portuguese and not Brazilian, which all my resources seem to.

*Tetro is Italian and has several meanings ranging from gloomy to morose to even sour or dark. Hence Tetrolupo (Sour wolf)
Nera guerriera= black warrior
Empty Orchestra

Chapter Notes

I was so happy this morning when I signed on to see this has reached over a thousand views! I just wanted someone to read this. So that's great to see. Thanks to everyone who's read it and to those who are invested that I finish this. Your comments, bookmarks, and subscriptions are much appreciated.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Stiles took one look around the busy bar and grill and groaned. "Scott, when you called me and said, 'Hey Stiles, we're doing a pack outing at Steve's,' I naturally assumed we were coming for trivia night, not karaoke, which by the way you never agree to come along to anymore. It's bad enough you hijacked my Pack Night planning duties, but to bring us here. Most of us can't even sing. Why? Why Scotty, why must you torture us?"

He flashed him a full dimpled grin and clapped him on the back. "Relax Stiles, Allison and I come down here all the time for karaoke. Since this is my Pack Night outing...this is what I wanted to do. Some of these people are really good. It's good fun."

Stiles pointed emphatically at the stage (Well flailed in the general direction of the stage to be more precise, but who's counting). "That guy is most certainly not really good by any stretch of the word good, Scott. He sounds like a dying cat."

"Dying cats don't even sound that bad." Derek added without missing a beat.

"How many dying cats have you heard?"

He pointed a thumb in Cambia's direction. "You forget I found her while she was dying...as a cat. It was more like a whimper and a hollow purr. It's actually a really sad sound. What that guy is doing," all the wolves flinched as the man hit a note that sounded like it could only be compared to a screech owl, "breaks the eighth amendment."

"Which one is the eighth amendment, and don't say the eighth one, Stiles."

"Actually, I was going to say the one after the seventh and before the ninth." He stuck his tongue out at Scott's eye roll. "What do you think? Cruel and unusual punishment." Stiles smacked him on the back of the head. "Seriously, what do you fill your head with if not knowledge?"

"Well-"

Stiles held up a hand. "Don't. Don't say porn or naked thoughts about Allison. Just don't."

"We can't all be as smart as you and Lydia."

"No, no you can't but...you know what-" He slammed his hands over his ears. "How does someone sing that badly? I mean I understand not being able to carry a tune like Derek, but that is just ear
murder. Is it actually possible to die as a result of exposure to off key, tone deaf warbling? Can we take him out back and burn him at the stake? I'm pretty sure that's some kind of black magic he's trying to pass off as singing."

"It won't be so bad. This place uses internet karaoke, so there are literally like thousands of possible choices. We come down for karaoke at least once a month. Last time we brought Lydia and Jackson. Even Jackson had fun. Plus, I've only heard 'Sweet Caroline' sung twice. So that's a plus."

Stiles sighed. "More song choices doesn't actually make it sound like more fun. It just increases the likelihood of hearing someone pick obscure K-Pop to sing."

They were lucky enough to find a table large enough to seat ten. Granted, they were all scrunched together at a table made for six, but what's no elbow room amongst pack?

"Any food?" The server asked.

"No, we're just here to sing." Scott smiled.

"Actually," Derek's eyes caught the dessert menu, "I'll have...ooh that sounds awesome. I want one of the Apple Cake with toffee crust. The biggest piece you have."

"Sure thing, handsome. Drinks?" She went around the table taking orders. "So that's four Cokes, a Diet Coke, one Sprite, a Blue Moon, one Johnnie and Coke, and a double Glenlivet neat. Did I get it all?"

"Yep."

Cambia looked at Peter with a mix of disdain and disappointment. "Give it here."

"What?"

"Your man card. I'm revoking it. Scotch and cola really?"

Stiles' chair fell over backwards with him in it as he laughed hysterically at Peter. When he stood up he held up his hands and addressed the nearby tables filled with snickering patrons. "I'm okay. Totally meant to do that. I'm a stuntman in training."

Scott turned to the table. "The list fills up pretty quick."

"So?"

"Come on Stiles, don't be a Debbie Downer."

"I prefer being called a Negative Nate. Thank you very much."

"Whatever, Man." He flagged down the emcee, meeting him slightly away from the table.

"What do you think, he's planning to murder us, Der?"

Derek nodded in agreement with Stiles. "He's definitely up to something."

"Or he's planning to sing an embarrassing duet with Allison." Isaac giggled. "I came once before with them. It was horrible. I swear to God, if I have to listen to them sing some One Direction song.
I am pretty sure that alone is an Alpha card revokable offense."

"No, I think he's coordinating a body dump. Look, the guy's wearing gloves. No prints."

Derek turned and shook his head at Stiles. "Your mind scares me sometimes, Stiles."

He took a sip from his soda. "Don't worry, Derek. Scares me too."

"Well, I don't know, I think I might sing something." Peter clutched his glass like it was a godsend savoring the liquid within.

Cambia looked traumatized as he drank. "What you're doing right there, that's blasphemy. It's alcohol abuse, and it's downright tragic."

"Tell me you're not going to sing." Lydia shook her head in disapproval.

"Why does no one want to hear me sing, Derek?"

Scott sauntered back to the table, looking quite pleased with himself. "So, there's this thing they do called-

"No."

He rolled his eyes. "Stiles, I wasn't actually talking to you. Like I was saying, they have sing-offs. You know where you challenge someone to a battle. You sing a song, and they sing a song."

"Like I said. No, we aren't." Scott clamped a hand over his mouth. Stiles retaliated in true juvenile fashion: He licked his hand.

"Dude! Anyway, the winner is determined by applause."

Derek had a feeling he knew where this was going.

"You don't have to sing the same song, and you can have it randomly selected, which I don't recommend, or you can pick your own song. The catalog is over there by the bar. That being said, I challenge you to a sing-off, Derek."

"You don't want to do that."

"Why not, think you can beat me?"

"Oh absolutely not. You know I can't sing, Scott. While I might not be as bad as the guy that was "singing" when we came in," he actually did the air quotes, "I can assure you, no one wants to hear me sing."

Scott sighed. "You guys are no fun. at. all."

"I would totally accept the challenge, if I could sing on key, but I can't. It's not really a challenge if I am sure you'd win." Derek's eyes lit up when the server delivered his cake. "That looks amazing thank you." He dug in and took an eager forkful into his mouth. "Oh my god. After the day I had at work...fuck I'm going to need two of these." Before the server could leave their table, he put in an order for a second piece of cake.
"Well fine, you can pick someone from your old half of the pack to sing in your place, but I warn you, no one else sings. I mean Isaac does a little, but he is...shaking his head at me saying no way. He won't do it."

"Oh put your hand down, Peter. I've heard you sing." Lydia took a sip from her Diet Coke, leaving a lipstick stain on the straw. "You wouldn't beat, Scott."

"I let you talk amongst yourselves. Good luck, because if no one volunteers, you have to sing, Derek, even if-"

"I'll sing for you Derek." Cambia volunteered. "But no way am I letting you pick my song, Scott."

"Oh come on. If we sing the same song it's easier for the audience to judge."

"On the off chance I don't know all the words to whatever song you pick, it's a train wreck waiting to happen."

"Duh, that's why you read the words on the screen."

She deadpanned. "Yeah, not gonna happen. I pick my own song or no deal."

"Fine, you got it, Cam. By the way, you're going down."

Stiles rolled his eyes as Scott walked up and selected his song at the machine. "That was a hint Cam. He's going to sing Fall Out Boy. Just so you know. It will sound pretty decent. I've heard him sing it a lot. It's his favorite song, God knows why. Loaded God Complex? What kind of shit lyric is that? Fuck I hate Fall Out Boy."

"Says the kid who....you know what forget it. I would have figured you be a fan of theirs."

"Well I was, until they absolutely butchered Beat It."

Scott walked back up. "Okay, I picked my song. Do you have a song in mind? If not, I can go first, because I'm like a pro at this."

"That's fine with me. I need some time to find something to sing anyway."

"I should have asked if you're any good."

"No, not really."

"Then why would you-"

"Well, I'm better than Derek." She turned to Derek sitting next to her and winked before making her way to find a song. She tried to search for songs, but became flustered really fast. Walking back to the table, she grabbed Stiles, pulling him to the machine.

"What? Don't tell me you're a luddite. It's a touch screen."

She rolled her eyes. "I know that, and if you saw my house, you'd rethink the luddite comment. There's no keyboard only a list. I need your help or I'll be here forever. Please don't make a big deal
out of it." She pushed him in front of the screen. "Search Metallica for me."

"They only have 'Whiskey in the Jar'."

"The have one song and it's a cover? Okay. How about Stone Sour?"

"They have two."

"Which are?"

He moved aside so she could see the screen. "See for yourself." Her frustrated groan surprised him.

"Can you just read them to me?"

"'Inhale' and 'Come What(ever) May'."

"Why would they pick those two over some of their more popular songs? Um... what do they have for Coheed?"

"A lot...but they're the long ones, and 'Welcome Home' has that long instrumental section."

"The Suffering'?" He nodded. "I could do that, but I don't know if I want to sing falsetto the whole song."

He gave her a sly glance. "You can sing can't you?"

"Yeah."

"So I can expect you to beat Scott pretty handedly?"

"Most likely." She sulked, and briefly considered beating Scott at his own song, rapping, or picking the worst possible pop song, until a delicious idea came over her, a deliciously wicked idea. Recalling something Derek mentioned to her once, while still stuck as a cat, she grinned. "Do me a favor. Look up Halestorm, and that's spelled like Derek's last name plus storm."

"Eight."

"Fantastic." She perused the songs muttering to herself, just in case Derek was trying to listen in on the songs. First, she found all the songs with three words in the title. "Four. Okay, that one...first word is one letter. Looks like an 'I' so that's probably I." She looked at the last word in the song title. "Three letters last two are the same. This is probably the one." She hovered over the song title. "Does this say 'I Get Off'?"

"Yes, can't you see that?"

"Uh nope. To me it looks like it says 'I C3f Qtt.' Pretty sure they do not have a song by that name. Forgot my reading glasses, and I'm out of contacts." She lied.

Stiles eyed her for a long time. He'd picked up on the lie, but decided not to press the issue, one which he could tell was a bit of a sore spot. "Oh, well sorry I was such a brat about it."

"Don't worry." She made her choice and practically skipped back to the table.
"So what did you pick? I'll tell you mine if you tell me yours."

"What are you in kindergarten?"

"Shut up, Stiles." Scott threw a wadded up napkin at him.

"I must feel like rapping tonight. I dunno, I just really feel like 'Superbass' is the way to go I think."

Scott's jaw dropped.

"And he ill, he real, he might got a deal. He pop bottles and he got the right kind of bill. He cold, he dope, he might sell coke. He always in the air, but he never fly coach."

"You're joking right?"

She rolled her eyes. "Yes Scott, I'm joking, but I'm not telling." She grinned. "What? You though because I like hard rock and metal that I can't also like hip-hop? I gotta tell you, the Twin Cities are actually kind of a hotbed for hip-hop. Look up Doomtree and Brother Ali sometime. Besides there are just some days when you think, 'This day, this fucking day. You know what? Fuck it! I'm blaring '99 Problems' on the way home tonight, windows down. To hell with the old ladies I scare in the process.' Don't worry; you have this in the bag." She chewed on her thumbnail and waggled her eyebrows at him. "Be right back." At the bar she gave the bartender her most winning smile.

"What can I get for you?"

"Strange request, well maybe not at karaoke night. You have olive oil and honey behind the bar?"

"Yeah."

"Could I have like a spoonful of each in a little cup? Don't have time for proper warm-up."

He smiled. "You want them mixed together?"

"That would be lovely."

He slid the cup her way, but stopped her when she pulled out her wallet. "Don't worry about it. I squeezed a little lemon in there for you too."

"What a sweetheart." She downed the mixture and handed him back the cup.

"What was that, Cambia?"

"Oh, that? It was a shot of liquid courage. You know that thing you four thought you were being sly about pouring into your sodas under the table?"

Jackson stared at her. "You saw that?"

"Nope. Just you four with the Cokes smell like Bacardi."

"Ladies and Gentlemen, we have a Sing Off on the table up next." The emcee pointed to their table. "Come on up, Scott."
"Wow, they know you here." Stiles rolled his eyes. He hated karaoke with a burning passion that resembled a trip through Mount Doom.

"Yes Stiles, I told you I come down here a lot." Scott grabbed Cambia and pulled her to the stage with him.

"So everyone, this is Scott. He's been here before, but this is his first battle. He's taking on his friend..." He held the microphone to Cambia.

"Cambia."

"Cambia, you ever do karaoke before?"

"No, I'm a first timer, but I know how it works."

"Scott has asked that I don't announce the song titles and that he gets to go first. Now I usually say, 'Ladies first.'"

She shooed him. "No, his battle, he can go first."

"Sounds fair. How this works, for those of you who don't know, Scott will sing his song first, and then Cambia will sing. After each song, I will ask you to applaud. Whoever has the loudest applause wins. Got it kids?"

"Yeah." They said in unison.

"Cambia, if I could get you to leave the stage. All right, let's give it up for Scott."

She looked over at Stiles as the song started to see him mouth, "See I told you, Fall Out Boy." She simply shook her head.

Scott took a deep breath and began to sing:

"Am I more than you bargained for yet?  
I've been dying to tell you anything you want to hear  
Cause that's just who I am this week."

Cambia tuned him out to calm her nerves. She didn't suffer from stage fright, but stage nerves. Yeah, she got those, though it's not like she hadn't performed in front of people before. It had just been a while since she'd played with a band, and she'd never sung alone on stage before. Oh well, she was adventurous; she'd try anything once. Luckily she had the song lyrics memorized.

"We're going down, down in an earlier round  
And sugar, we're going down swinging.  
I'll be your number one with a bullet.  
A loaded god complex, cock it and pull it." Scott finished the song, quite pleased with himself.

"Thank you, Scott. That was pretty good. Can we get some applause for Scott?" He held the mic towards the audience, where Scott earned some decent applause. "All right, Cambia. He's left you a tough act to follow. You sure you up to the challenge." He pointed the mic at her.
"Absolutely not. I can't sing, but a challenge is a challenge."

"That it is, Cambia. That it is. Let's hear it for Cambia." He gave her the mic and left her alone on stage.

She felt weird being on a stage without her bass, but whatever. She could do this:

"You don't know that I know  
You watch me every night  
And I just can't resist the urge  
To stand here in the light  
Your greedy eyes upon me  
And then I come undone  
I could close the curtain  
But this is too much fun."

By the time she made it to the chorus, she felt right at home. Just like riding a bike. Her rock growl didn't even feel stale.

"I get off on you  
Getting off on me  
Give you what you want  
But nothing is for free  
It's a give and take  
Kind of love we make  
When the line is crossed  
I get off  
I get off"

Over at the table, quite a few of the pack looked very surprised. Derek however, looked something else entirely.

"Derek, are you drooling?" Isaac tried not to laugh.

The man nodded, his mouth agape. "Uh huh."

"I seriously had no idea she could sing. I mean she said she was in a band before. I just assumed it was as the bassist only."

Derek regained control of his brain to mouth connection, but didn't take his eyes off the stage. "That's not it. I vaguely remember telling her, while she sat in my front seat in that makeshift cat carrier, that I had a huge crush on this band's vocalist. I can't believe she remembered it. She's..."

They locked eyes from across the room right as she sang about it being more exciting to look when you can't touch, and fuck if she didn't wink at him.

"Can you be less obvious?" Jackson groaned.

"About?" He was hardly paying attention to anything but Cambia.

"You totally want to fuck her. We can all smell it, but seriously, could you stop eye-fucking her at right this moment? For the love of God, don't stand up; we don't need to see it."
He shook his head. "I don't..."

"You like her, don't you?"

"Shut up, Isaac. I want to listen to the song." Stiles threw his balled-up straw wrapper at him."

"Yeah, I get off!"

The emcee took back the microphone. "That was certainly not the performance I was expecting when you said you couldn't sing. Let's hear it for Cambia."

The applause was much louder for her than it was for Scott.

"Well we have our winner. Congrats Cambia." He held up her hand the way a boxing official would to declare a winner. "Say cheese guys."

Apparently, there was a Sing-Off wall of fame where photos of all the battles were posted. Scott didn't say anything until they sat down. "Why would you say you can't sing, if you were packing pipes like that?"

"Oh don't sulk, Scotty Boy. It's called gamesmanship. Why do you think I volunteered? You challenged Derek, but you knew he couldn't sing. That's low. I know you were going for alpha vs alpha, but...well I'm sort of an alpha. Worked out well don't you think." She took a drink of her Scotch. "I might have neglected to mention I was a music performance major in college, and that I threw five semesters of voice lessons into my electives. But hey, I had fun, just like you wanted. Derek, you're being unusually quiet. Didn't like the song choice?"

He gulped. "No, I did. Definitely, totally did. Do you remember everything I said to you while you were a cat?"

"Not everything. I purposely forgot the litany of inventive swearing that happened the day the water main broke outside your loft, and you lost water pressure before you could rinse the shampoo from your hair. I just remember the important stuff."

"My list of celebrities I'd like to sleep with is important?" He ordered another beer. "Duh, why wouldn't it be? I'm willing to talk about my list, though I'm sure it's longer than yours, and I'm pretty sure we might have some of the same answers. I'd be willing to share." She tapped her nose while she pondered something. "Huh that would be a first. I haven't had a MFF threesome before."

Peter choked on his drink while Isaac performed a spit take with his.

"I would totally go for a two guy ménage à trois." Lydia applied more lipstick. "How was that?"

Cambia laughed. "No, no, no, no, no. Not a devil's threesome. F cubed."

"College experimental period?" Peter asked, his voice unnaturally high.

She took a long drink of her scotch. "No, I was on more than a first name basis with a couple of my last packmates. We lots of loud and crazy sex. I miss them. They were great friends. Anyway, this has been fun."
As the next singer began singing, Cambia leaned over to Derek and whispered. "I picked that song on purpose. I figured if Scott was trying to embarass you, I might as well beat him with a song you'd like." She smiled warmly. "I mean I'm not as good as Lzzy, but I did okay. Don't you think?"

"Okay? That was really good. So threesome?"

"I was joking. I just wanted to make everyone uncomfortable. I've never had a threesome."

"But your heartrate-"

"Didn't change. I know. I'm a really good liar when I want to be. I make out like a bandit in casinos. I created a whole new identity. That wouldn't have worked so well if I sucked at lying."

"Have you lied..."

"To you?" She looked at him earnestly. "Why would I want to do that? I trusted you the moment I heard you try to stop me in the preserve. Seems kind of stupid to give you a reason not to trust me. And yeah, I do remember a lot of what you said to me as Kitty Cambia. I won't tell a soul. I miss my family too, and it would be nice to talk to someone about it. Maybe to like a giant black wolf, or to a friend."

He nodded. "That's a good idea. Helped me."

"How about you come over Wednesday. We can cook dinner, watch a movie."

"Are you asking me on a date?"

"Would you like it to be?"

"I...uh...um...I don't..."

She shook her head and smiled. "Easy there tiger. I don't want to break your brain. It doesn't have to be a date. It can just be dinner between packmates."

You idiot. Sourwolf? Ha, Stupidwolf is more like it. Why for the love of all things lupine, didn't you say yes?- He hoped his face did not betray the silent scolding he was giving himself. "I'd like that. This time, I'll bring the food."

"Sounds fantastic. What do you say we shut up and watch the show? It seems rude to at least not have a good time. If we get really bored, we can throw pieces of popcorn at Peter, try and get them down the V-neck of his shirt."

He agreed, but really, he just wanted to take himself out back and beat some sense into him for having mind to mouth dysfunction. Damn him. Damn his brain.

Chapter End Notes

Songs with lyrics referenced in this chapter:
Nick Minaj's "Superbass"
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EbB4PP4HknU

Fall Out Boy's "Sugar We're Going Down"
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ufb70h78eO4

Halestorm's "I Get Off"
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hq-2q9vz9-E
"Yeah, yeah hold on!" The intercom buzzer blared through Cambia's condo, and moments later she came running from her bathroom in a towel. "Hello?"

"Hey Cam, It's Derek."

She pressed the button again. "Come on up. I'm number 1741. It's the seventeenth floor, in the middle of the building, left side. Anyway, I left work late, so I just got out of the shower. I'll leave the door unlocked. Let yourself in." She hurried back to her bedroom, shutting the door behind her, before frantically digging through her closet for something to wear.

A few minutes later Derek pushed her front door open and was greeted by an enthusiastic Titan. He set the grocery bags on the kitchen counter, crouching to rub the dog's ears. "Who's a good boy?"

"Woof." The dog turned his head to lick Derek's hand.

"Nice to see you too." Titan craned his head and ambled over to a large black and purple plaid dog bed, where he happily gnawed on a large rawhide bone.

In his pocket, he felt his phone vibrate. It was a text from Stiles

From: Stiles

(18:05)

So a bunch of us are heading to the Jungle tonight. You know...just a heads up in case you needed us or if you and Cam wanted to join us.

From: Brows of Doom

(18:06)

We'll see.

He slipped the phone back into his pocket and looked around Cambia's home. Nice place. He hadn't been expecting it to be such a large condo. He admired the dark colored cabinets and contrasting white granite countertops. It had a clean and modern look, with it's state of the art appliances. The floors were similarly colored to those at his house, and he saw they continued throughout.

Just off the kitchen, lie the living room; its open floor plan practically begged him to explore. Instead of the traditional accent wall painted a different color than the rest of the room, the accent wall had been covered with brick red colored tin tiles. It had a very funky vibe to it, but then again so did the rest of the room. A flight of stairs against the kitchen wall led up to a lofted area above the living room.

Opposite of the accent wall, two massive, floor to ceiling bookcases took up most of the wall. Wooden with riveted metal trim, they were definitely quirky, but filled with far less books than he'd expect. The back wall happened to be comprised with all windows and a sliding glass door onto a
balcony. He figured the windows probably stretched into her bedroom. No Derek, stop thinking about her bedroom. You implied this wasn't a date. No, but you want it to be. Of course I do.- Fuck, he was having an internal argument with and against himself.

Glancing down the hallway, he admired the three framed guitar paintings. That was until he took a closer look and realized they were actual framed guitars...or well one guitar and two basses. He could see the first door on the left open slightly, quickly determining it to be a practice room or studio, because he could see a bass on a stand, an amp, and computer. I should ask her to play for me.

He felt like he was snooping, so he returned to the living room. She'd give him a tour when she was done dressing. Her television was bigger than his, and he thought he'd splurged for a big screen. Underneath it, in the entertainment cabinet, he could see four gaming consoles. She wasn't kidding when she said she was big into gaming. Upon further inspection, she not only had an XBOX and Playstation 3, but also the XBOX One and Playstation 4. Oh god. She's one of those people who has to have the newest thing. He wasn't sure how he felt about that, but then again, she did go toe-to-toe with him and Stiles when they played a couple weeks ago. Books, yes, he would look at her book selection.

He noticed right away, however, that she had just about as many audio books as actual books, and most of those were the same as the printed ones. Odd, he thought. On the small end table between the bookcases, her IPad, sat charging. She really does love her technology. Not that he expected anything less, given her love of science-fiction and pop-culture. The middle compartment housed some strange office supplies: Several pieces of transparent colored plastic, green notebook paper, and a couple colored rulers with a clear middle section. A jar had ten different colors of highlighters as well as several other colored pens. Next to that was a dispenser of Post-It flags in just about as many colors, and several plastic boxes he remembers using in college to hold flash cards. Mixed in with all the books, various little statues and trinkets looked back at him. However, perhaps the strangest thing he found was this bizarre looking mechanical wand thingy. He picked it up just as Cambia walked into the room tying her hair up in a messy bun. "Shouldn't you keep this somewhere else? Most women I know keep their sex toys in their bedroom." He face-palmed. Way to go, you moron.

She snatched it from him, laughing slightly. "Don't worry, Derek. I keep them there too. That, however, is a ReadingPen."

"What?" He cocked an eyebrow at her.

"Watch." She took a book from the shelf and opened it.

The first thing he noticed was the fact that it was a large print book, but he resolved not to say anything. She opened the book to a page, conspicuously marked with a green flag. He watched her drag the pen across a page

"Words can be like X-rays, if you use them properly - they'll go through anything. You read and you're pierced." A mechanical voice read aloud from A Brave New World.

"Neat toy. Why do you have it?"

She ignored his question, replaced the book and her gadget and walked into the kitchen, but not before adjusting the thermostat. One hundred degree weather was not her favorite by a long shot. Ugh sometimes I really hate summer. Oh well, two months down, one to go. From the fridge, she pulled a container and whistled. "Dinner time, Handsome."
"You make your pet food too?"

"This? No, it's that fresh pet food you can get at the store. I didn't have time to make his food when he was younger, and he loves this stuff. Don't you, Sweetie?" She rubbed Titan's head as she set his food dish back on the floor. Derek chuckled. "What?"

"His food dish looks like the Jolly Roger."

"Yeah, well it suits his personality." She picked up the bottle of wine he'd brought.

"That was recommended by the man at the liquor store to serve with the meal. You know I never even asked. Do you like wine?"

"Yeah, just prefer Scotch that's all." She furrowed her brow as she inspected the label. "I've not seen this one before. Can I keep the bottle?"

"What? Sure I guess. Why?"

She crossed an arm across her chest to hold tightly to her other one, where her thumb started stroking her shoulder. "I keep track of things."

"Like a label collection? Wine you've tried?"

"Something like...no. It's part of my system."

Confused, he started taking things out of the grocery bags. "You said that about my disorganized movie case. What do you mean by system?"

She averted her eyes. "Um..."

With her gaze elsewhere, he scented the air. The same scent of anxiety and frustration he'd smelled the night she became pack hung in the air again. Instead of saying anything, she beckoned him to follow her to the other bookcase, which was filled with movies and video games. Every so often, a divider card stuck out separating sections of cases.

"Without some kind of system, I couldn't find a movie without looking at the cover. Well, it would be tough at least and take way longer than I'd like. See, I have these arranged by genres, and within those sections they are alphabetized. So I know if say... I want to watch XMen, I go to my superheroes section. Well X is at the end of the alphabet. I can pull out the last few movies," she demonstrated, "look at the cover and find it."

"That is logical and efficient. I'll give you that."

"Now back to the kitchen so I can explain further."

He followed. A few books caught his eye on the way back, and she didn't see him stop.

"So this is my... Derek?" She popped her head around the wall. "I can probably stop explaining my system then, if you're looking at that." She pointed to the book in his hand.

"Did I... when I said you didn't need to pull them out to look at them... and with the spices..."
"Hurt my feelings? Yeah, but I'm over it."

"So, curious because I'm confused. How can you be so good at music if you're dyslexic? I thought it affected the ability to covert letters to sounds, not just reading."

"No. There are different types of dyslexia. Not everyone fits in the same box. I was an okay student...mostly C's with some B's except for music, where I excelled, because it clicks for my brain much better than everything else. I mean, I was pretty good at history, but I think that was mostly fueled by father's profession. If you want to know about the history of the Roman Empire, specifically their battle tactics and military organization, he was your man. He sort of passed it on."

"Do you play by ear then?"

"No, as with everything else, I have a system. Guitar and vocal sheet music gets printed landscape, and bass is printed on portrait. That way I can't confuse the clefs. I color code the notes, well except the whole notes. They are the only ones that don't have stems. Half notes are highlighted yellow, quarter blue, eighth pink, and so on. I also color the rests, circle the triplets, and put triangles around upstrokes and bends. Time signatures are not a problem, because I read numbers just fine. I'm good at memorizing music too. Sight-reading is a bitch though.

"I have no problems phonologically. I hear everything fine, and I have no coordination problems or actual vision problems. I can write okay except for phonetic spelling, not that I could read you back what I wrote down. I just can't read for shit. It takes a very complex and time-intensive system. Even then...yeah reading is not my strong suit. So, that explained, what is this wine brand? The font has too many squiggles. It would take me at least ten minutes to figure it out." She handed him the bottle.

"Oh, it says San Roman Toro. The clerk said it was floral, silky and fruity. I've never had it before. So, if it sucks..." He gave it back to her. "That first pack night, you were memorizing what the label looked like weren't you?"

"Yep. These are my food reference books. This is my booze binder." She opened up a blue binder. Inside it, the pages were filled with labels of various alcohols. She'd printed out label stickers to put underneath each one. "If I forget what it's called, I can read my sticker with the pen. Otherwise, I just search it out at the store. It's really helpful at work actually, being able to memorize what the labels and bottles look like. Anytime we get a new type in, I have my phone read it to me. I do okay. Like I said the system can get really complicated. By the way, all my spice jars have words and pictures. I'm good with pictures. See, your spice jars, with the clear labels on glass jars and small writing...not gonna happen. Heavy contrast between the writing and paper is key. I would be completely lost without my text to speech app for my phone, TV and gaming consoles."

"I get it, and you listen to the books while you read along, don't you? So you can memorize the way the word looks, and that's also why you wouldn't let Scott pick the song?"

"Right again. So, would you like a tour?"

He nodded and resolved to reorganize all the DVD's and video games at his place as well as buy all new spice canisters as soon as possible. Hell, he would even organize the pantry alphabetically. Yes, I will definitely do that.

"Great follow me. Okay, so this is obviously the living room." She opened the door to the balcony.

"Nice view." He stared out at downtown Beacon Hills. Her balcony overlooked Beacon Square and the bustling shopping area which surrounded it.
"Yeah I like to bring my bass out here to practice."

"This place had to cost you an arm and a leg."

"Not really. Well yes, it was expensive, but didn't really make a dent. Moral of the story, Derek, I sold the house I grew up in for quite a lot, because let's face it, I did not need 4700 square feet to myself. Yeah, so between that plus life insurance, pensions, and the civil suit my parents' lawyer insisted I go after because the drunk guy was some hotshot lawyer...whatever, I was sixteen, what the hell did I know. I don't ever have to work if I don't want to, but that just seems lazy to me. It does allow me to work at jobs I like as opposed to seeking out higher paying ones I might hate. Anyway, enough about my finances. Follow me back inside. Down this hall, this is my studio." She opened the door completely, revealing black and purple corrugated walls.

"What..."

"Acoustic panels."

Standing in the room completely, he could see not one, but two computers, a couple music stands and chairs as well as her instruments and equipment.

"First door here, is the bathroom. It's just a 3/4 bath. So, as you can see... lame shower. Guest room is the second door on the left. Also not that interesting. Laundry room is across the hall, even less interesting."

"What's upstairs?"

They retreated back down the hall and climbed the stairs to the lofted area. "My room." She spread her arms.

He laughed. "You painted your room Merlot?"

"No. I painted my room Chianti." She smirked.

Dark grey curtains had been pushed to the sides of both walls to let light in. Her headboard butted up against the windows, the bedding a similar color to the curtains. A TV sat atop her dresser, and there were a couple end tables. Just like the dog bed downstairs, another one lay in the corner, littered by a couple toys. Other than that, the room seemed to be sparsely furnished.

"My bathroom has a pretty sweet bathtub. See look.....oooh whirlpool jets." She waggled her eyebrows.

Fighting a deep and altogether embarrassing blush spreading across his cheeks at the thought of her naked in said bathtub, he cast his eyes to the floor. On the hardwood floors, he noticed what appeared to be a long, thin, rectangular mat running the entire width of the room, about twenty-five feet in length. His eyes followed the mat over to a strangely dressed mannequin.

The object of his gaze caught her attention. "I see you found Gianni. I love to hack this guy to pieces."

He quirked an eyebrow at her.
"So in addition to playing hockey, I was a competitive fencer. My dad's idea. I haven't competed in years, but it helps relieve stress just about as well as knocking people around in the practice ring."

"Fencing?"

She grabbed her épée from its stand and proceeded to demonstrate a series of advances, some with lunges, some without. Following up her footwork show, she attacked the dummy. "See? I mean, I really should have put the arm on the dummy so I had something to parry and riposte off of, but you get the idea."

"Why isn't your back hand up here? You know, like in the movies when you hear 'En Garde'?" He imitated a sword-fighting stance.

"Because that is begging to get your hand struck. Instant touch. It's bad form. Probably wouldn't be a big deal in foil or sabre matches because the hand is not a valid target, but in epee, I could hit your hand and score a point."

"I see."

"Shall we get cooking?"

They set to work in the kitchen, preparing the beef tenderloin and field greens salad with goat cheese.

"So...I am going to take a stab, Derek, and say you brought dessert in the other bag in my fridge."

He looked at her and shrugged. "Guilty as charged. I brought cheesecake. I, uh, didn't make it. I would have made it myself, but I didn't have time today. When I walked past the bakery at the grocery store, I couldn't pass it up." He picked up the cake and thrust it towards her. "Just look at all the caramel, Cam! How can anyone say no to this perfect flan cheesecake? It looks like paradise in baked good form!"

Laughing, she shook her head. "You are damn lucky you're a werewolf Derek. Otherwise you'd weigh like three hundred pounds and be diabetic, or at least on your way there."

"I can't help it; I have no willpower when it comes to sweets. Everyone's got a weakness."

"And yours is baked goods? Not Wolfsbane or Mountain Ash?"

Derek put the cake back in the fridge. "Not what I meant. Sweets, they're like...my mom liked to bake... a lot. She made stuff for all kinds of bake sales. The school, Chamber of Commerce, the Children's Hospital, even churches. We weren't religious, but she made stuff all the time." His eyebrow twitched. "I was the only one of my siblings that showed any interest in her hobby. I learned all her recipes, but I only remember half of them. There was this family cookbook. When I was about ten, the two of us sat in the middle of the living room floor going through four generations of recipes. The best ones went in the book. There was this carrot cake recipe; it was like a gift of the gods. For the life of me, I can't remember three ingredients, and I have experimented so many times trying to figure it out, but," He pressed his lips into a hard line and shook his head, "I just can't get it right. Fuck, maybe I'm just remembering it better than it actually was. Part of me thinks, that if I can just figure out that cake, then it will be like she's still here." He scrubbed his face with his hands. "That was the only possession I wish survived the fire. Even a photo album or two managed to make it out, but not that book. So much family history gone. I contacted the historical society hoping she made a copy for their City Heritage library, but no luck. It's silly, because it's just one damn book,
but desserts and sweets...they remind me of home." Feeling as though he would fall apart any moment, he excused himself for the bathroom.

While he was out of the room, Cambia took the opportunity to finish the Parmesan crust on the tenderloin and popped it into the oven. There wasn't much to the salad, just slicing some cheese and chopping walnuts, but she figured might as well finish this up. When Derek returned, she gave him a soft smile.

"Sorry."

"No apology is needed, Derek. Grief sneaks up on you sometimes. Even eight years later." She held out her arms. "Would you like a hug? I've been told I'm not particularly affectionate anymore, but I still have some tricks." Surprisingly, he obliged her.

It wasn't that Derek didn't like hugs. He had no problem with them, but the proximity to Cambia was what he had an issue with. He could feel his wolf clawing underneath his skin, made even worse when he inhaled. What had started as a simple attraction was very quickly growing into something deeper, and he wasn't sure if he-- he didn't want to mess things up. Yeah, that was his problem.

"Do you know why I have the car I do?"

He broke the hug and picked up his wine glass. "You have an affinity for vintage muscle cars?"

"No, not really. As far as cars go, I like anything that looks sexy. Apollo was my dad's car, but I gave it the name after they died. He drove past it one day, and at that time, it was only the body. It had no engine; the interior was trashed. It was just parked in someone's front yard along White Bear Avenue with a red 'For Sale' sign in the window. I remember sitting in the passenger seat, confused as hell when he flipped a U-Turn to go and ask about this car. At the time, yeah I didn't see the appeal, but he bought it on the spot. The next day he went back with a friend of his who had a trailer. My mom was so upset when he got home with it, called him foolish for purchasing it, but the exterior was near mint. He was always pretty good with cars, and I guess as a little kid he loved Bullitt, you know, with Steve McQueen. From there he just became obsessed with American cars. It had always been his dream to own a classic American Muscle car. A 1970 Chevelle SS was his dream car. There was no way he was going to let my mom talk him out of it. I was twelve. Instead of pushing me to learn something 'for girls,' he taught me how to fix a car; give it a tune up; change a tire, oil, brakes; you name it. We worked on it together, the two of us, and it took us three years to restore it. I remember when he got it back from the shop, and it had that beautiful new yellow paint and gorgeous black interior. So long as nothing happens to it, I will never get rid of that car. It's just like baking with your mother."

Derek nodded. "Yeah, I guess it is. That's a nice story, Cam. Your dad seemed like a pretty cool guy."

"Both my parents were. We had a great relationship. I know that sounds corny, but it's true. They were great parents. My mother loved movies, and music, and clothes. She loved to take me shopping and then finish the afternoon with a movie. My dad picked Risk every time it was his turn to pick the game for family game night. My mother hated that game with a burning passion." She gestured to the stove. "How long does that need to cook?"

"About thirty minutes, give or take. I don't know your oven."

Her eyes lit up. "Well what do you say to video games? I had a craptacular day at work, and I would really like to chop off some zombie heads."
"Sounds fun."

She plucked a game from the book case and popped it into the XBOX 360. "I don't care if it is five years old. *Left 4 Dead 2* is still my favorite video game."

Derek sat down beside her as she started up an offline co-op game. He hadn't played this game in a couple years, and it was just as much fun as he remembered, maybe more so, because he never had anyone to play with. That was still a relatively new thing, having friends...even saying that in his head felt foreign.

"Take that, hunter! All your jumping and shit has got nothing on Slashitha!"

"What the he-"

"That's my nickname for the katana. It's silly; I know, but I don't care." She looked over at him. "Sorry, you died. I'll let you out of whatever closet you respawn in."

He couldn't think of a response. Instead he sat there frozen trying to get his brain working again. Fuck, he was bad at this sometimes.

"Problem, Derek?"

"I...um... I..." He tried again to form a complete thought. *I really like you, Cam. Would you maybe like to go on a date with me?* By the time he worked himself up to it, the timer on the oven went off. She jumped up and ultimately over the couch, bounding for the kitchen, while he groaned inwardly.

Then, he remembered Stiles' text. "Say Cam, a bunch of the pack are heading out to one of the nightclubs tonight. Did you want to go too? You know, after dinner?"

"I'd love to, but I work in the morning, so I'd have to leave by midnight."

"Well I have a class at eight-thirty." Before he could stop himself, he stuck his foot back in his mouth. "It wouldn't be a date or anything." *God damn it, Derek! You complete asshat! What the hell are you doing? It's not hard.* The feel of his forehead rapping softly against the coffee table repeatedly, only marginally assuaged his embarrassment. Since when had his game completely abandoned him? That asshole, how dare he? Well he supposed, that was one way of punishing him for not getting laid in two years.
"Too fucking early." Stiles grumbled into his pillow as his chirped on his nightstand. "It's still dark out." However, when he opened his eyes, he noticed that one: it was definitely day time, and two: already past nine o’clock. He grabbed the phone and opened the text.

From: Brows of Doom
09:15

I have a problem and need your help!

The exclamation point woke him up enough to hold a coherent conversation (Most likely). "Hey man. What's the emergency?"

"I have lost all ability to talk to women."

"Really Derek? That's the emergency? Is this about Cam?"
"What? How did you-"

"It's painfully obvious, man, even without a supernatural nose."

"I really like her, Stiles. What would you do?"

"You are seriously asking me for advice? You're the adult in our friendship. High school students are not really the best source of sage wisdom when it comes to dating, especially me. Just saying." He sat up and rubbed his eyebrow. "You forget that I haven't really liked two of the people I've slept with. Aside from Alex, they've all been hook-ups because I find them attractive, and they're game. I have minimal experience at the relationship thing. Look how well that turned out."

"And mine have been any better?"

Stiles groaned. "Just say, 'Hey Cam, would you like to go on a date with me?' Seriously, you're way more attractive than me; you could probably just look at her the right way, and she'd take up your offer."

"Are you kidding? She'd eat me alive."

"I fail to see how that's a problem." He paused. "Oh wait, you weren't talking about getting head were you?"

"No. I don't want to sleep with her. I mean, not only."

"Then the best advice I have for you is to nut-up, Derek." His stomach grumbled. "I need breakfast. Talk to you later." He didn't wait for a response, and stumbled out of bed bound for the kitchen. He didn't even notice anyone else was up as he made a bee-line for the coffee maker.

"Ugh, Stiles you smell like sex. Go shower." Scott groaned from the living room where he sat playing XBox.

Stiles almost dropped his mug at the sudden outburst. "Food first. Need hangover food." As soon as he opened the fridge, the jingle of dog tags came towards the kitchen. "What in the-- Titan, why are you here?"

"Because Cam is here. Something about her building and a day long water outage."

Stiles scratched his chin. "I probably should put on a shirt then."

"Please just eat and then shower." Scott paused his game and walked into the kitchen where he popped the tab on a can of Coke. "So, who was it?"

"Who was who?" He asked, his head in the fridge, while he scrounged up omelette ingredients.

"Correct me if I'm wrong, but to smell like sex there is usually someone else involved."

With an armful of various fixings, he closed the door with his foot. "Not true. Pretty sure no one else is required for self-love."

Scott smacked him in the back of the head. "Don't be an ass. Who was it?"
"I don't know, didn't ask for a name. Ravenous had a special 16+ night last night. Nothing as fulfilling as nameless head in a nightclub bathroom. It wasn't even good head. She's the one that offered. Now, excuse me. I need sustenance." He set to work on assembling his hangover cure. "Whatcha doin' Cam?"

"She's reading."

"Thank you, Cam." Stiles rolled his eyes at Scott.

"Well she can't hear you. She has ear-buds in."

He walked around the sofa to get her attention.

She smirked as she removed her headphones. "Someone was a busy boy last night."

"What are you reading?" She held up the book for him to see. "The Ocean at the End of the Lane? Any good?"

"Yeah."

"What's with the ruler?"

"Keeps me focused on one line at a time."

"Oh I remember using something like when I was learning to read. Hated the things. They made me feel like an idiot."

She glared at him. "I feel like a bigger idiot without it."

He nodded. "So do you listen to instrumentals when you read?"

"Nope. I listen to the book."

"Wha-" His question was interrupted by his father coming down the stairs in a hurry. "Where's the fire, Daddio? Oh god, I hope there isn't an actual fire."

"You two," he pointed to Scott and Cambia, "I could use your special skills. Well the whole packs skills."

"Even me?" Stiles pointed to his chest.

"An extra body couldn't hurt. Get dressed."

"Scott says I smell like-- I need to shower."

"Do it later. We have a missing five year old, and there's a community search party. Meet me at the founder's fountain by the Park. Bring your dog, Cam."

Within five minutes, the three of them had piled into Apollo and headed towards the middle of town.
Stiles looked around at the crowd. There must have been three hundred people gathered to help. He watched his father grab a megaphone from his trunk. In his left hand, he held a photo.

"Can I have your attention everyone? This is five-year old Alexa Monroe. She is forty-five inches tall and weighs about forty pounds. She has long blonde hair and blue eyes. Sometime between one thirty this morning and eight a.m., she disappeared from her home. A chair had been pushed over to the back door, so we believe she left the home on her own and was not taken. She was last seen wearing pink and blue My Little Pony pajamas. Given the maximum time frame, and the average walking speed," he gestured to a large red circle on the map taped to the side of Parrish's SUV, "this is our search radius. Now that you've all been signed in, and have copies of her photo as well as your search quadrant, please get to work. The forecast today calls for temps up to 95 degrees. We need to be worried about exposure, for both Alexa and ourselves. Please remember to stay hydrated and seek shade if you feel overheated." He dismissed everyone.

Stiles found the rest of the pack. "Are we all in the same search area?"

"Jackson, Danny and I have the area that includes the community college. It's search zone 3 I think."
Lydia said.

"We have search area six." Isaac said. "That's Scott and me. It's the area that includes the Safeway."

"My dad and I have the warehouse district and the golf course. What number was it, Dad?" Allison looked at her father for clarification.

"Number two. It also has the running trails that lead into the Preserve, which I'm going to take a guess and say is your area Derek, since you're the most familiar." Mr. Argent said.

"Yeah, it's search zone ten, but it's the deepest part of it. It goes all the way to Rte 9 and back to the lake."

"That's my area too," Stiles said.

"Let's go." Cambia grabbed a different dog harness out of her trunk just as John walked over carrying a pink t-shirt.

"Before you all head out," he handed the shirt over to Scott who took a sniff and passed it around to those in the pack with supernatural noses and Titan. "Good luck."

The pack split up and Derek, Stiles, and Cambia piled into the Jeep, where Titan happily hung his head out the window. Stiles drove them to the Hale house and parked the Jeep. Cambia buckled Titan into his harness and gave his leash over to Stiles. "Here you go. He has a collapsible water dish in his harness."

"Why do I get the dog?" Derek gave him a pointed look that said, 'Seriously?' "We're splitting up, and you want me to have a super nose at my disposal, don't you?" Both Derek and Cambia nodded.

"Let's fan out. Stiles, you head towards the high school. I will head for Rte 9, and Cam the lake."
"Be careful, Derek." She voiced her concern. Even though there was a missing girl to find, hunters could be anywhere looking to steal yet another werewolf for whatever their wicked endgame was.

"I doubt, with all the police presence out today, anyone is going to try and snatch a wolf. They'd be incredibly stupid to do so. Do you have a way to signal us, Stiles, if you find her?"

"I have an emitter Chris gave me. It's on my key chain."

"Great."

And with that, the three split up.

* * * * *

Over an hour in, and Stiles' feet were already killing him. His voice was starting to go hoarse. "Alexa! Hey kid are you out here?" As with every other time he called out for her, he heard no reply. He suspected he wasn't being as convincing as he could be. What? He had no idea how to talk to a kid. So sue him. "Yo Alexa!"

Remembering his father's advice to stay hydrated, he pulled out the water bottle from his backpack, pouring some into Titan's dish before taking a long swig for himself. Even with the trees creating a cover from the sun, the heat was still pulling sweat out of his every pore. He tugged his shirt over his head, draping it around his neck while the two of them took a short break. "Alexa! Hey little girl, there are a lot of people looking for you! Can you hear me?"

After five minutes, he stood and continued the search. From what he could see, the path looked undisturbed, but he was glad the search was during the day. He couldn't imagine trying to find a little girl in the dark. If she was even in the preserve. A large part of him hoped she walked towards town, and she'd be found easy. But this town, this fucking town, he knew better. Everyone would be out here all day, and if they managed to find her, it would take until nightfall. That's if they were lucky.

"You are such a Negative Nate, Stiles." After about another half mile east, Titan stopped, sniffed the ground, and took a hard right south. "Got something? I sure hope you're not chasing a rabbit, because I do not want to watch you kill it." He felt his stomach roll at the thought.

Titan's enthusiastic pull on the leash prompted him to start into a jog as they headed towards the lake.

* * * * *

Of course Derek had to pick the search direction almost entirely uphill. Even with werewolf stamina, he was beginning to get winded. He'd been moving at a brisk pace as he had the farthest distance to search. Stopping every couple of minutes to call for Alexa, so far, he'd heard nothing. Not only that, he'd picked up no scent whatsoever.

If she'd managed to make it this far away from her home, she'd be exhausted at this point. What five year old willingly walks ten miles? Granted, it was most likely still dark when she wandered away from her home, and if she'd walked North from her house, getting lost would have been easy.
"Alexa! Alexa Monroe! Are you out here?" He called out as his feet hit the pavement of Rte 9. If she did come this way, and had been lost, walking along the road might get her spotted easily. It was a shot in the dark, but he turned back towards town, walking along the side of the road.

Kids are too smart for their own good sometimes- he mused, recalling when Cora and Sophia worked together to make a precarious stack of chairs in order to reach the pull string for the attic. Their little scheme had been for the sole purpose of finding their mother's hiding place for Christmas presents. The plan would have succeeded, if Cora hadn't insisted that her younger sister, because she was lighter, be the one to climb up to open the door. A lack the innate natural grace of a werewolf resulted in a broken leg for Sophia and lots of stern words from their mother. He couldn't wrap his head around what could compel a little kid to wake up and decide to leave the house at night. Maybe if she'd been a toddler, sure. Those little munchkins didn't quite have the concept of right versus wrong, but at five years old, she should know better.

_That's it; if I ever have kids, I am getting a state of the art security system to let me know if the perimeter is breached at night._ He sighed. _Who would want to have kids with you, Derek? You are a walking disaster._ Damn his brain, damn it and its crushing pessimism. "You are a ray of sunshine, Derek."

He supposed it came from the fact he grew up in a large family, but he'd always wanted kids of his own. Well he did before the fire, back when he was innocent and believed they and their kind could exist peacefully and be left alone. Now...why would he willingly bring children into this? Still, thinking about how poor Alexa's parents must have been feeling while everyone searched for their daughter, renewed his zeal, moving with great purpose along the road.

*   *   *   *   *

Two hours into her search, Cambia picked up a faint trace of Alexa's scent. The little girl was frightened, that much she could smell, but the night had been windy. The only reason she caught a smell at all, was because Alexa touched a tree.

From what she had been able to follow, Cambia knew the girl had stopped for a bit at that tree and turned Southwest. Maybe she thought she was heading back towards her home, or maybe she thought this way would lead her to town. Poor little thing, she'd picked the worst direction to explore. There had been nothing but dense woods and no trails for over a mile. Perhaps she'd been following the small stream for a while. Though, the thought of a five year old lost and scared in the dark woods at night, tugged at Cambia's heartstrings.

For all her short tempered nature, it wasn't like she was heartless, far from it actually; she just had a unique way of showing she cared. The last thing she would want is a poor child to be injured or needlessly frightened. There was just no justification for that sort of thing.

She took a swig from her water bottle and contemplated switching to an animal form, though she wasn't sure which one, if any, would help her deal with the heat. For all her heartiness in cooler temperatures, summer just got to her. _Snow would be nice right about now._ Ha, snow! She doubted if Beacon Hills got snow more than flurries every few years.

"Alexa! Sweetie, are you out here? Your mommy and daddy are worried about you! Alexa? I'm
helping them look for you. The police have a bunch of other people trying to find you. If you can hear me, call out, and stay where you are, okay?” Cambia continued Southwest for another mile when a strong scent caught her attention: terror and...blood.

She took off running at a frenzied speed in the direction of the smell, seeing no sight of the little girl. Completely immersed in her worry about Alexa being injured, Cambia failed to notice the terrain growing rocky. Her foot caught a rock, which sent her to the ground. Lying on her back to catch her breath for a minute, she surveyed the damage, relieved to find only a minor scrape. When she stood, she resumed her search, but at a much more contained speed, finding she had to climb over boulders every so often.

She'd have been lying, if she said she wasn't praying Alexa didn't come this way and had turned around. Cambia was almost twice as tall as the girl, and even she was finding in human form that the path was difficult to navigate in some areas, then again kids are smaller. An easier path might exist between the rocks, one Cambia herself could not squeeze through. However, in the pit of her stomach, she knew better. The girl's scent was growing stronger. **God, a bird's eye view would be so helpful right now.** Realizing that was the perfect idea, she scrambled down the rocks towards the beach.

Halfway down the sloping hill, she found a little purple sandal wedged into a crack in a rock. As she looked around for the other one, thinking maybe Alexa had abandoned them both after she got one stuck in the rock, her heart sank when she found a ripped piece of pink cotton snagged on a rock right at the edge of the bluff. **Oh god, she fell in.** A tentative look over the edge confirmed her fear: The other shoe and a second scrap of clothing had caught another stone on the way down.

Abandoning all concern for herself, Cambia bounded down to the beach and stripped out of all her clothes. She glanced around for any prying eyes before she shifted and took off skyward, grabbing her bra and underwear in her beak as she flew. The last thing she needed was to end up somewhere else in the preserve with no clothes. Once above the tree line, she continued upwards for another couple hundred feet. There was no sight of the girl anywhere near where she fell in. So she soared around the vicinity.

The wind seemed to be pushing the lake's current South-Southeast. That would be the easiest direction for her to swim, assuming Alexa knew how to swim at all, if she was even able to after her fall. Pumping her wings hard, Cambia flew across the lake, her eyes trained on the water below.

Past the center of the lake, and several hundred feet from the other bank, Cambia noticed a shape in the water. She made her target. Her wings folded in and she dropped into a dive bomb, gaining speed until she found herself falling at 200 miles per hour. This animal form took her years to perfect, but she would never trade those years for anything. A peregrine falcon had proved an invaluable form to have for territory patrol. Fifty feet or so above the water, she unfolded her body to slow her descent and shifted back fifteen feet above the water, hitting the lake feet first.

When she surfaced, she winced. She hadn't slowed her descent quite enough. Her legs were going to punish her later. Quickly, she pulled on her underwear and clasped her bra behind her back. At least now she looked like she’d stripped down to avoid unnecessary weight when swimming, not like a woman taking a hasty skinny dip.

However, she'd missed her intended entry point by several yards and swam towards the shape she'd seen from above. As she grew closer, her breath caught in her throat. Poor Alexa floated face down in the water.
Cambia turned the girl's body over to check for breathing, but found it difficult to do while treading water. She was no lifeguard. In human form, her swimming skills were mediocre at best. When she looked around, she noticed there was no beach on this bank, only high rocks, ones she didn't think she'd be able to latch onto from the water and pull them both up.

Cursing herself for never bothering to learn the form of an aquatic mammal with hands (Something like an otter would be great right about now), she rolled onto her back. Alexa still tucked under her arm, she concentrated on shifting her legs into a fin. Aquatic animals had never been her strongest, simply because she seldom had the chance to practice using them. However, she couldn't manage to make the partial shift work.

Maybe she was tired, or maybe it was the adrenaline. Hell most likely, it was the toll the hard drop into the water took on her legs, but she tried again to turn her feet, this time, into that of a pinniped's. The familiar tingle of her shift, gave her hope; she lifted one foot out of the water, rejoicing to see sea lion feet looking back at her. They weren't a tail fin, but webbed feet would help a little.

Finally, after what felt like ages, she reached the bank. On the shore, Cambia tried to remember her CPR training. High school felt like forever ago, and she realized she was missing some steps. Two breaths, ten compressions? Growing frustrated, she did what she could remember for several minutes, hoping that something was better than nothing. During chest compressions, she let out a howl to call for Derek, and ultimately Titan. What? The dog was attuned to her animal calls.

She resumed her attempts to resuscitate Alexa, and by the time Derek arrived, she was still trying. He took over for her. "Call Stiles. Tell him to get in touch with his dad."

Only when he moved Cambia out of the way, did she even notice the girl's appearance: Lips blue, gashes on the head and chest. Blonde hair was matted with muck and blood. She felt her head begin to spin; her hands started to shake. When she looked down at her trembling fingers, all she saw was blood. Her breath came in shallow and ragged, but she couldn't look away from the red on her hands.

"Call Stiles, Cam." Derek looked over his shoulder at her, only to be met with a wild stare, eyes filled with panic. "Cam?" She scrambled away, turning her back to him. Her whole body seemed to vibrate, and it was at that point he finally got a good look at her back, which had two tattoos adorning her shoulder blades. He'd never seen them before. The one on her left side, resembled a family crest and the other a simple diamond. He knew he shouldn't have been distracted, but he couldn't help himself. It was just a lot of bare skin (Not that he'd stopped his chest compressions any. He could multitask).

Somehow, he managed to fish his phone from his pocket and dial Stiles' number. With the phone on speaker, he waited for his friend to answer.

"Hello."

"We found her. At the lake, we're on the beach. Call your dad and get an ambulance right away! Cam, pulled her from the lake."

About twenty feet away from him, Cambia still sat, lost in her head...

The inside of the den was more or less destroyed, with bodies littered here and there. Blood— everywhere. It was one thing to attack another pack for territory, but it was something
else entirely to do this. Blood, so much blood. Her pulse raced; her heart felt like it was going to burst from her chest with all the adrenaline and panic coursing through her veins. She fought to keep her stomach from emptying itself on the living room floor.

Despite exhaustion and injuries of her own, she tore through the house, searching every room up and down for the one person she wanted to find, needed to find above all others. All around her, the sounds of desperation and grieving sucked the air from her lungs. The wailing cut through her soul like a knife. With each empty room, she found her hope waning. They're dead. All.

In her haze, she tripped over one of her fallen packmates. Shaking as she stood, she found herself covered in the man's blood. All her attempts to keep her lunch failed at that point, as she wretched onto the floor.

No matter how hard she tried, she couldn't catch her breath, and despite that, she needed to find her. A scream echoed throughout the house. "My son! Charlie! God no. My boy." The broken sobs told her all she needed to know; that's where she'd find her.

Two steps into the master bathroom, Cambia's legs went out from under her. Underneath Charlie's lifeless body, a tiny hand covered in blood lie still. Blood stained blonde hair peeked out from under his arms...

Cambia clawed at her scalp, rocking back and forth on the ground. "No, no, no no."

The sound of approaching emergency vehicles caught Derek's attention just as Stiles made it to the beach. "Oh my god. Is she-" Derek gave him a glare; the look shut him up immediately.

"Check on Cam will you? I think she's in shock."

Stiles rushed over to her and crouched in front of her. "Are you okay?" Instead of answering him with any hint of coherence, all she did was mutter about blood, though he did make out the words, "She looks like--they look alike, and 'Bianca.'

Titan lay his head in her lap. This attention, and perhaps the comforting smell of her beloved pet brought her around a little, especially after he gave her a little whine. "Io so; mi manca anche lei."

Sheriff Stilinski approached the group as EMT's worked on Alexa, ultimately calling her dead on arrival. "Which one of you found her?" Cambia raised her hand.

"I pulled her from the water. She was quite a ways out." Her eyes stared, hollow, at an undetermined point on the ground. "She fell off the rocks. Her shoe is at the top and another caught on something on the way down. I...didn't touch anything."

He gave her the once over and signaled for a blanket and paramedic.

"Aw, you gave her a shock blanket." Stiles tried to make light of the situation. "Get it? It's from Sherlock."

His father glared at him. "Not the time son."

"I want to go home." She pulled her dog into her lap and tuned out the world. Her head and her heart both ached.

Derek dropped her off at home, and she spent the next two days curled around a cherished photo as a
familiar black cat. Sometimes the world was just too cruel for a human to face.

Chapter End Notes

Trigger avoidance summary: The pack looks for a missing child who wanders away from her home. Unfortunately, the search ends in tragedy as Cambia finds the girl's body in the lake. This sends her into a flashback surrounding the deaths of her old pack, specifically a child who, in Cambia's mind looked a bit like the missing girl. It is mentioned in the chapter that she has two tattoos on her back. One is a family crest that is mentioned again in later chapters.

Translation for Italian used in this chapter:
Io so; Mi manca anche lei.- I know; I miss her too.
Pack Your Bags; It's a Getaway

Chapter Notes

I'm going on vacation. So for the like 25 of you who are actually invested in this story (Thanks by the way), I have a treat in the form of several chapters, because I will not be able to update for two weeks or so.

If you happen to find any bizarre typos like random + signs and such, my three year old thought it was a good idea to "play" with the computer when I stepped away from the computer (Seriously, he's like a little ninja of chaos). I think I found them all, but let me know if you find others.

Stiles stared out the window, his knee bouncing off the floor of the living room as he waited for his ride. Despite his protests to the contrary, his dad declared the Jeep not suitable for long trips. He could feel his stomach churn, not because he didn't want to go this weekend. The pack decided to celebrate the beginning of their senior year with a getaway, but then Scott said something about how the weekend coincided with Stiles' eighteenth birthday, and well, they piggybacked a birthday celebration with it. Once Lydia got her metaphorical claws into the planning, she decided that the details of said weekend needed to remain a surprise to him. The unknown had his nerves in knots. Everyone else knew details of the weekend. Why wouldn't any of them tell him?

"Nervous son?"

"A little. No one will tell me where we going. Thanks for letting me go by the way."

His father sighed. "I didn't want to. I mean you haven't been eighteen for more than a week, but you know persuasive people."

"Did Derek come over and scowl until you let me go, or was it Scott begging? I bet it was Scott. Those puppy eyes are hard to say no to. Believe me, I've tried. I bet he knocked on yours and Melissa's bedroom door, pleading his case at like six in the morning."

John laughed. "Both of them actually, but it took Cambia stopping by the station on Tuesday. She told me she would personally keep you out of trouble and make sure you behaved like a responsible adult. If something happened, she said she'd take full responsibility."

"She said that?" Stiles smiled. He realized after spending more time with her after that first pack night, his crush had been fleeting. To clarify, he felt as many romantic feelings towards her as he did towards Scott, which was to say none. However, he had a lot of fun with her. They liked superheroes, science fiction, and useless bits of knowledge. She filled that gap in his life that Scott's constant time with Allison had left. He didn't feel as lonely anymore, even if he still had no significant other.

Those few weeks she'd spent living at their house while she looked for a place had made an impact on the family. Since the first time she'd been over for dinner, his father and Melissa seemed to adopt her as part of their family, though his dad wouldn't admit it. They all even had dinner together at least three times a week. "Oh so you trust her enough to let me go, but not the other two. I thought you
trusted Scott."

"About supernatural type of cases, not holding you to acceptable behavior. Look kid you're eighteen now, I can't get you out of trouble anymore."

"I know. Just say it, Dad."

He furrowed his brow. "Say what?"

"That you and Mel practically consider her a Stilinski now. You know, the daughter you didn't know you always needed." He patted his dad on the back.

"Something like that. It has to be tough for her to have absolutely no family. Can you imagine how Isaac would have handled holidays if he didn't have Derek?" Stiles nodded in assent. "Think of it as a love thy neighbor sort of thing."

"But Dad, she's not our neighbor."

John rolled his eyes. "Semantics, Stiles. Anyway, don't think I can't see the way you act around her."

"Like what?" He held up his hands in surrender. "I swear I am not interested in her like that."

"I know, but you have grown closer to her in six months than I thought possible. It's like the way you and Scott used to be, before Allison, before the bite. So, you also think she's part of the family."

"Well yeah, but-"

Just when Stiles felt the conversation growing awkward, the front door opened. "Hi Stiles. Hi John."

"Morning Cam."

She walked into the living room carrying two wrapped presents and yawned. "Ready to go kiddo?" She yawned again.

"Yeah. Do you want some coffee? I know you don't really like it." He could see the wheels turning while she considered his offer. "I think I might actually have a can or two of Red Bull if you'd prefer that."

She nodded. "A Red Bull with some Sprite over ice would be great if you have a travel cup."

He jumped up from the couch and went to the kitchen.

"You work last night?" John asked, sounding ever the concerned parent.

"Yeah. There were a bunch of college kids at the bar, and they were messy little bastards. We were cleaning until well after three."

"No Sprite, but I mixed it with OJ. I tried it; it's actually pretty good." He handed her the drink. "Are we waiting on anyone else?"

" Nope. Everyone else left already. Apparently, no one had space for you. Talk about rude. Derek could have easily taken the SUV, but he said, and I quote 'I don't think I could take Stiles and Peter
bickering inside a small space for three hours without killing one of them.' I'm pretty sure you would be the one to survive the car trip though. Besides, I needed a few more hours of sleep, and now I have a road trip buddy. It's just you and me on the way down. Derek already knows we'll be there a couple hours after everyone else and will leave the key to our room at the front desk." She noticed him eyeing the presents on her lap. "Oh yeah. These are for you. I wanted to give them to you on your actual birthday, but the second one didn't arrive until two days ago."

"Can I?"

"Go ahead open them. Start with the bigger one." She watched him excitedly tear away the paper. He held up the black shirt. "Cool. Look, Dad." Proudly, he showed the shirt to his dad.

"I don't..."

"We've been over this. This is The Joker, and that's Harley Quinn." He pointed to the two figures. The Joker held Harley Quinn in what appeared to be a dance hold. "This is great. Thanks Cam." His fingers went to work on the next present as he wondered what else she'd given him. When he pulled the paper back and opened the box, he stared in shock. "This...this...Cam, this is a limited edition hardcover. I've been trying to find a copy that I could afford." He ran his fingers over back cover.

"Turn it over."

Carefully, he followed her instruction. "Holy shit! It's signed." Before he could stop himself, he lunged across the table, wrapping her in a hug. "Thank you! I love it!" Then, he pulled back. "Wait, this is... you didn't need to spend this much on me. This had to cost a ton, and wait, you remembered it was my favorite book. I told you once."

"Yeah, I spent too much on it, but eighteen is a big birthday, and I knew you'd appreciate something like this. Don't act so surprised I remembered. I have a great memory. Helps with my dyslexia."

"I don't know what to say."

"Don't say anything. Look, I inherited way more money than I know what to do with, and I have no one to spend my money on besides myself. Six months, and it feels like I've known you my whole life. You've become my baby brother, and this is the type of gift you buy family. Should we get going? You can read that on the way down."

"Oh no. This beauty is staying here where it's safe." He ran upstairs.

John turned to her. "That was really nice thing you did. He's right though. The t-shirt was more than enough."

"I know. Believe me, I intended to just give him the shirt. But then I remembered his favorite book was a graphic novel, and I am not that versed in them. So I thought I'd read it. Well, I borrowed his copy, and let's be honest, it looks a lot worse for wear. I thought a more durable copy would be a good present. I couldn't find one. After that, it became an obsession almost to get him one. Long story short, I may have gone overboard. I'm not all that sure I care I did."

John looked at her like her line of reasoning was one he'd heard many times before. "You sure you don't have A.D.D.?"
"Nope, when I get an idea in my head, I'm just very focused. I believe tenacious has been used more than once."

"You did all that because my book was falling apart?" He looked like he was about to cry.

"Yep." She looked down at her lap, moving her hand to her neck.

"You're doing it again."

"I am?"

"Yeah, your necklace isn't there, but you keep rubbing the area as if it were."

"Why would someone steal that from my belongings? It wasn't particularly fancy. I don't even believe it's lucky. It was just a Christmas present from my parents, and a week later they were both dead. It just reminded me of home."

Seeking to cut the tension, John interrupted their banter. "You kids should get going if you want to have time to explore today."

Stiles hugged his father and grabbed his suitcase. "See you on Sunday."

"Have fun and be safe. I mean it. I don't want to hear how you knocked up some girl because-"

"No, Dad, just no." The scowl he cast in his father's direction could have burned holes in metal.

She grabbed Stiles by the shoulders and herded him towards the door. "I'll make sure he behaves."

He grabbed her phone, browsing for music. "I only know like three of these bands."

She snatched it back from him. "My car, my rules. Driver picks the music, shotgun does what?"

"Shuts his cakehole. Yeah, I got it." He chuckled. "How much TV do you watch?"

"See, usually when I get home from work, I need an hour or two to wind down. Not much to do at that hour except watch TV. At three in the morning the only thing on is infomercials. Do you know what is on though? Netflix. Though that show makes me feel a bit vilified. I don't steal people's skins, nor do I have the urge to kill people."

"This is so true." He drummed nervously on the armrest.

"Something on your mind?"

"No, well yes actually. See, Danny and Jackson convinced Derek that we should go to a nightclub tonight. Apparently, Danny hooked up Scott, Jackson, and Isaac with outstanding fake ID's. You know since they're the only ones under eighteen still. Don't get me wrong. I have fun dancing, but it's usually after I have a drink or two in me. I'm just not good with complete strangers. You've heard me talk to people I actually know when I'm nervous. It's not like I care what people think about me, but this dry spell is killing me. That spur of the moment blowjob in the bathroom of Ravenous was terrible. I had to finish myself off. It's funny, I did okay for the first seventeen years of my life, but now that I know what I'm missing, it's brutal. I actually thought I gave myself carpal tunnel last week. Anyway, I think it's everyone's mission to find me a hookup, with the way they've been acting
around me. I don't really want Jackson's help doing anything."

"I wouldn't either. Men like Abercrombie just piss me off."

He sighed. "I don't need help to find me a girlfriend or a boyfriend. Actually maybe-"

"I have no intention of doing that. I am going to help you get laid this weekend."

"Um..."

"Relax Stiles, I'm not offering that. Do you trust me?"

"Right now? Not really."

She smirked. "Fantastic. I think everyone is doing their own thing this afternoon. So you and I, well you'll just have to wait and see. I promise, it will be worth your while. You will be so happy you trusted me." She laughed and pulled away from his house, making sure to pick the music that would annoy him most. She loved the voice command app on her phone....so much.

*   *   *   *   *

Stiles whistled as he shuffled into the lobby of the Fairmont San Francisco. After Cambia handed her keys to the valet, they headed to the front desk where the concierge greeted her.  

"May I help you?"

"I think, or at least I hope so. The rest of our party should have checked in now, and I was told they'd leave our keys."

"Who is the reservation under?"

"Last name is Hale, first initial D. The keys should be held for the name Cambia Di Pellicce." She made sure to spell it.

The concierge handed her the keys. "Here you are. Your room is in the tower. If you take those elevators up to the eighteenth floor and turn right you should find it."

"Thanks." She grabbed the handled to her rolling suitcase.

"So we're roommates? That might be weird for you tonight if your skills as a wingwoman are as good as you claim they are."

"I may not be the smartest person in the pack, but I do know how to read people. By the end of the night, you will be thanking me. You will end up rolling in these sheets with someone other than your right hand."

He glanced sidelong at her. "So won't that be awkward for you? Or are you exceptionally good at ignoring it?"

She let out a cackle. "I just had to tell your dad that we were rooming together. You get the room to yourself birthday boy. I have no intention of ending up back in this room tonight or tomorrow night."
No sooner had she pressed the button to the elevator than the doors opened and the pack walked out.

"Hey guys! You made it." Scott hugged Stiles.

"But not before almost losing my mind, because the first two hours of the trip consisted of listening to screaming death metal only to be eclipsed by Cam singing along to Rage Against the Machine for the last hour."

"That was not death metal."

"Then what was that?"

"Alt-metal. Get your genres straight if you're going to make fun of me." She looked over to see him giving her a strange look. "What? I can't help it. I have a major girl boner for their lead singer."

The group surged forward as Derek pushed the last of them out of the elevator just as the alarm sounded. He looked utterly flustered when he ran into Cambia. "Um...Cam um...hi."

She smiled warmly. "Good morning, Derek." She glanced at her phone. "Or good afternoon. Fuck I'm tired." He gave her an expression, that to the rest of the pack came across as disinterested, but Cambia recognized the gleam in his eyes. He was as happy to see her as she was him.

"So," he rubbed the back of his neck, "the pack wanted to split off into smaller groups for the afternoon. I'm being forced to hang out with my sister and Peter for the day, which... I am not all that thrilled about. spending time with Cora is no problem; I enjoy that, but ugh Peter." He leaned in close. "Shoot me please, Cam."

"And miss out on the stories later. Not a chance. Besides," she gave his cheek a playful pat, "why would I want to ruin this face?"

"I'd much rather spend time with y-" *Danger! Warning! Impending crisis.* Blushing, he changed the subject. "So um, you could tag along with Danny and Isaac if you wanted. I'm sure they wouldn't mind. The others are having a double date." He rolled his eyes. "Or you both could enjoy the afternoon. None of you guys should have a problem with any of the were in the city. I contacted all the packs in town and let them know about our vacation. Just tell them you're part of the Hale pack. Yes, Scott I know. It's technically the Beacon Hills Pack, but my name is shorter and carries more weight. I've been assured that so long as none of you attack them, there will be no trouble."

Cambia yanked Stiles towards the elevator. "Great. Do you just want to hang out with me, Stiles? I'll buy lunch."

"Sure."

"Anyway, we're all going to meet at the restaurant at 6:30. I sent the address of the restaurant to both your phones."

"See you then." She gave Derek the once over. "You own a color other than black or red? Cobalt is a color I never thought I'd see you wear. Looks good on you." Cambia and Stiles entered the elevator.

He felt his face flame. "Um... Be safe guys." He pulled out his phone as he walked away from her as quickly as possible, mentally face-palming in the process.
To Cam:

12:42

Sorry you have 2 room with Stiles. I tried 2 pair everyone up so it didn't look like I was playing favorites. The two couples actually wanted to share a suite.

To: Cam

12:42

Except Peter...fucking Peter threw a fit and got his own room. More often than not, I want to strangle him

Outside the hotel, he received a reply to his message.

From: Cam

12:47

Relaks hansum. I dont plan on staing n my room much newa. ;-) 

Now that he'd become used to her atrocious spelling, or phonetic as she called it, it didn't take him forever to understand her messages. He almost fell over as he read the message. If she was planning on a random hook-up tonight, well he would have to get his head out of his ass and make a move. It wasn't like he hadn't been trying to do that for months already. Smooth, real smooth.

* * * * *

Cambia rifled through Stiles' suitcase.

"What are you doing? I don't... that's my underwear!" He snatched the boxers back from her.

Seemingly undeterred, she continued searching. "If it bothers you so much, I'll show you my underwear too. Feel free to dig through my suitcase too." She pulled out a can of AXE body spray. "Really? You've got to be kidding me. No wonder you're in a sexless rut. Well now, I can't have my honorary baby brother celebrating his birthday smelling like Eau de Douchebag." She tossed it into the trash. "That shit doesn't even smell good on high school freshmen."

"Hey! What are you doing?"

She scoffed. "What does it look like? Helping you get laid."

"I'm sorry what?"

"You have like nothing in here that is going to help that. I mean if you want to go about it on your own-"

"I do okay on my own."
She deadpanned. "Red jeans really?"

"Hey I like those pants."

"And they're skinny jeans. No, just no. When we get back, you are donating all of your skinny jeans. In fact..." She looked at the tag and nodded. "These would fit me. I mean they'd be too short and probably too tight across the ass, bu-"

"Sure they would." Before he had a chance to turn around, she shucked off her own pants and tugged the red pair up.

"Told you so."

"I'll be damned."

Once she was back in her own clothes, she gestured to the door. "We're going shopping."

"But I don't have the money, and you are not spending anymore money on me, and I like who I am."

"Oh, I love who you are too, but call it an investment in your social life and future. You are dressing all sorts of wrong for your body type. You look like you raided your grandpa's plaid collection. You dress like...a kid, which you aren't anymore."

He groaned. "Clothes don't make the man, Cambia."

"No, but the right clothes can make and already amazing guy a lot more confident. Take it from someone who has spent a lot of time behind a bar people watching. Women love confident men. Seems to hold true for gay men as well. Confidence is key." She gave his shoulders a small shake. "For all you know, underneath all your ridiculous layers of clothes, is the hottest guy ever." She patted him on the shoulder and winked. "Stiles, it's time to let him out and play. Show the world how much of a bad-ass mother, Joãozinho Stilinski can be. Wow, those two names really don't go with each other."

"No, they don't. Honestly, calling me Janek would have been the same name, but Polish. All right, Cam, I leave my very terrified person in your charge for the afternoon."

She patted his cheek. "Don't be worried. No one is going to know what hit them. You'll probably make Jackson jealous." She clasped her hands under her chin and batted her eyes. "And doesn't that just sound like fun?"

He opened the door. "Lead the way." He was nervous, more than a little worried she'd turn him into a preppy guy, which was in no way, shape, or form his style. Whatever, she was right. He was eighteen now. He could man up to the challenge.
"I don't accessorize!"

Stiles hated malls, hated shopping in general for that matter. Yet, here he was following Cambia around Westfield Shopping Centre like a lost puppy. *Ha, lost puppy. It's funny because-- She's not really paying attention. Maybe I can make a break for it.* He waited for a distraction and turned to leave.

She grabbed his hand. "Oh no you don't." She pulled him into Fossil. "First you need some accessories."

"I'm not a girl. Just because I'm also into the D doesn't mean I accessorize." He waved his hands at her. "Fuck, I just gave you jazz hands, or spirit fingers. No, I'm pretty sure those were jazz hands."

"Stiles! Focus!" She pointed to a dark grey stainless steel watch in the case. "What do you think of this one? And if you ask for a digital watch, I think I may just cry."

"Why would I wear a watch? I have my phone."

Groaning, she cast her eyes to the ceiling. "Watches are sexy. Real men wear them. Do you like it?"

He shrugged. "Yeah, I guess so."

"Can we see that one?" The clerk helped Stiles try on the watch. At the back of the store, a jacket caught her attention. "What size jacket do you wear?"

"Medium or large if it's slim in the shoulders. Why?"

She patted him on the shoulder. "Be right back." The dark brown leather jacket had a distressed look and a rocker feel to it. Instead of zippers, it had snap pockets. Perfect. "So the watch?" He held it up for her to see. "Nice. Try this on." She smacked his hand as he tried to look at the price tag. "No."

He looked at himself in the mirror, choosing the larger size, afraid he'd rip the armscye seams of the medium the first time he moved. "It's a pretty sweet jacket. Fits well, and it feels like it will be warm too."

"Great. We'll take both of these, and that brown leather bracelet, the one with the stitching." She handed him her credit card. "Don't let him see the total."

"Cam, you really don't have to do this."

"But I do. I can't have my brother being outshined tonight. It's about damn time someone noticed Stiles first. Let me do this, please. It makes me feel like I'm helpful. And," she drew an 'x' over her heart, "cross my heart, you do not ever need to pay me back for any of this." She dragged him over to the fragrance store. "What types of smells do you like?"

"Um... Earthy, you know woody and lavender. My mom loved lavender. I like the smell of vanilla and chocolate too." He watched the cashier pull out two fragrances.

"Smell these two." The cashier sprayed each on a card.
He carefully considered them. "I can't decide. I do like them both."

"Giver her your wrists." Cambia instructed and the cashier sprayed one on each wrist. "Okay. Now we are going to finish our shopping."

"Why? We're already here."

"And this is why high-schoolers buy Axe. Stiles, you need to try out a fragrance to see how it mixes with your body chemistry. What smells good on the bottle may not work for you. Thank you. We will be back in a little while. You showed us Fuel for Men and Homme Intense right?"

"I did."

Stile felt like his arm would be pulled out of socket as they went down a floor and into Guess. "What? No? I can't shop in here. This is not me."

"They have a nice jean style that I think will work for you. It's not as ridiculous as those skinnies you insist on wearing, but slim enough that you won't drown." She grabbed three pair of the slim jeans in black, a dark wash and a distressed wash.

He read the sizes. "How do you know my pant size? Don't say lucky guess either, 30x33 is not the first one to pop into people's heads."

"I just checked the tag on those red abominations not even an hour ago. Now, go try those on. Do not look at the prices please."

While he tried on the pants, she grabbed a v neck sweater in blue and red. Adding to her haul, she selected a couple t-shirts and two henleys as well as a charcoal colored chambray shirt. She noticed he'd come out of the fitting rooms. "What do you think?"

"These look good. I feel like they make my ass look pretty great. I feel...I'm not sure."

"You feel older?"

"Yeah..."

"That's because those skinny jeans you like make you look like you're fourteen. You're not a kid anymore, and if you dress like a man, you might get more respect. Change your clothes and hand them back over the door." She waited patiently before the pants he'd been wearing hit her in the head followed by the other two pairs.

"Sorry."

Not giving him a chance to protest, she took all the items to the register and paid before he came back out.

"What else did you buy?"

"Nothing. Onward for shoes." After twenty minutes, Stiles was in possession of two pairs of military inspired boots, black and brown, plus a myriad of additional shirts.
"Please tell me we are done buying me clothes."

"Yep. Time for lunch. I want to get a nap in before we have to leave or I will fall asleep at dinner, and I have absolutely no intentions of calling it an early night."

"On the prowl are we?"

"Nope. I have someone very specific in mind." She grinned. "I need some sleep and time to get ready."

They ducked into Chipotle for a quick lunch. "So," she began while she mixed up her burrito bowl, "scale of one to ten, how much more excited are you for tonight?"

"You mean now that you've put makeover Stiles on your to-do list?"

"I told you, it's an investment. If you don't like the other stuff I bought, I'll take it all back tomorrow. I mean what you don't wear tonight. Believe it or not, your lanky build kind of has an appeal to a certain type."

"And that is?"

"Stiles, you just need to unleash your inner rock star, the one you're hiding under layers and layers of clothing that doesn't fit you."

"How do you know what-"

"This little thing called pack training. Plus I see you and Derek at the gym on occasion. You have nice broad shoulders and arms that demand proper fitting clothes."

"We never see you though."

"Ah well that's because I'm usually sparring or have blinders on." She took a bite. "I am so glad you actually take time to enjoy your food unlike our wolfy friends."

"Tell me about it. Have you watched Scott eat?"

She took a bite, washing it down with a drink of iced tea. "I mean aside from curly fries. Watching you eat those makes me afraid for your fingers. I'm always worried you're going to bite one off."

"I have bitten a few fingers while eating fries, I admit."

"And that doesn't surprise me in the least." After they finished eating, they stopped in to pick up a bottle of Homme' Intense, and headed back to the hotel where Cambia promptly collapsed onto her bed face first. She didn't even bother to take off her shoes.

*   *   *   *   *
"Hey Sleepyhead, wake up." Stiles shook Cambia's shoulder. "It shouldn't take me very long to get ready, but I don't know how long you need."

She opened one eye and stared up at him. "What time is it?"

"4:45. I've already showered. It's all yours."

Not needing to be told twice, she hopped off the bed, grabbed her bathrobe and toiletry bag then groggily stumbled walked into the bathroom. Stiles noticed her large yawn as she shut the door. *I hope she doesn't crash at dinner.* He pulled out a package of the complementary coffee before remembering she didn't like the stuff. He grabbed the phone and called the hotel coffee shop. "Hi, quick question. Do you sell energy drinks?"

"We do."

"Excellent. Thank You." Stiles grabbed his wallet off the dresser and his room key to make a quick trip downstairs. Quick was an understatement. He was down and back in less than five minutes. Cambia was still in the shower when he returned. So he sat the drink on the counter where she would see as soon as she opened the door. Then, he turned his attention to what the hell he was going to wear.

He laid out all his new clothes on his bed. Overwhelmed by the number of possible combinations, he stared blankly at the motley of fabric. He could see eleven shirts and five pairs of pants. "So fifty-five outfits. I can do this. I dress myself everyday... in nerdy t-shirts and flannel. Who am I kidding? I can't look hot. It's not part of my vocabulary. Stiles is full of nerdy charm, not hot." He wanted to crawl under the bed and die. Still, he intended on having a good time and tugged on a pair of jeans with an indigo wash, admiring himself in the mirror. Not bad. They make me look like I don't have bird legs. Not that I ever had bird legs. He decided against the studded belt she'd bought him, and stuck with his favorite belt, the Batman one he'd received for Christmas last year. "You can't go wrong with Batman." He felt a little more like himself wearing at least little bit of geek culture.

"Nice ass, Stiles."

He paled when he turned around to find Cambia standing behind him wearing her robe and a large smirk. "Planning on wearing a shirt or should we slap some suspenders on your waistband and call it a day? Huh."

"What?"

"I didn't expect you to have chest hair. You can barely grow stubble."

He felt his cheeks flame. "Um, I don't know which shirt would go best. How about this black one?" He held up a v-neck sweater.

She wrinkled her nose. "With dark blue denim? Go with the chambray."

"The what-a-ray?" A grey button down shirt was thrust in his face.

"This is a chambray shirt. It's a type of fabric. White threads are woven in." She grabbed her hair dryer and a box out of her suitcase and plugged both into the outlet near the desk.

"What is that?"

"Hot rollers." She squeezed a hefty dollop of styling cream into her hand, and after smoothing it
through her hair, went to work drying it. A miserable twenty minutes later, her hair was dried and in rollers.

"So?" Styles spun around. "How'd I do?"

She took note of his rolled up sleeves, watch and leather bracelets, complete with his new boots. "May I?" She pointed to his tucked shirt.

"May you wh-" He was cutoff when she untucked his shirt.

"You're not in formal wear. If you wore a t-shirt, maybe a half tuck. Now how about you fix your shoes." She knelt down and, loosening the laces, sloppily tucked his pants into his boots. "When you do this, you don't want it to look like you tried. It needs to look effortless. Like the pants fell into your boots, but you don't have two fucks to give to try and fix it." She stepped back to look at him. "Much better. While I finish getting ready, fix your hair. We need to leave soon. Traffic can be messy. Plus, I want us to be a little late."

"Why?"

"Ever hear of fashionably late?" She patted his cheek and strode into the bathroom with her makeup kit and clothes.

After he styled his quiff just the way he wanted...standing up and defying gravity as always, he sat down and waited for her to finish getting ready. Girls, they always took forever it seemed. No sooner than he did so, she emerged from the bathroom.

He took in her appearance. Her tight purple dress had wide diagonal stripes of black lace, and was from what he could tell, quite short. "Wow, Cam. Going for the maneater look tonight?"

"More or less. It's about fucking time a certain pack member gets his head out of his ass and makes a move or I will."

"Better not be Uncle Creeper."

She furrowed her brows at him. "And you better be joking."

"Um, Isaac? Cause I'm pretty sure he is into someone else."

Laughing quietly, she simply shook her head. "No, Derek you idiot. Alpha or not, I am sick of waiting for his emotionally bottled up ass to make the first move. Help me out?" She pressed her necklace to her collarbone.

He tried to play his ignorance off as cool as he moved her hair away from the clasp so he could fasten it. "Oh, duh, I knew that. Yeah, I totally knew that."

When she grabbed her jacket, Stiles fought a giggle.

"What?"

"Oh nothing. I was just thinking about how much alike the two of you are. Black leather jacket?"

"Only the sleeves and yoke are leather. The rest is lace and satin."

"It's not just that. You both drive muscle cars, and you both have black hair with green eyes. It's like well...I don't know how to put it. A nice complement to each other."
"And I'm a lot darker complected." Seemingly undeterred from her mission, she slipped into her shoes, a pair of purple peep-toe heels with black soles. Purple leather laced up the heel only to be capped off with a black bow on the counter.

"Skulls? On a pair of heels? And why do you need to wear heels anyway?"

"Shut up. These are my absolute favorite pair of shoes. I am not going to have my fashion choices limited because men are intimidated by tall women." Slipping a black print wristlet around her hand, she opened the door. "You ready?"

Once he had on his jacket, he nodded.

"Don't forget your key, but I have mine if you need it. Oh and Stiles?"

"Yeah?"

She grinned, tossing a condom at him. "Should you end up successful, stay off my bed. Now that you look like a rock star, don't forget to act like one."

"Like a cocky bastard that likes groupies?"

"No, confidence with a little bit of swagger. Let's go. I'm starving." She shut the door behind her, but had a wicked idea. "You know what? I'll meet you downstairs in just a second. Go on; it's fine." Once he disappeared down the hall, she ducked back into their room where she used some of her dress tape to stick a row of condoms and a couple singles of lube to the mirror, making sure to scribble a little note in lipstick.
Feeling more confident and self-assured than he had in months, Stiles opened the door to the restaurant, holding it open for Cambia.

"Oh such a gentleman."

"Hey, my dad taught me well. He said always hold the door for your date."

She patted his cheek. "Not your date."

"I know, but he'd want me to anyway. Hold a door for a lady."

"Pretty sure I am as far from a lady as one can get without having gender dysphoria or being in possession of a penis."

As Cambia and Stiles approached the table, he noticed everyone staring. He assumed it was because of her until Danny broke the silence.

"Looking good."

Stiles looked around thinking that perhaps Danny had been addressing someone as he passed behind them. "Who me?"

"Yes you, birthday boy."

Stiles pushed his hands in his pockets apologetically. "Yeah well I don't need to know if I'm attractive to gay guys anymore. Already know the answer to that." He flashed him a cheeky grin.

"Damn, don't you clean up well."

"Um, thanks Lydia."

"Didn't know you had it in you Stilinski."

"I didn't, Jackson, Cam dragged me shopping with her. Apparently, she is a menswear guru or something. Where are the other three?" He asked, drawing attention to the fact that Derek, Cora, and Peter still had not arrived.

Isaac shrugged. "Not sure. I texted Derek, but they're probably stuck in traffic."

Cambia passed behind Stiles. "Tell me about it. Took us forever to get here." With I.D. ready, she stopped their server as he returned. "Excuse me what do you have for Scotch?"

"Johnnie Walker, Dewar's, J&B. Those are the most popular ones."

She groaned. "Those are all blends. How about for single malts?"
He thought for a second. "The only one that comes to mind is Glenlivet. I can go check."

"No, that's okay. I'll take Glenlivet, neat. And can you also bring a glass of Malbec if you have one?"

"I'll have a coke." Stiles added.

She sat down in the one of the empty seats in the middle of the table. It seemed that everyone chose to ignore the seating "rules" tonight. Stiles took the seat kitty corner from her. "Anyone order appetizers yet?"

"No, we're waiting for everyone."

*Scott, always so noble.* She sighed as her stomach grumbled. From her purse, she pulled a lollipop.

"Really Cam, a sucker? We're at a restaurant." Isaac sassed between sips of water.

"What? I'm hungry. And while we're all sitting here without appetizers, waiting for She Wolf, Hot Stuff, and Uncle Creeper, I can feel my blood sugar tanking." She popped the candy into her mouth. "When that happens I get cranky. You think I have a hair trigger now...just wait."

He quirked an eyebrow at her. "Hot Stuff?"

"Would you prefer I call him, Sex on Legs, because it's far more accurate." She snickered as the teen choked on his drink. "Didn't think so." She picked up her menu so she could be ready to order as soon as possible, but frowned when she saw the lack of pictures and fancy font. *I knew I should have eaten more at lunch.*

"Sorry, we're late. Someone practically bought the whole store." Cora pointed her thumb in her brother's direction.

"And what store would that be, Henleys R Us?" Stiles giggled.

Derek gave him a sarcastic scowl.

"No, we just spent the better part of the last three hours at Ghirardelli. Before that we had been in search of some place called Tartine so we could find coconut macaroons. Don't even ask me why." She held up her hands in surrender, begging not to be asked further about it. Then, she plopped, down in the empty chair near the end of the table, where Peter sat down next to her. "I swear my brother is the proverbial kid in a candy store we always hear about. If I never see a bar of chocolate again, it will be too soon."

"So wait, you spent three hours in a candy store? And you wondered how I knew about your sweet tooth. Please tell me you are immune to fang decay like you are diabetes."

Derek smiled when he realized the only remaining seat was next to Stiles and he'd be sitting directly across from Cambia, who at the moment had her nose buried in the menu. He tried not to stare as she ran the lollipop in her mouth back and forth over her bottom lip, and he definitely tried to keep his mind out of the gutter. Unfortunately, his wolf wanted had other ideas. The connections in his brain began to fray at the image it formed in his head. *That's it. No more keeping my distance.* "So," His voice squeaked. *What are you, going through puberty again, "anything look good, Cam?"*
The familiar voice snapped her from her reverie. When she looked up, and took in his appearance, she promptly dropped her candy. "Fuck me." And those were the only words she could manage. If Stiles had cleaned up well, then Derek was dressed to kill, although not literally, given that he actually could kill. Or at the very least, he looked as though he wanted to be the best dressed man in the pack for the evening. Frankly, she didn't think he had it in him. Her cheeks flamed as she raked her eyes up and down his body. His usual leather jacket and standard slim fitting black denim aside, he wore a dark purple dress shirt and a black suit vest with no tie. It almost looked too formal, but like Stiles, he'd wisely rolled up his sleeves to the elbow. She didn't remember telling him she had a major weakness for strong forearms. She couldn't come up with any more words other than: "Nice belt." She drew attention to his Wolverine belt buckle.

"Thanks."He smiled at her. "Cora got it for me for my birthday last year. I thought it was an awesome present at the time, but now I am seriously rethinking the yellow belt buckle with the purple shirt. It's a little Tim Burton's Batman."

"Did you two call each other to plan your outfits?" Jackson laughed.

"What?"

"Both of you are wearing black and purple. Lydia sometimes makes us match. I hate it. Now you both look more alike than you usually do."

Cambia leaned forward and looked down the table at him, just as her drink arrived. She picked up a straw and blew the wrapper at him. "Really?"

Lydia didn't even look up from her menu. "Well you're both about six feet tall with black hair and green eyes. I mean his hair is more on the cool shade of black, and yours much warmer, but it's still black. While he weighs like fifty pounds more than you, you are both seriously muscular. You are quite a bit darker than he is, but he is far more hirsute, luckily for you. You share a penchant for leather, and I actually think you might wear the same size pants."

"I doubt that Lydia. I learned today that she has freakishly long legs and has to buy pants online. No offense Derek, but your legs are not that long." Stiles, never the one to miss a beat slurped on his soda.

Trying not to be obvious, she pushed the wine glass next to her drink across the table towards Derek.

"What's this?"

"It's for you. Malbec right?"

"When did I tell you I liked... oh yeah. Thanks."

She raised her old-fashioned glass. "Cheers."

"What are we toasting?"

"To a fun night?"

"Sounds good. Oh, I... um got you something too." Reaching into his jacket pocket, he pulled a small wax paper bag.
She eyed him warily, but opened the sack nonetheless and began to giggle as soon as she saw the contents. "So you dragged your sister and uncle to a bakery because you wanted to get me coconut macaroons?" Her lips spread into a soft smile.

He blushed. "Yeah. I have a ton more in my room. I practically bought you the whole store." Way to go, Derek. Way to sound creepy. "I mean...fuck." He covered his face with his hands. "I mean I bought a whole dozen."

"That's so sweet. Thank you. Can you help me with something?" She glanced down at her menu and back at him again a few times. Luckily, he seemed to get the hint.

"What are you hungry for?"

She blushed. "I want poultry."

He quickly read. "Well there is a quail dish with sage and Marsala, prosciutto, spinach and cheese."

"That sounds good. Thanks."

"No problem." He stared across the table at her, because save for the semi-monthly pack nights, their get-to-know you text messages and occasional dinner, he did not know nearly as much about her as he would like. In fact, he found he just wanted to know her, know everything about her. Not just her favorite color (Purple), what crowd did she run with in high school (Jocks), and favorite food (the aforementioned macaroons). He wanted to know the deep stuff, stuff no one else got to know, her hopes and dreams, her fears, old wounds, how her lips felt against his, and the way she looked in the morning when she first woke up. He was fucked; he knew was. He just didn't care.

As it was, he didn't when it happened, but sometime in the last six months, he'd fallen in love with her. Having spent so long believing he didn't deserve happiness or nice things, he couldn't bring himself to act on his feelings. Stiles, however, must have noticed he'd been off lately and messaged him last night...

...From: Stiles
21:45
You okay? You seem kinda down. Is it about building a pack again?

To: Stiles
21:52
No, not okay, but no, it's not about the pack. I've fallen for Cam...hard, but my mind keeps thinking about Paige...and Kate, and Jennifer

From: Stiles
21:54
Look, just because you made bad choices, it doesn't mean you're a bad person. Okay?
People make mistakes.

From: Stiles
21:55
Cam is a good person, and if she makes you happy, go for it. You've had enough bad things
...Whatever it was about those words, what he wanted finally clicked in his mind.

So lost in his own head, he wasn't actually sure what he ended up ordering for dinner when the server returned. Surprised he'd never asked about her music preferences before (Other than Stiles' questions he abandoned after two pack meetings, because no one seemed to enjoy them besides him and Cambia, and those inklings he got when she hissed at his music choices as Kitty Cambia), he smiled. "What's your favorite band?"

"Tool. You?"

"The White Stripes. Why is Tool your favorite? I would have figured that either Deftones or Pantera would be since they made your favorite albums."

"I mean they're up there. Tool edges Deftones only slightly, and Pantera would be number five I think behind Hurt and System of a Down. I love the aggression of Pantera, and the dreaminess of Deftones' music, but those are just my favorite albums. Honestly? Tool has an amazing bassist, and their frontman has a killer set of pipes, but Justin Chancellor was a big inspiration to me when I switched from guitar to bass. Well, him, John Paul Jones, John Myung, Geddy Lee, and Les Claypool, but let's be honest, Primus' music can get a little weird. God, I could talk about bassists forever if you let me."

He rose one eyebrow. "Primus, like the guys who wrote the South Park theme song?"

"The very same. Why do you like The White Stripes?"

A small chuckle escaped his throat.

"What?"

He scratched his eyebrow. "You're going to think I'm copying you, but I like them because Jack White is a sick guitarist, and I am saying that as someone without a shred of musical talent. I love that they are still rock but also draw inspiration from other sources like blues, bluegrass, even punk."

"What is your favorite song, Derek?"

He scratched the back of his neck.

"Oh god, it's something embarrassingly awful like "Hit Me Baby One More Time', that will make me reconsider my attraction to you isn't it?"

He almost choked on his wine. "You are... attracted to me?"

"Wow! I thought it was obvious, but given you are the second person to be surprised at that... Well fine, I will try to guess."
"Try. No one ever guesses it."

She leaned forward and beckoned him closer. "I'm not most people. Remember, I'm good with mundane facts like albums, year released, singles, and such."

Sitting next to Derek, Stiles couldn't stop his eye roll from happening. When Cambia said earlier that she had no intentions of sleeping alone, he didn't think he'd actually have to watch her eye-fuck his best friend from across the table. He chose that moment to immerse himself in the conversation to his right. He'd never found Cora all that interesting before, but damn if he didn't want to right now.

"No, I suppose you're not, Cam. I'm glad you're not most people. Most people annoy me. They tend to talk too much."

She laughed. "Oh, I definitely talk."

"But I like listening to you. I don't really understand why, but I do. I still don't think you'll guess it."

She raised her eyebrows. "Oh really? Well, Mr. Alpha, I bet I will guess yours in fewer questions than it takes for you to guess mine."

"Well of course you will. I know like nothing about metal."

"Well how good for you that it isn't metal."

"What's the wager?"

"If I win, we stop dancing around. If you win, we do the same. Let's quit kidding ourselves, you and me," she gestured between them, "there's something here, something big. I sat back and let you do your Alpha thing, but fuck it, if you were worried I didn't feel the same, don't be. Because, I do. So do we have a deal?"

His heart pounded in his chest. Then the corner of his mouth drew up. "You're on."

"Is it by your favorite band?"

"No."

"Well there goes 'Ball and Biscuit', which is their best song in my opinion anyway. Seven minutes of crunchy bluesy, ear-gasmic heaven."

That's it, no denying it anymore. This was the woman of his dreams.

"Is it a rock song?"

"Yes."

"Hard rock?"

"A little I guess."

"Radio single?"
"Yes."

"Debut Album?"

"Yes." He felt pretty certain she had no chance at guessing. So, he dug in to his newly arrived food.

"Most popular single off that album?"

"No."

"American band?"

"Yes." He swallowed. How many questions was that now? Seven? No eight.

"Oh thank the universe. I worried for a minute there you were a Nickelback fan. That would be a deal breaker definitely, because I can't in good faith have a relationship or even a casual fuck with a Nickelback fan. Did you like the song when it first came out?"

"No. I discovered the band a couple years later when I was sixteen, and the song suddenly felt so personal."

Cambia did the math. _Eight years ago was 2006...so 2004._ She ran through her knowledge of popular hard(ish) rock released in 2004. She had an inkling what band it was, but for a song to be personal in 2006, it probably had something to do with how guilty he felt after the fire. Then it hit her. "Is it the lyrics or the title that are personal?"

"Um...both actually." When she smirked, he figured she probably thought she had it. "You think you know, don't you?"

"I'm feeling 95% sure."

"Sure you do."

""Burning Bright.""

He paused mid bite. "Really in ten questions? How?"

"Debut album, hard rock, not the most popular single, released a couple years before you discovered the band at sixteen which would be 2006? Personal lyrics and title? Obvious choice, Derek."

"Not fair. You probably like some obscure song, I've never heard of."

"Doubt that."

"So you said not metal?"

"Just rock."

"Your favorite bands?"

"Um...no."
"Did you like the song when it came out?"

"Yes; I liked it when I heard it on the album, which came out in 2008, because the lyrics felt personal to me and gave me strength to leave."

Derek continued guessing until after twenty-three questions, he practically whined. "Have I heard this song?"

"Yes, you've probably heard it. In fact, given your taste in music, I'm almost positive you've heard it."

"I really don't know."

"I'll give you a hint. Jack White side project."

He thought for a minute, sure that Cambia could see the gears in his head turning. "The Raconteurs"

"Very good."

"Um... 'Steady As She Goes'?"

"Nope. Another hint: Last track on their second album."

"Really? 'Carolina Drama'?"

"Yes.

"Well, you win. Why do the lyrics speak to you?"

"Billy did what I wish I could have done to my ex. Well, maybe not with a milk bottle, but I can't tell you how many times I wish I had been strong enough at the time to kill the bastard. Would have saved me quite the hospital bill." She sipped her whiskey. "When I heard that song, I knew I was in trouble, and I had to get out."

"The Sheriff said something about restraining order?"

"You have your ghosts. I have mine." She finished up her meal.

"Last question? Well two questions."

"Sure."

"First one, when am I going to hear you play for me?"

"Swing by my place next week, and I will introduce you to Viola. She's a sassy lady with bite."

"You named your bass Viola?"

"Yeah, it's purple. Why not?"

"Fair enough. Tell me something embarrassing."
She stuck the tip of her tongue out from between her teeth, in a teasing smile, the kind that wrinkled her nose and formed little creases at the corners of her eyes. "That's not a question, Derek."

"Oh come on."

"Fine. I have a ridiculous love of Italian language pop music."

He ordered a second glass of wine. "I was being serious."

"So was I. Laura Pausini, Tiziano Ferro, Elisa, Alessandra Amoroso. I also like their rock bands too. Verdena, Lacuna Coil, although they mostly sing in English."

"That's not really embarrassing, Cam. Your parents are dead, and you're trying to hold on to your culture, even if you don't like espresso."

Her face flushed. "Thanks. Your turn."

He leaned forward. "Don't tell the pack, but I like dancing."

"Aww, my little Billy Elliot."

He rolled his eyes. "Not ballet. Laura dragged me to Brazil one year for Carnivale when I was in college and forced me to learn to dance." His eyes grew wistful, and he struggled to keep them from watering. "God, that was the last fun thing we did together before she was killed. I haven't been that happy in a long time."

Her warm hand reached across the table and covered his own. "That's not embarrassing either then. It helps you feel close to someone you've lost."

The sound of singing pulled them from their reverie, and they looked up to see a few servers bringing a lighted piece of cake to Stiles, who looked almost beside himself. Too much attention, Cambia thought. As everyone started singing Happy Birthday, she made sure her version was loud enough to calm him down. She'd sung it to him on his actual birthday, when he thought he would have to spend his eighteen birthday alone because his dad and Melissa all had to work. Derek had been roped into an Alpha dinner with Scott. Pulling her best pouty face got her out of work early, and she hurried to the grocery store for last minute cupcakes. He'd been near tears when she walked in the door, his face lighting up as he saw her...

..."Sorry, I thought I would have to work all night. So these aren't homemade, but hey Stiles, it's the thought that counts right?"

He sniffled. "Yeah."

Her arms wrapped around him in a tight hug. She pulled a birthday candle from her purse. "I can't have you celebrating alone." Two shot glasses and a flask emerged from her purse. "Don't tell your Dad."

"Holy shit! That is red liquor."

"You said it's your favorite color." She lightly smacked his hand away as he tried to pick it up. "Birthday candle first." She lit the single candle and serenaded him with her rendition of "Tanti
Auguri a Te."

He paused for a moment after she stopped singing before blowing out the candle. "So what is this?"
He asked plucking the shot glass from the table. "It looks like a red hot."

She raised hers as well. "To a great year. Salute!"

"Salute!" He knocked back his shot and started coughing immediately. "Ugh and it tastes like black licorice and funky flowers. What the fuck was in that glass?"

"Sambuca."

They played several hours of *Halo* before John walked in the door at two in the morning, looking absolutely shocked when he found Stiles still awake. However, he couldn't be angry, instead relieved beyond belief that his son hadn't spent his birthday alone again...

Stiles looked up after blowing out the candle. "Gotta say, Cam, I think I may have to request to hear Happy Birthday in Italian from now on."

The rest of dinner passed without much thought until Peter rose. "Well kids, I have no interest in night clubs or spending the rest of my night with a bunch of drunk college aged kids dry humping to techno. So I will see you all in the morning for breakfast." He quickly left.

*Excellent! I get all night away from Uncle Creeper.* Stiles smirked. Tonight was shaping up nicely.

Chapter End Notes

Songs referenced in this chapter:

Shinedown's "Burning Bright" -- link to the song can be found in notes for chapter 10
The Raconteurs' "Carolina Drama"
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vXefkECoL6k

And if you are curious- Here's "Ball and a Biscuit," it's totally worth a listen for the guitar solos alone
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=urEeUMqRhA4
We're up all night to get lucky  
We're up all night to get lucky  
We're up all night to get lucky  
We're up all night to get lucky

The present has no ribbon  
Your gift keeps on giving,  
What is this I'm feeling?  
If you wanna leave I'm with it

"I thought we were never going to get in!" Scott grinned as he looked around the nightclub."

Stiles laughed, clapping him on the back. "I'm pretty sure we can thank the ladies for the fact we got in at all."

"Yeah, they do all look great tonight." Scott pointed to both Allison's and Lydia's cocktail dresses and Cora's sparkly, low-cut top.

"Oh please, we all know it was the impossibly long legs and miniskirts of Cambia and Allison that got us in the door, that and the three one hundred dollar bills they gave the doorman." Danny laughed. "Who knew being able to spot a leg man from a mile away was an actual thing?"

"Wrong boys. I'm fairly certain the guy was a breast man. So really it's a thank you, Cora." She winked. "Not my best area."

Once everyone's jackets had been checked, Derek addressed all of them. "Okay, no one starts any fights, and if the eight of you somehow manage to get served alcohol, be responsible. I am not bailing any of you out of jail. I know you can't actually get drunk without Wolf Whiskey. Point still stands. Yes, Jackson, I realize that I excluded Cambia from that lecture. She can legally buy her booze, so unless she starts a drunken bar fight, I don't foresee her causing a problem. Although, now that I think about it," He turned to Cambia, "don't start any drunken bar fights."

She held up her hands in surrender. "Not my style, Coach."

He deadpanned. "I forget that; don't finish any fights either. Leave whenever you guys want, but be careful going home. I mean that. We still have a hunter problem. Keep an eye on your drink, and no one leaves alone." He noticed Danny and Stiles both hand their hands up. "This isn't a field trip, and I'm not your teacher. You don't need to raise your hands. What?"

"So um...when you say don't leave alone...you mean-"

"Be damn sure of your hook-ups." He waved his hands as if to say go and felt a tug on his arm.

"Come on. Let's go dance." Cambia cooed at him.

"In a little bit. I need to let my dinner settle."

She rolled her eyes at him. "Liar. Go ahead; go find a perch to watch your flock from. But don't forget to have fun, and you owe me a dance later. I will warn you though; I am a terrible dancer. But," She leaned down to meet his ear, "I'm open to instruction." Before stepping back, she nuzzled at his neck, eliciting a small chuckle from him.

"What?"

"Just takes some getting used to, you being taller than me."

"Don't tell me it bothers you, because that would seriously suck. You know that right? I've had problems with that since I was fourteen."

"It doesn't, just different. I'm just used to you being a little shorter than me."

"I'm not shorter than you."

"Oh come on. I helped the sheriff look for you. I know what your license says."

"I just say 5'11", because well there is quite the stigma being a six foot tall woman, and plus I slouch a little when standing next to you."

Suddenly, he felt ashamed. "Don't do that. I wouldn't care if you were a whole head taller than me, although I like being able to look in your eyes when we're standing. It's nice."

Before she could respond, Stiles came back and pulled her away. "Come on. I need your help; I've been here five minutes already and need your promised expertise. Stiles needs to find a hook-up like right now before he dies from blue balls. And let's be honest, Stiles' dancing skills are not going to help the matter."

"Do me a favor."

"Sure anything."

"Don't ever refer to yourself in the third person again." She dragged him towards the bar, telling him to stay out of the bartender's line of sight. After what felt like an eternity, she returned with two glasses. "Don't tell the rest of the pack I did this for you. You need liquid courage."

"Cam, you told Dad you wouldn't let me be irresponsible." He hadn't realized he forgot the 'my' in front of dad in that sentence until he said it, but having done so, it felt like the most natural thing in the world, speaking to her as if they really were family. He asked once when he was about thirteen, why he didn't have any siblings and was disappointed to know that his parents just hadn't thought about it. He actually felt cheated. Who doesn't think about that sort of thing? Even parents who only have one child, barring medical troubles, stop at one, because that's all they felt they wanted.

"And this," she shook the glass, "is the only drink I'm getting you. Don't use that horrible fake I.D. you have either."
"I promise. Bottom's up." They both tossed back their shots. "God, that burns, but it's a good burn." Before long, he felt the effects of the alcohol calming his jitters. They managed to find most of the rest of the pack except Danny in the mass of dancing bodies. The heady mix of lights, smoke from the fog machines, and hot sweaty bodies pushing against his own had him in a great place in no time. Although, he had to wonder how the wolves in the pack were managing with the mix of noise and smells, until he saw Cora pull a flask from the inside pocket of her blazer.

She passed it around the group, and all took nips from it. Thoughtful wolf that she was, even offered it to Stiles and Cambia. He took a sniff; it smelled like whiskey. So he saw no harm in joining in. "Take another if you want. Jackson has a flask too."

When he passed it Cambia, she also took a pull. Stiles watched her swish the liquid around in her mouth before swallowing.

"Way to ruin a whiskey."

"What?" Stiles looked at her with a wide-eyed expression.

"It's been infused with Wolfsbane. Don't worry, it's a common thing to do. It dulls their wolf mojo as you call it, so they can get drunk. It's not going to hurt them."

"I know that. How do you know what it tastes like?"

"Who do you think did the infusing in my old pack? I just preferred to use cheap whiskey. It's not like you can make that shit any worse."

Stiles looked over at Scott, who at that moment, was giving him a dopey grin. Clearly, he'd had more than one drink from that flask. Or maybe both he and Jackson had one hiding in their pockets. That made more sense, because both of them looked pretty damned buzzed. Hell, they'd probably spiked their drinks at dinner with it.

Not one to judge, he turned off his brain, but not before he moved away from Cambia. He just knew that he did not want to be grinding against anyone he considered part of his family, and that included Scott as well.

The light-show, with it's alternating hues of blue, green, and red, even some purples, was strangely hypnotic. The thing with trap music was that it was quite easy to get lost in the music. Songs which flowed into one another and remixes of songs he knew, made it hard to tell time. Not that he cared one bit. Social anxiety be damned. Tonight, he intended to have a fucking good time.

Sometime later, he watched Cambia sneak away to what he presumed was the bathroom. When she returned, she stood closer than he felt comfortable with until he felt her breath against his ear as she spoke. Even with the loud music, her proximity allowed him to hear her.

"Have a preference for the evening?"

He pulled away and looked up at her, his brows knit in confusion. "What?"

"Girl? Guy? Blonde, brunette, redhead? Tall, short? Big rack, no rack, facial hair, baby face? Give me something to work with, Kid."

He swallowed hard and came to the realization that no, tonight he really didn't care. He'd take just
about anything; that's how frustrated he was.

She studied him for a minute. "What?"

"Nope, no preference, none at all."

"Good. Then follow me. By some small miracle, I think I may have hit the Wingman jackpot."

"Wait what?"

"The line for the bathroom was impossibly long, and I waited there for-fucking-ever by a group where someone is guaranteed to pique your interest. Trust me. Now I need you to play along with everything I say. Got it?" He nodded, and soon found himself being dragged away from the speakers. The further away they got, the quieter it became. Close to the bathrooms, she slowed her pace. "Remember what I said?"

"Yes."

"Good. When I stop next, I need you to complain about your ears ringing or something about the noise. Don't go overboard. So here's the setup. I found you some potential hook-ups. There's a girl in a Batman t-shirt, somewhat bookish, who looks uncomfortable with the whole atmosphere, but she's cute I guess. She's not really my type. There is an emo'ish girl with a My Chemical Romance necklace, Pierce the Veil tattoo, and a "I prefer the drummer" bracelet. He's a bisexual guy who from what I overheard, is looking for the D tonight, but can't seem to find one who is down with sleeping with a Bi-guy or one who isn't looking for a flamer. He said just because he prefers dick and only occasionally women, it doesn't mean he wants to stop playing video games, and sports, and dress like a fucking queen." She held up her hands. "His words not mine. I think he's your best bet actually. So here's what you're going to do. I am your older sister, and I am going to ask you about your birthday presents. Make sure you mention the drum heads, your gym membership, and the new book. I am going to mention something along the lines of Dad saying you have been seeing someone. I'm going to ask if it's Lydia. It isn't. Give me an excuse. Then say it was a guy who was looking for a twink, and you don't fit the bill. From there, go with it. You can do this, because I think I've found you a situation in which you go home with one of them tonight with a pretty good probability. There are three people who apparently share a type that just so happens to pretty much be you. I'd give it a 75% shot. Those are pretty good odds. By the way, they're all pretty good looking, especially the emo chick. Just saying, I'd hit that. Oh, don't bother trying for the brunette. Pretty sure she's a lesbian."

"How do you-"

"Call it a hunch." She began walking again only to stop nearby the group.

Stiles noticed that they were a year or two older than him. "Finally! I thought I would have to brave the smoke outside to get a reprieve from the noise in here. I am never letting you choose how to celebrate my birthday again, Cam."

"Stop whining. For the record, this place was Scott's idea. Just be lucky you got to come at all. Dad said no like five times before I wore him down."

"Sounds like him all right."

"It's a good thing I'm such a responsible and well behaved older sister."
"Sure you are." He scoffed.

"So, I haven't seen you all week, what did you get for presents? I'm so sorry I couldn't make it to your party. No one would switch shifts with me." She leaned her back against the wall and patted the empty space next to her, effectively putting him next to the group. She looked at him and darted her eyes to the group. The hint was subtle, but luckily, Stiles was smart. Who was she kidding, of course he was. He was Derek's best friend. In order to communicate with that man at all, one had to be fluent in Eyebrow-ese.

He glanced over and noticed a rather uncomfortable looking blonde woman standing with her arms crossed across her chest. Wearing skinny jeans, a somewhat fancy looking Batman tank top with ruched sides, and tall black boots, he admitted she was pretty cute. "Well, let's see, Scott got me new heads for my snares. Isaac renewed my XBOX Live account for another year. Dad and Melissa got me a new pair of Converse and a new hoodie, both red, as well as new tires for Roscoe. Derek bought my gym membership for the next six months and gave me 'coupons' to the batting cages. Essentially, he will be paying for my time the next ten times we go."

"Coupons?"

"Yeah, I'm pretty sure he made them himself. They were made of construction paper and colored with crayons." He giggled at the thought of Derek hunched over the desk in the library furiously coloring like a kindergartener.

"Who knew Mr. Sex on Legs was that creative?"

"Oh, they're nothing special. They look like they were made by a five year old, but whatever, it's the thought that counts."

"Anything else?"

"Oh shut up. You know you got me the best present. You usually do. Seriously Cam, where did you manage to find a limited edition, signed copy of Dark Knight Returns?"

"It took a lot of time on the phone, and a lot of money. Let me remind you, that came from hard-earned tips. Do you know how difficult it is to sound interested in some drunk's misogynistic sob story about his cheating slut ex, while he only orders the cheapest drink possible and tips in quarters? All for tips? Be a bartender they said, the tip money is great they said. Ugh."

"So this music? What do you say, pretty awful?"

"Not my cup of tea. You know it's not."

"Yeah well no one likes that death metal shit you like."

"Told you, I don't like death metal or the similar subgenres, too much growling, squealing, and not enough clean singing. At least I have better taste than you. All Time Low, Simple Plan, and Tokio Hotel? Give me a break, Kid. In your entire music collection, I can only listen to three bands, and only two bands you like do I even own any of their music myself."

He quirked an eyebrow at her. "Which are?"
"Rise Against, 30 Seconds to Mars, and A Day to Remember. I own a couple AFI albums, and well you know I like Coheed and Cambria."

"Well... huh shit. I guess I could learn to like some of yours."

"I'd be happy to introduce you to the wonders of prog, thrash, groove, and metal core. Hell, I'll even throw in nu-metal. So..."

"Yes? I know that tone."

"I was talking to Dad the other day, and he says you've been seeing someone. Did you finally get the nerve to ask out Lydia?"

"No, well yes I did, but she wasn't interested in me. No, I met Alex at a party a month ago."

"How's that going?"

"Well, let's see...he dumped me because I wasn't "gay" enough." He even used the air quotes. "Like, he wanted me to go get manicures and skinny jeans, and moisturize...he wanted me to be a walking gay stereotype, Cam. I asked him why I should be one if I'm not gay. Then he got pissed because apparently, I'm an insatiable guy who was just using him as my gay experiment. Seriously? I'm a varsity athlete who spends way too much fucking time with my XBox...I like chicks. I also happen to like dudes and anyone in between. I'm a people person, what can I say? I fail to see the problem." He was pretty sure he sold the story. Hell, it was practically his life story.

She winced. "Ouch. Yeah, sounds unpleasant."

"Tell me about it."

"Well...I'm gonna go find someone to dance with, preferably in the most inappropriate way."

"Be good Cam. I don't care if you are over six feet tall in those shoes. I've seen the type of guys you attract. Like a certain scruffy, broody, mutual friend of ours, for example."

"Such a protective little brother, or are you just worried he'll take me to play baseball instead of you?" She patted his cheek. "You gonna be okay back here?"

"Yeah, I just need a break from the noise."

"You got your room key?"

He patted his shirt pocket. "Yep."

She kissed his cheek. "Have fun, and no drinking! I shouldn't even have bought you that one drink. Dad would kill me." She spun on her heel and scampered away.

Not even a minute later, one of the girls next to him, the only brunette (And suspected lesbian, per Cambia's words), broke through the silence. "You don't look alike."

"Who? Me and my sister? Different mothers. She got all the looks in the family."

"I'll say."
"Gee thanks."

"Not a dig on you by the way. Must have been hard growing up with her. Great legs."

_Call it a hunch? Spot on, Cam._ "Yeah, I guess. Never really thought about it."

"Don't mind, Lizzy. She's impossible sometimes." The third friend, with platinum blonde and pink streaked hair, the "emo girl" he guessed, shifted closer to him. "You look just fine, better than fine actually."

He blushed, but before he could shove his hands in his pockets or flail like he normally would, he took a deep breath. _Remember Stilinski, be a rock star. Be smooth._ "Thanks. You all look pretty hot yourselves." He especially liked the emo chick's very short skirt.

Seemingly uninterested in him, Lizzy turned her attention to the crowd. "Your sister like girls too?"

_The brunette stood on her tiptoes trying to spot Cambia through the crowd._

_Lie you jackass._ "Um, no. She likes muscular men who either look like pro-athletes or GQ cover models... and men who actually are professional athletes or cover models. You're don't seem to be her type."

"So what's your type?" Emo Girl asked.

"Don't really have one. I like everyone. I mean I have preferences just like anyone, but I play fair."

He cast a glance at the only guy in the group, who didn't really fit Stiles' type of tall, tan and blonde. Still, the man was pretty cute with brown spiked hair and icy blue eyes. Come to think of it, he looked a little like Jackson. That was definitely okay in his book. It's not like Jackson was unattractive. No he was just hot with an unattractive personality.

Emo Girl fumbled with her necklace as she bit back a giggle. "So you're a drummer?"

"Yeah, or at least I try. My mom bought me a drum set when I was seven. She thought it would help with my ADHD, to focus my frenetic energy." He waved his hands in the air chaotically as he spoke. "Mostly, it's just me and my siblings jamming in the garage. Well, when my brother is not out with his girlfriend anyway. I mean we all spend a lot of time playing video games too. Sibling bonding at it's finest."

"Meg here," Gamer Boy pointed a thumb at Emo Girl, apparently named Meg, "loves musicians."

"Does she?" He tried for seductive, but was not sure he was successful.

"Yeah, especially drummers. She said something about stamina and skilled hands." Bookworm laughed.

"Yeah, and Kayla...well she loves comic books, and sci-fi. She's the only girl I met who plays video games as much as I do. It's how we became friends."

Stiles smirked, "Funny you should mention that," he lifted the hem of his shirt to show the pair of them his belt buckle, "because I love Batman. Well, I mean I'm more of a Marvel guy, but Bats, he's the best. I'm Stiles by the way."
"Interesting name. I'm Kyle."

"It's a nickname. My actual first name is complicated and hard to pronounce."

"What's your type of game?"

"I'm big on the first person shooters. It's cathartic, and I get lost if I have to adhere to a strong story line. My dad says I've got the attention span of a goldfish."

"I heard you mention a room key. So you're not from the bay area are you?" Meg asked.

"Nope, my siblings and some of my friends are all in town for my birthday."

"Well Happy Birthday. I'm guessing since you're not supposed to be drinking, you're not twenty-one yet."

"Nope turned eighteen this week."

"We're about the same age then. I turn nineteen next month." Kyle got right to the point. "You, Kayla, Meg, and I are all going to dance."

"Come on, do we have to?"

"Yes, Kayla." He grabbed one of Stiles' hands and Kayla who linked arms with Meg. He pulled them away from Lizzy. "Lizzy, you're welcome to join us."

"No thanks."

"Your loss." Kyle stuck his tongue out and dragged them onto the dance floor, where he began grinding against Stiles' back. "Don't be shy, Kayla."

Meg reached an arm around Stiles' waist, catching Kayla by the hip, yanking her against his body as well.

He could not believe the night he was having. Two pretty girls and a cute guy actually seemed interested in him, and judging by the way they danced, they were very interested in him. Oh my God, and how are they interested in me! His brain went into overload when Kayla turned around. For not liking the music, she was a great dancer. Her hips, and ass for that matter, undulated against his crotch. He was a teenage male; there was no way his body wouldn't respond to that. He felt Kyle tug on his hair, bringing his head back slightly, just enough for his ear to move near the other man's lips. "Just go with it." He was pretty sure his mind blacked out at that point.

* * * * *

Cambia broke free from the rest of the dancing pack. Danny had found them about half an hour ago lamenting at the lack of prospects, and she somehow found herself in the middle of the group dancing against Isaac and Cora (Which is good, because it hid her two left feet pretty well). Not that she had anything against the girl, but she was not exactly the Hale she wanted to be dancing with.
She hadn't seen Derek at all since coat check; it took all her strength not to pout.

"Where are you going, Cam? Don't want to dance with a bunch of teenagers anymore?"

"Very funny, Isaac. What you and Cora are doing, doesn't really qualify as dancing so much as it does vertical dry-humping. Good to know you two are finally done beating around the bush...and that is NOT a euphemism. I need another drink." Total lie, but she just didn't feel like shouting 'I have to take a piss' for them to hear, and to be honest she did not want to go the restroom and have the ladies insist on following her.

The ladies' room was surprisingly quiet and the line short. Her ears were ringing, but it wasn't like she had been having a bad time. No, she was quite enjoying herself. She just wanted to find Derek (Okay, she really wanted to find Derek, whisk him away to the hotel and do all kinds of inappropriate things to him). Maybe he'd camped out near the bar. It sure sounded like something he would do. Once she made it to the bar, she scanned the crowd hoping to see him, but had no luck. Someone pressed up against her back. Before she could tell them to back up or check to see if Derek had found her, she felt a hand on her ass. Without enough room to wiggle free, she remained calm. "Take your hand off my ass."

"I saw you dancing earlier, and I was kind of hoping to buy you a drink."

"Gotta tell you grabbing my ass was not the best ice-breaker." She breathed a sigh of relief when mystery man complied and slid into the gap next to her.

"I didn't mean to be so forward, but you really caught my eye. How about that drink?"

Cambia looked over to asses the man. Her Perv-o-meter went off in her head, every bell and whistle sounded. Its grating alarm probably loud enough to be heard by anyone in a ten foot radius. Why did some men insist on leaving multiple buttons on their shirts unbuttoned? It looked cheap, especially when coupled with the fact he clearly spent too much time in a tanning bed and was a fan of waxing. He reeked of too much cologne. *Dear god, he thinks he's a lady killer.* "I'm not interested."

"It's just a drink."

"Will it get you to go and flirt with someone else?"

He grinned. "Of course. I just want to buy a pretty girl a drink."

"I'll have-"

"Oh I already ordered it. I have a knack for guessing the perfect drink for anyone."

She nodded--Was it possible to nod with both sarcasm and incredulity? To hell if it wasn't; her eyebrows definitely conveyed both adjectives. *Would you just go away?* "Do you? And how do you do that?"

"I have a keen eye for observation. I notice the way a person walks, dresses, carries themselves and guess accordingly."

"Is that so? Do this work for you often? When flirting? Assuming you know what the woman wants to drink?"
"Absolutely, with almost ninety-nine percent accuracy."

She eyed the drink as arrived. "And somehow, you're convinced this pink concoction is my favorite?"

"That pink concoction is a Seabreeze. It's delicate and shy, but also playful and sweet."

Rubbing her forehead, she looked away to keep herself from laughing. "I hate to break it to you, but you just described the opposite of me."

"Oh, I don't think so."

"Delicate eh?" She eyed, him up. "What are you about a buck fifty? I could bench you easy, and I'm fairly certain I could put you on the ground in one punch. So delicate really wouldn't be the word I would use."

He brushed her hair off her shoulders, his hand lingering on the exposed skin. "A strong woman, I like that."

She wiggled out from under his arm. "I'm not shy, or sweet, or girly either. If you wanted to pick the perfect drink you would have ordered me a Scotch."

"A Scotch drinker? I never would have pegged you for one." He threw an arm around her waist. "But still I think you'd like the drink if you tried it."

"Take it off before I break it off." When he didn't remove his hand from her hip, she decided she'd had enough. "Look, thanks for the drink, but like I told you before, I'm not interested. In fact, since you were presumptuous about the drink and insist on touching me after I have explicitly said to stop, I'm even less interested."

"I'd hate for this drink to go to waste." He slid it in front of her. "Just try it. For me?" He begged like an eager puppy.

From behind her she heard someone clear his throat. "Perhaps you should try it first."

The man looked over Cambia's shoulder, a guilty expression flashing across his face for a second before he could return the shark-like grin to his face. "Oh I don't think that's necessary. I'm not a fan of grapefruit juice."

"Or perhaps, you're not a fan of the drugs I watched you slip into the drink."

"Um, I don't... I think you're mistaken."

"Mistaken or not, she said to get your hands off her."

"Who do you think you are, her boyfriend?"

"Yeah."

"She could have just said she wasn't available."

"She told you she wasn't interested. It should have been more than enough of a deterrent. Now beat
From the corner of her eye, she watched the man slink away grumbling about stuck-up bitches as he did so. She didn't turn around before replying. "Just so you know. I had no intention of trying the drink, Derek. Where you been all night?"

After giving the bartender a heads up to have security keep an eye on the man, lest any woman fall victim to his game, Derek slid into the vacancy next to her. "Keeping watch over my flock as you called it earlier."

"Thank you. You arrived just in time to prevent one of those fights you cautioned me about." She looked over at him and smiled. "My hero."

A flush spread across his cheeks. "I just...um, thought you might need help, or I mean, well you probably didn't need help, but I wanted to... yeah help." When she covered his hand with hers to stop his fingers from drumming nervously on the bar, he smiled. "How about that Scotch?" He flagged the bartender down, and after a very short list of three Scotches, he ordered Cambia a Johnnie Walker Black and a Lemondrop for himself making sure to flash the bartender a look that said 'Yes, I'm aware it's girly, and do I fucking look like I care?'.

"You really like your sugar don't you."

"Shut up." He chuckled into his drink. "Their wine selection consists or red, white, and pink. Not too inspiring. I'm not really a fan of hard liquor. So I don't want to taste the booze."

"I admire your confidence in your masculinity." She looked down at her glass before taking a large swig, knocking back half the drink in one gulp. "Thank you. For helping me. I'm glad you did. Even though I had no plans on drinking that, and maybe he would have taken the hint and left me alone, but maybe not, and well...thanks."

"You're my friend; you're pack. I really li...I had to do something."

After both had finished their drinks, faster than either probably intended to, he held out his hand. "Come on. I seem to remember owing you a dance." As Derek led her back to the dance floor, he held her close to him as they danced. He didn't want anyone else to get handsy with her, and his wolf was still on edge because from having to protect one of his packmates, though he had no doubt she would have defended herself just fine. "I hope you don't mind that I said you were my girlfriend. I just wanted him to leave you alone."

She couldn't stop the smile forming on her face. "No, I don't mind at all. I liked the way it sounded. In fact, I wouldn't mind if you referred to me as that from now on."

"Good, I'm glad you're not upse- Wait what?"

When the blush returned to his face, she patted his cheek. "If you want to be my boyfriend, I'd like that."

He mirrored her smile with one of his own, albeit a bashful one. "I'd...um.." He nodded. "Yeah, like that too. I'd really like that. That sounds--excellent. Just, great yeah."

"Alpha werewolf and you still have trouble talking to a pretty girl."
"No, just ones I might be falli-" He clamped a hand over his mouth in embarrassment. To fix what would surely be a disaster of epic verbal proportions, he pulled her body against his, beginning to move to the music. *I take back every harsh word I said about it at the time. Thank you, Laura for insisting I learn to dance.*

She had not been exaggerating when she described her lack of dancing ability. More than once, she stepped on his foot, and he'd have been lying if he said it didn't hurt, but he couldn't be bothered to care. Stiletto to the toes or not, this was the most fun he'd ever had when dancing. Though, he supposed, the current company he shared was entirely the reason why.

When he tried to spin her, she stumbled over her feet and crashed into his chest, her face stopping mere inches from his. He opened his mouth to ask if she was okay, but found all speech had left him. Words weren't really needed anyway. *Time to man the fuck up, Derek.* His two second long internal pep-talk over, he cupped the back of her head and brought his lips to hers, hovering just a moment to give her a chance to stop him, but she didn't. Their lips met, and his heart didn't skip a beat, or even ten, it just quit beating entirely. All the air left his lungs. She tasted like both lightning and sunshine, with the warmth of a security blanket. The soft but unyielding pressure against his lips felt like a million Sunday mornings, Wednesday nights, and every moment in between, and every moment after.

As her tongue skimmed along his lips, parted just enough for her to claim his mouth, he could taste the hint of Scotch that remained and even a little Wolfwhiskey for good measure. Without meaning to or realizing it, they had continued swaying to the music as it provided an off-tempo soundtrack to their kiss. He brought his hand out of her hair to her shoulder, trailing his fingers along her collarbone. When one of them and absentmindedly slipped under the top of her dress to brush against the top of her breast, he quickly pulled his hand away, preparing himself for a blow to the jaw. When one didn't come, he turned his gaze to her eyes, and was met with bright shining emotion. His lungs which had finally remembered how to fill themselves, quit working once again.

Derek wished they could stay in that kiss forever, but as bodies pulsed around them, he wanted nothing more than to leave the club where it was too noisy with too many conflicting scents, and far too many men with grabby hands. He wanted to be somewhere quiet with Cambia where he could memorize every curve of her body.

However, he couldn't move; his feet had melted into the ground where they stood. She felt right, so immaculately right, that he didn't know how he ever existed before she came into his life. Suddenly, he became aware of just how lonely and unfulfilled he'd felt for so long.

She broke the kiss first. "Let's get out of here. I hate the way this place smells. It's too noisy, and if I get my ass grabbed tonight by one more person who isn't you, I am going to snap."

It was as if she'd read his mind, and he found he still had no voice, but simply nodded his assent against her neck as they walked towards the door..

Chapter End Notes
Lyrics and chapter title from Daft Punk's "Get Lucky" feat. Pharrell Williams
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HXEJjtBouRA
After giving the driver a twenty, Stiles stumbled out of the cab with Meg, Kayla, and Kyle in tow. "Keep the change."

Kayla, giggling, wrapped her arms around his waist from behind. "Big spender."

Stiles grinned, thrilled that Kyle used his fake ID to get him another drink...or two, and he led the way into the hotel. The lobby was empty save for a man at the front desk, who Stiles felt quite certain to be judging them. He offered a lazy Scout Salute. "Keep up the good work, Sir. Fine establishment you have here." He heard the man grumble something about spoiled rich kids.

Inside the elevator, which was thankfully, mercifully, and wonderfully empty. Kyle pulled Stiles' body to his chest, taking the opportunity to plant kisses on the back of his neck. His knees grew weak by the time he felt a nip at his earlobe. He swallowed hard.

"What floor?" Meg asked.

With a shaky voice, he was barely able to muster, "Eighteen," as Kyle ran his hands down Stiles' sides. As soon as he heard the click of the elevator button, Meg turned and pressed a searing kiss to his lips. Wasting no time with tentativeness, choosing instead to use her tongue like a pry-bar to force his lips apart. She tasted like a mojito, lips sweet with citrus and mint, and he couldn't stop the appreciative moan escaping his lips.

Briefly, his mind glossed over how to bring Kayla into this. *How the ever loving fuck is this ever going to work with four people?* However, all rational thought fled his mind when Kyle's hands dipped into his pants. Breaking the kiss with Meg, he reached over to pull Kayla into the action. The skin of her neck smelled like peaches, and was just as soft.

An unwelcome ding signaled the eighteenth floor, breaking them all from their haze. His brain told him to get to his room as quickly as possible, but his heart, or more accurately, his dick, had other ideas, because...wow did Kyle smell fantastic! Excited by the knowledge that somewhere in the building, the night security guard, thinking he was in for yet another boring night of uneventful surveillance, was probably giddy or at least a little intrigued at the scene unfolding on his monitors, Stiles pushed Kyle up against the wall. The shove, had not meant to hurt, but only seemed to fuel the man's arousal. Kyle's hands, splayed across Stiles' back, tugged his body even closer so he could rut up against his leg.

"We need to get out of this hallway." Stiles' voice already sounded wrecked, hurrying down the
hallway to his room, where he only managed to struggle with the door once... really, just once honest. It seemed as soon as the door closed behind them, all bets were off.

Kayla and Meg, who had chosen merely to watch the two men in the hall, had clearly enjoyed the display of fully-clothed public sex. Out of the corner of his eye, Stiles watched Kayla drop to the ground in front of Meg, her hands holding up her skirt for easy access. His eyebrows shot up, and he couldn't help but push back away from Kyle so he could better see the action. "Fuck. That's..."

"I can watch for a little while if you want to join them." He smirked, his hands grabbing Stiles' ass.

"No, no. This... this is just fine, so fine." Stiles was fairly certain that with regular practice, he'd develop quite the sexual skill set, especially given his thirst for knowledge. Still, he'd learned a thing or two from all the porn he watched when he was, embarrassingly, still a virgin. Hell, just last week he was enjoying Private Stiles time with one of his favorite videos, and the guy-- Hey is that my ear? Oh fuck, it totally is. You bit my ear. No, don't stop, please continue, absolutely please continue.

Emboldened by the booze, combined with the way his brain just seemed to shut off during sex, giving him the laser like focus he never seemed to have any other time (No matter how much Adderall he took) and a tangible skill for multi-tasking, he tugged Kyle's shirt off over his head while still plundering his mouth. He was unsure what possessed him to do it, but he grabbed the other man's wrists, pinning them above his head and set to work on the buttons of his shirt, throwing it to the ground. Incited by the way the other man's lips were so soft yet unyielding in their pressure, he wanted them wrapped around his dick, which was cruelly still confined in his jeans. Then again, so was Kyle's, a tragedy he needed to rectify like right fucking now.

Metal clanked from his belt buckle, and in a surprisingly smooth move (Especially for him), Stiles pushed the jeans to the floor. A loud, achy moan erupted to his right as Kayla brought Meg over the edge. The sound of her orgasm rang in his ears, only exciting him further, and his hand, slick with spit dipped into Kyle's boxers.

"Fffuuuck." The man groaned.

"Yeah? How's the grip? Too loose? Too tight?"

"Tighter." He gasped when Stiles nipped at his skin, sucking a hickey into his collarbone.

Stiles worked him for a while until he heard Kyle's breathing speed up. Figuring the guy was close and wouldn't want to come in his underwear, he let got of his wrists to free his own hand where he finished undressing the man. Perfect timing too, because with one more pump of Stiles' hand, he shuddered, shooting his load all over his stomach, Stiles' hand and undershirt.

"Jesus." He gasped.

"No, Stiles." The younger man wore a smirk.

"Sorry about your shirt."

He wiped his hand on the cum covered A-shirt before shucking it off. "Bed?" He tapped Kayla on the shoulder as they passed, not that she noticed. The two women had switched places, and Meg was going to town, treating Kayla's pussy like it was dessert. Stiles fumbled with his belt, finding it so much quicker to get out of his pants now that he'd traded in his skinny jeans for ones with a little more room. Before he could lose his boxers, Kyle chuckled.
"What?"

He pointed to the mirror, where Stiles found the note and extra provisions:

_Oi irmãozinho,_

_Thought you might need some extras...just in case. Have fun, and be safe. Breakfast tomorrow morning is at nine._

_Até logo,_

_Cam_

"Best sister ever." He grinned, pulling down the condoms and lube tossing them on the bed. "She likes to make sure I'm prepared." He stumbled a little trying to remove his socks, but caught himself.

"You were hiding quite the body under that shirt." Kyle mused, but Stiles simply shrugged.

He pushed him onto his back and worked his way up the man's body to his mouth.

"God, I hope you top." Kyle wrapped a hand around Stiles' cock.

Unable to form a rational thought, (Cause oh fuck the man's hands were just as soft as his lips) he just nodded. "Uh huh."

"Oh thank God, because I don't, and I need your dick in me like yesterday. Kyle flipped them over so Stiles was on his back. Taking him in his mouth, he opened the lube and began prepping himself.

A long deep swallow brought a barrage of curses out of him. "Puta merda! Your mouth. Ffucck." His words were loud enough to entice Meg and Kayla to the bed, shedding the rest of their clothes on the way over. Surprised he could actually function, Stiles sat up, and with his hand behind Kayla's head, pulled her mouth to his. She ran a hand down his chest, fingers tracing the outline of his lean but sculpted muscles. He wondered, for a moment, where Meg was, but soon felt her on the other side of him.

Everyone always talks about how exciting a threesome would be, but there is something no one ever seems to mention: Logistics. Whose what goes where and when? Right now? Right now, Stiles realized he didn't have enough hands or mouths to keep both women satisfied, because giving one hand to one breast and that's it, just didn't seem fair, and fuck if he was going to have enough stamina to see this to the end.

He reached down to cup Kyle's chin, pulling him up.

"How do you want me?" The man asked.

Stiles broke the kiss with Kayla. "On your back." He whispered against his lips.

Kyle grinned and grabbed a condom, opened it and rolled it on his dick.

Stiles arched an eyebrow at him. "Thought you said you don't top."

"Not with guys." He pressed one in Stiles' hand. "Kayla wants me to fuck her. You get to fuck
Hear that? The crickets? That was the sound of all coherent thought leaving Stiles brain in an instant. After a beat though, his most valuable asset didn't fail him, and his brain started working again. Oh sweet...fuck...no don't start falling apart now, Stiles. Instead, he regained control of his mental faculties and opened the condom. Once sheathed, he looked down at Kyle, who simply nodded. Stiles' brain short-circuited as he pushed inside slowly. Dear god, his dick now sat wrapped in a vice grip. Deep breaths. Don't blow your load already.

"Oh fuck." Kyle groaned.

"Okay?"

"Yes, just give me a sec-"

Kyle's words were cut off by Kayla's lips, effectively distracting him as his body adjusted to the intrusion. After a minute, he gave Stiles a thumbs up, and the birthday boy rolled his hips, starting a slow but delicious tempo. Unable to form words anymore, all he could do was groan. Kyle felt fantastic, a hell of a lot better than the only other time Stiles had been able to top with a guy. His eyelids fluttered closed as he sped up to a relentless rhythm. Suddenly, he felt Kyle's body dip into the bed and hot skin leaned up against his chest as he thrust. Stiles opened his eyes, and oh merciful fuck, Kayla was riding Kyle at the same time he pounded into him, while Meg lay next to the man on the bed, kissing him like there was no tomorrow. This...this should be illegal, he thought. No one should have this much pleasure at once.

Kayla dislodged his hands from Kyle's knees, moving them to her breasts. He captured her earlobe between his teeth, nipping at it gently. The high pitched moan it elicited told Stiles he should continue, and he sucked a small hickey into the crook of her neck. More groans. He traveled his hands down her stomach to between her legs.

Apparently, that was all it took to set off a chain reaction.

Her hand wrapped around Stiles neck, fisting in his hair as her body bucked wildly. She shuddered, violently as she came, rolling off Kyle when she regained her wits, which pushed Kyle's body toward Stiles just enough for the perfect change in angle.

With two more pushes inside him, Kyle was gone. "Oh my God! Fuck, fuck, fuck!"

Stiles glanced over at the clock, they'd been at it for at least fifteen minutes, and he wasn't even close. What the he-- Is this bizarro world? When did I develop stamina? When Kyle came back down, he looked up at Stiles.

"Never would have pegged you for a power top."

"S'a new development. You okay?" He panted still rolling his hips in slow thrusts.


He didn't even have a chance to breathe before Meg grabbed his wrist and pulled him down to the bed. "Hope you have enough left in the tank for me." She switched out the condom and hopped on.

Stiles tossed his head back, beyond delirious. "Damn." He shut off his brain completely at that point,
too exhausted to even focus anymore. So he didn't, and let Meg take complete control, which seemed to be exactly the way she liked it. Lips captured his. Dear God, Kyle was the best damn kisser. That extra sensation pushed him over the edge, and he came in a stream of obscenities.

His chest heaved as he came down, but there was no way he'd leave his partner hanging. So, with shaky limbs, he lifted her off him and, rolling her over, settled between her legs. He'd missed out on all the oral action so far in the night, and he'd be damned if he finished the night without partaking. Looking up at her, he watched her roll a nipple between her fingers.

*You're a beast Stilinski. When the hell did this happen? What happened to the flailing clumsy kid?* He argued with himself. *Shut up, fucker! He grew up; he's a man now. Yes, yes I am.* He watched her come undone once he slipped a couple fingers inside her to stroke at her G-spot while he licked the alphabet onto her clit. *I told you Playboy could be good for something other than jacking-it.*

"Shit, Stiles!" Meg screamed.

With the noises, the mewling she made at his actions, he found himself deliciously hard once again. He had to be doing something right, because she tugged hard on his hair as she came, screaming once again, and damn if he didn't realize he had a hair-pulling kink until that moment, because he exploded, untouched all over the comforter.

"Oh fuck that's hot." She cooed.

He pulled himself up her body slightly, and rested his head on her stomach while he struggled to regain his breath. Exhausted didn't even begin to cover it.

After several minutes, he pushed up off her. "Yuck!" In his haste to flip her onto her back, he'd forgotten to tie off the used condom, and stuck his hand in his now cold and sticky spunk. He tossed the spent condoms into the trash. "I don't know about you all, but I am beat."

When Meg and Kayla retreated to the bathroom, he threw the blanket on the floor, and cranked the AC. Bed, yes bed. Definitely. After cleaning up first Kyle and then himself, he flopped back onto the bed, where he was soon flanked by Kyle. By the time the ladies returned, he was almost asleep. Meg curled in, spooning around Kayla, and the group passed out in post-coital bliss.

*I've watched you change*  
Into a fly  
I looked away  
You were on fire  
I watched a change  
In you  
It's like you never  
Had wings  
Now you feel  
So Alive

"Okay, so maybe walking home from the club was not the best idea." Derek laughed, moving aside so Cambia could step into the revolving doorway.
"I don't know; I thought it was nice. Now if I didn't have a pair of purse flats," she wiggled the offending pair of heels hooked on two of her fingers, "then you'd be in trouble."

He snaked an arm around her waist, and she squeaked as he pulled her to him. "Touché, Miss Di Pellicce." The peck he placed on her lips may have looked innocent, but the intent behind it was anything but. "And," he whispered, his breath hot and humid against her ear, "what if I want to be in trouble?"

She poked him in the nose. "Such a naughty boy." The elevator dinged, and they stepped inside. His stubble tickled her when he nuzzled her neck.

"Is that a problem?" His lips planted a line of kisses from her ear down to her collarbone. "I can be a good boy too."

Cambia leaned her head back to give him better access to her throat. "Where's the fun in that?"

The elevator stopped on a floor that wasn't theirs; Derek groaned in frustration. Why couldn't they have this ride gloriously to themselves? The doors opened and several people in evening attire filtered in, the smell of alcohol and sweat wafting off them in a nauseating wave.

"That was." Hiccup. "Seriously the best wedding I've ever been to." One of the men slurried together in a rush.

An obnoxious man about Derek's age, looked like he could party another couple hours. "Dude, check out the love birds." He let out a wolf whistle. "Hey Baby, why don't you let a real man take care of you tonight?"

Derek stiffened, wanting to throw a punch, but she stopped him before he could look over his shoulder at the asshat. Then she did something that should have surprised him, but nope-- not in the least bit surprised.

"Something funny, asshole?"

"Not at all." Derek turned around, squared his shoulders and watched the guy shrink in front of him. "See that's what I thought."

"I could so totally handle you, Sweetheart."

She tutted again. "It's so cute how you think you have a chance. See under this dress, I'm built like Wonder Woman with top notch adductor muscles, which is why I make it a point not to fuck below my weight class. I would crush your pelvis like a sparrow's egg, between my thighs." The elevator bell dinged. "Oh look, it's your floor. Enjoy your night with your right hand. Ciao."

Derek waited for the doors to close before bursting out into raucous laughter. "Did you just..."
"Wreck It Ralph? Yeah. When in doubt, quote Zangief."

"The best part, your heartbeat stayed the same."

She lowered her brows and smirked at him. "Who said any of that was a lie? The only time you've seen me naked, I was malnourished. Amazon isn't that far off as far as adjectives go. Hope you're up for the challenge." She waggled her eyebrows at him.

"Oh absolutely." He smiled, brushing a piece of hair from her forehead. "You are..."

She tugged at his vest, to pull him flush against her body while they rode up the remaining five floors. "Yeah? What am I?"

"Something wonderful," he nipped at her neck, "that I want spend a lot more time with."

Her fingers, warm, cupped the back of his neck, and all flirtatiousness disappeared from her face, where it was replaced with a look of pure affection. "Me too." She captured his lips with her own, kissing him with a mix of longing, passion, and fondness. The elevator had stopped for almost thirty seconds before either noticed, and they broke apart.

Thankfully, Derek's room was not too far from the elevators, because he needed his mouth and hands on as much of her skin as possible, as quickly as possible.

Once inside Derek's room, Cambia threw her shoes in the corner and pushed him against the closed door. They'd been good at the club, keeping things PG-13, but fuck if she was having any more of that. She wanted him more than she'd wanted anything in her life.

"God, Cam. You. taste. amazing." He punctuated each word with a kiss while he worked on removing his shoes and socks. "I'm sorry I was such an idi-"

She pushed a finger to his lips, stopping what would most likely be a string of self-deprecation. Staring right in his eyes, she gave him a warm smile. "I don't care that you took it slow; we both needed it I think. We're here now. Don't retreat into your head."

He felt his breath catch in his throat. "Um..." I think I love you. He screamed in his head, unable to get his tongue to form the words. His tongue turned to cotton in his mouth when her fingers began opening first the buttons on his vest, and then his shirt. Her mouth never left his skin, whether his lips, his neck, or exposed chest. The need to taste, to touch, it seemed was just as great for her as it was for him. She pushed his overshirt and waistcoat to the floor, pulling, next, his a-shirt up over his head. Wasting time did not seem to be on her agenda for the night, because she went right for his belt.

Reaching behind her, he fumbled, searching for the zipper to her dress. His fingers finally found it, and pulled it towards the floor, slowly, oh so deliciously slowly, until he could shrug the dress to the ground. Surprised to find her sans bra, his wolf ached to come out and play at the sight of all the bare flesh, but he didn't let it out. He wanted to savor her; the wolf could have its chance later. But damn, she had been telling the truth in the elevator. In his fantasies, he did not add nearly enough muscle. It looked good on her.

She tugged at his arm, urging him towards the king sized bed in the middle of the room. Along the way, he walked out of his pants. "Boxer briefs? I had you pegged for boxers." She pulled him down with her to the bed, her hands fisting in his hair.
"S'that a problem?" He murmured against the skin of her collarbone. Fuck, he wanted to mark her, so everyone could know she was his, but he knew better. Given her history, he knew Cambia was not the kind of woman who would tolerate a possessive Derek. Fairly certain that she'd be an alpha were she a werewolf, he knew she could handle herself, and part of him wanted to give her the reins tonight. It had been so long since he'd completely relinquished control (Willingly). It sounded like the best idea he'd ever had.

"Not at all." As Derek moved his attention to her breasts, she arched her back, grabbing at the sheets for purchase.

"Good." Enjoying the view, he licked a long stripe down her toned stomach, planting a kiss above her navel. "I'd hate for that to be a deal breaker."

"Honestly Derek, at this point, there's not much you could say or do to break the deal." She panted. "I've wanted you and this since you gave up the rest of your evening to watch a sappy Italian movie with me, because I was having a bad day."

His lips passed over several faded but still raised scars near her left ribcage. They were perfectly straight marks. Two criss-crossed over each other, another right below that. Closer to her mid-line were a few little puncture scars.

She regained her senses when she felt him pause. "Go ahead and ask."

"Did he give you these? Your ex?"

"Most of them. Stabbed me three times, ruptured my spleen, and the little holes are where they had to remove it. The one by my hip is where I got shot earlier this year when you found me."

He hadn't even noticed that yet, but now that she mentioned it, he let his fingers trail over it. Instinct took over, and he found himself kissing each scar. He knew they wouldn't go away, but maybe it would help a little.

"You don't have to do that. I'm not ashamed of them. They are part of me; I cant change that. The mental scars, well I wish those would fade."

He surged up her body, capturing her mouth again. "I don't want anyone to hurt you anymore. I know you don't need protecting, but...I want to... I..." Once again, his emotions caught somewhere between his brain and his mouth, swirling around in a maelstrom. Instead of trying to force the words from his mouth, he studied the small tattoo on her hip bone. With its minimalistic feel, it was nothing complex, just simple black lines drawn to resemble a cat, but given the placement, it seemed personal. His fingers traced along the lines. "Reminds me of Kitty Cambia."

"It's a memorial tattoo."

"Your parents' forms?"

"No, they were a tiger and a stoat."

He cocked an eyebrow. "Stoat?"

"It's a weasel."
"Who is it for?"

"Too soon, Derek. The wound is still open, still bleeding, and I can't talk about it yet. I'll let you know when I get there."

He sought out her lips. "Fair enough."

After several minutes of fervent kissing, hands seeking out bare flesh to caress, she broke for air. "Fuck, Derek. The things I want to do to you."

He took a nipple between his teeth gently, mumbling against her skin, "Yeah? What do you want to do to me?" He looked up at her. "I'm yours; take the lead."

She wrapped her legs around his waist and flipped him onto his back, driving him hard into the mattress.

"Did you just jiu-jitsu me?"

Her teeth nipped at his lower lip. "Maybe."

"Not gonna lie. If I hadn't have been turned on before, I would be now."

She placed a finger to his lips. "Shh, enough talking. Help me with these." She tugged on the waistband of his underwear, and once he lifted his hips a little, she threw them to the floor along with her own.

The mischievous twinkle in her eyes as she took in the sight of him naked, sent his stomach into a routine of back flips. She wrapped her lips around him, swallowing him down in one smooth, agonizingly slow pull, her breath leaving hot, humid vapor on his skin. At that moment, Derek was pretty sure he saw the beginning of time.

He tried to push all thought from his mind, a task easier said than done. His brain kept telling him he shouldn't have the onslaught of feelings coursing through his body, his blood-- He didn't deserve any of them. Too long he'd felt guilty about poor choices made under false declarations of love made by someone he trusted, about finally caving to the needs of his body in one misguided moment of weakness. This woman trusted him, of all people, the moment she saw him, trusted him to save her in her most vulnerable state. Fuck it! He was done playing the martyr, punishing himself for clinging to his human side, ignoring what his wolf knew the moment it caught her scent.

Cambia peered up his body through her lashes. Even in the low light, he could see her sage colored irises had virtually disappeared, replaced by pupils like new moons, just as dark and just as large. He wanted to cup her chin and coax her up his body back to a mouth that needed to taste the salt on her lips, but he couldn't move, frozen in place, body trembling with more desire than he'd ever felt in his life.

She pulled off him with a pop, lapping her tongue over his head before flicking it over his lower abdomen, whisper light, like a feather, far softer than he thought possible. Not that it didn't feel fantastic; it did, but curiosity got the better of him. His eyelids fluttered open, and he looked down to see a forked tongue flitting over his skin. It took him by surprise. She must have felt him tense under her, because before he even had a chance to process, she took one of his fingers in her mouth. She passed it over her teeth to show him that, no, just because she'd changed her tongue, it did not mean
A soft chuckle rumbled in his chest. "You read my mind."

She quit the dance her tongue made across his body and returned to his cock. Derek did not whimper, and it most certainly did not sound like a puppy's whine (It didn't; shut up), but dear God, she had no gag reflex. He threw an arm over his eyes, because fuck if he could watch her anymore. It took every of control he had not to thrust up into her mouth as it was. If he continued to watch as her head bobbed up and down, as she sucked him into oblivion, he was going to blow his load, long before he wanted to.

When he began to feel the familiar pull from his groin, the tingle in his limbs, she stopped. Derek wasn't sure if he wanted to be angry or grateful. Grateful, definitely grateful, because there was nothing he wanted at that moment more than to be buried in her as deeply as possible.

Seconds ticked by, but to him they felt like years. If he couldn't feel, and hear for that matter, her panting on his thigh, he might have worried she passed out, but no. Even supernatural creatures needed a breather.

"You okay down there?" His voice was just as ragged as her breathing.

She nodded against him, planting gentle kisses on the soft skin of his upper leg. He tried not to thing about how amazing it felt and managed to do fairly well, until she raked her nails up his leg. Against his own volition, his back arched off the bed. "Oh fuck!" He couldn't see the smirk she gave him, too busy balling his hands in the sheets, willing his claws to not come out.

Enjoying the response it elicited, she repeated the action, this time pulling her nails down his stomach. An 'Mmph' was the only reply Derek could manage. His resolve was fading fast, if she didn't hop on soon, she'd have to wait for round two.

What little control he'd been clinging to, went out the window the moment she bit down on the skin of his upper thigh at the juncture of where his leg met his pelvis. Her teeth didn't break the skin, but large fangs rolled his muscle between them.

"Cam, I- Fuck, Cam!" He lost it, her name like a song on his lips. He saw spots as he came harder than he ever had in his life. Literal stars burned white hot in his veins, and he swore he could feel electricity, honest to God electricity erupting from the spot she'd bitten him. Derek had been transformed into a live wire, shaking on the bed, waiting to come down.

Had she just chosen that location at random, without knowing it's significance? She'd been part of a pack before; she had to have known. A few moments later, when he regained control of his body, she tensed, digging her nails into his leg as she gripped him tightly enough to bruise, and with a shuddering gasp, erupted. He hadn't even noticed she'd been multitasking while she damn near worshiped his cock.

He carded his fingers through her sweat damp hair. "Hey." He sounded as wrecked as he felt.

"Hey." Suddenly, her eyes caught sight of the bite mark she left and realization of what she'd done washed over her face like a wave. Cambia sat up, immediately clamping her hand over her mouth.

Oh yeah, she knew the importance of that spot. The thing was, he didn't even feel upset about it. In fact, it felt like the most correct thing had ever happened in his life. He knew what how he'd felt...
when she did it meant, even if he couldn't say it aloud.

"Oh my God, Derek. I'm so sorry. I don't even know what happened. My animal took over for a second. That's never happened before to me." She tried to scramble off the bed, but he caught her arm. "I should never have done that without talk-- It's not like I haven't thought about you and what I-- I've tried for months to open your eyes, but this was wrong. Please don't hate me." Her voice was tinged with tears.

He cupped her chin and turned her face to meet his. "Come here." His soft voice coaxed her to his mouth, and he kissed her tenderly, his teeth barely nipping at her bottom lip. "Don't." His arms wrapped tightly around her. "I think my wolf knew the moment it scented you what you were to me. I was just too stubborn to admit it. Right now, you feel as natural as breathing." He kissed her temple. "I think your animal recognized it and acted on instinct."

Nodding, she sat up, pulling on his hand.

"What are you doing?"

Picking up his dress shirt from the floor, she slipped it on. "I want to show you something no one has ever seen. It's only fair."

Still confused, he tugged on his underwear. She pushed open the balcony door and led him into the night air. Thankfully, the night was crystal clear. Her eyes craned skyward checking for the moon's location.

"Cam, I don't understand."

"I'm showing you the rest of my Marca."

"Your what?"

"The big tattoo on my back. It has a name. Everyone of my kind has one."

"The rest?"

"My Vero Corpo, my true animal form, it's missing from the tattoo, except..." She turned her back to the moonlight. "Except for under light from the half moon, and with the right words." She let the shirt drop from her shoulder blade. "Put your hand under the tattoo." The skin of his palm still felt like it was on fire. "Ipse videt in praesenti et in futuro, absconsa cutis ostentare."

Before his eyes, he watched the rest of the ink appear on her skin. "Wow! That's amazing. Your tattoo is magic?"

She looked over her shoulder at him. "Yeah. Woke up on my eighteenth birthday with it. I mean, my parents and I had an idea what my Corpo was... but I've never shown anyone the rest of the tattoo."

"You're a grizzly bear?" His fingers traced along the new lines. "Is that...Common?"

"I don't think so. Your Vero Corpo is a reflection of your personality."

"What's that say about you?"

She gave him a serious expression. "I'm the one who does the protecting, who does the defending,
It's why I can go toe-to-toe with a werewolf. I'm strong, and you haven't even come close to seeing the full brunt of my anger. Revenge, vengeance...If I ever see him again, heaven help the alpha who that wiped out my last pack. Ain't no chains can hold me back."

He felt like he was seeing all of her as he stared at the three animals on the crest. A grizzly was flanked on the left by an eagle and the right by a stag. "What's with the other two animals?"

"Family line of each of my parents."

"Aquila?" He read the surname on the bottom of the shield. "Is that your real last name?"

"Aquila-Cervini." She noticed the question written on his face and rolled her eyes. "Elianna." When he opened his mouth, she cut him off. "Don't. Don't use that name."

"Why? It's a beautiful name."

"Yeah, it was. The way my name flowed from my mother's lips sounded like heaven, but Tommy ruined it. With every blow, he would spit it at me until it became poison on his tongue. When I hear it now, I just feel sick. He took my name from me, and nothing I do brings back the way it felt to hear it on her say it. Even from your lips it still sounds like venom."

He wrapped his arms around her waist, resting his chin on her shoulder. "I'm sorry."

"S'okay." She nodded.

"Can I ask you something?"

"As long as it changes the subject."

"Can you show me your bear?"

"Now?"

"Yes." He mumbled against the skin of her neck.

She took his hand, leading him back into the room, where she made sure to shut the balcony door. "Step back, and remember I'm in control of my animal. I won't hurt you."

Before he could tell her that no, he was not worried about that, her body disappeared, and the shirt she'd been wearing fell to the floor. In her place, a massive dark brown grizzly sat. It still amazed him, that no matter the form, her eyes remained the same color, even if the shape and size were different. In this form, she was much bigger than any bear he'd ever seen, and she hadn't even stood on her hind legs. Quickly, she shifted back to human form. "Just because it's my true animal, doesn't mean it's my favorite form."

"No?"

"Can I show you?"

He smiled. "Of course."

A few moments later, he saw a snake coiled up onto the floor, obviously waiting for him to become comfortable with her intimidating new form. Once his features softened from anxious to fond, she
lifted her upper body off the floor so that their eyes met.

She flared her hood, and took on the more familiar profile of a King Cobra. With a tentative hand, he reached out to her. Snakes had always scared him. He'd never touched a one before, and honestly, he'd expected her skin to feel almost sticky, slimy even, like every story he'd heard as a child. That was such a travesty of a description, he almost felt offended on her behalf. The cobra's skin was smooth, and soft, and even silky, but a little rough if he rubbed against the grain of her scales.

He watched her head dance and sway like he'd seen in nature videos. Even with six feet of snake raised off the floor to face him, he estimated another ten feet of snake remained on the floor. He could have watched her like this for hours, and obviously, she sensed that. She pushed her head into his hand, in what he assumed was an attempt at a nuzzle. A minute or two later, she changed back.

"The bear was impressive, but the cobra was..."

"Beautiful. That's how I felt the first time I saw one at a zoo when I was five. Sometimes I think my Marca is wrong. It's like I am a dichotomy. On one hand, there's the bear: Strong, vengeful, short tempered, and on the other...the snake, which is balanced, sensual, cunning. The power of a grizzly is great, but my confidence and self-esteem come from that cobra. After my parents died, I actually contemplated running away to Asia to live as a King cobra for the rest of my life."

He wrapped his arms around her waist, pulling her close. "When I was a kid, snakes terrified me. This was the first time I'd touched one. Honestly, up until you shifted, they still scared me."

"Hold out your arm. It won't hurt."

She waited for him to comply and then wrapped her fingers around his wrist. He watched as her face slowly morphed into that of a snake until her whole body had curled around his arm. Bringing his hand in front of his face, he couldn't help but watch, enrapt, as she flicked her forked tongue against his skin. She chose not to stay as long in the form of this snake, and soon, Derek's hands cupped her face.

"You're so beautiful." Even he was surprised at the amount of emotion he put into those three words. He actually felt her skin flush beneath his palms. Any further words died in his throat, and he crashed his lips to hers, enrap, as she flicked her forked tongue against his skin. She chose not to stay as long in the form of this snake, and soon, Derek's hands cupped her face.

"Some other time. Enough foreplay; right now I just want you in me."

And fuck if that didn't make his dick jump at the idea. Never a big fan of missionary, he rolled them over, and she wasted no time lowering herself onto him.

"Oh fuck, you feel amazing." Her words disappeared into his neck while she scented his skin. "Fuck me, you smell even better."

They fell into a glorious rhythm, skin to skin, bodies moving along each other in a long denied dance. She tried to pin his hands above his head and intertwine their fingers. "No, don't. Not above my head. I...please don't pin them there." She let go. "And I just want to touch you." There was not an inch of her body he didn't want his hands on at that moment, but he decided on holding her hips, fingers splayed against her lower back. His head, foggy with lust, felt different than it ever had
during sex, even different than earlier, and he soon realized the Intention Bite she'd given him earlier made sex so much better. If just that bite could make it feel this great, he couldn't even imagine how it could be after a Claiming Bite, but damn if he didn't want to, just not yet.

Cambia's breath came in uneven, ragged gasps. Tension, and weight, and an unrelenting heat built behind her eyelids. As much as she wanted to, to memorize the way Derek's face looked, she couldn't keep her eyes open. When he nipped at her neck, tingling rolled from her groin down to her toes.

Her pure animalistic growl as she came almost pushed him over the edge, but he held on long enough to roll them over. His eyes met hers, asking permission.

"Do it." She nodded.

He pulled out of her to move down her body, where his teeth sought out the same location on her body as the one she'd bitten on his. Carefully, he clamped down on the muscle, the points of his fangs pushing into the skin, but not breaking it.

She likened the sensation to that she felt when she swam in her electric eel form before shocking prey, a constant buzzing underneath the skin, continuing to mount in intensity until it erupted into its target. This time though, it pulsed through her leg so strong, it released another orgasm. She almost blacked out from the pleasure, totally unaware of Derek reentering her until his body tensed above her.

Shock-waves tore through his body as he came, convulsing like crazy before collapsing on top of her. When he regained control of his mouth, his first words were ill-formed and poor declarations of his affection. Even he didn't understand a word he'd said, but apparently the meaning came through loud and clear, because she nodded and kissed his forehead.

Exhausted, he dropped his head to her chest, and fell asleep to the sound of heartbeat and the feeling of her fingers carding through his hair.

Chapter End Notes

Song lyrics from 1st scene from Rev Theory's "Hell Yeah"
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GEHukjv8NCg

Song lyrics from 2nd scene from Deftones' "Change (In the House of Flies) [Chosen more for the sexy feel of the song than the lyrics - They're a little S&M for the scene]
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=op8oLaiSb94

Translation for Portuguese used in this chapter.
oi irmãozinho- hi baby brother
Até logo!- see you later
puta merda- Fuck me (as an interjection)

Latin:
Ipse videt in praesenti et in futuro, absconsa cutis ostentare.- He sees in the present and
future, display skin's secret
-Lord help me if the Latin is wrong. I tried so damn hard on that one.

I'm not sure if the sex was explicit enough to increase the rating, but if it was let me know.
Derek opened the door to his room, Cambia's suitcase in his other hand. After the sensory overload also known as Stiles and Cambia's room, he took a deep breath, inhaling the heady and comforting mix of his and Cambia's scents. He needed to clear his mind. How the hell did that kid manage to hit the hook-up jackpot last night?

Yanking his shirt off over his head, Derek walked towards the bathroom. She'd left the door open as an invitation, and he stepped out of his sweatpants and underwear to join her in the shower. She'd still been asleep when he grabbed her room key and went downstairs to retrieve her clothes. Walk of shame's should be reserved for waking up the morning after regretting the night before, and he was pretty damn certain that did not apply in this case. He pressed his chest against her back, wrapping his arms around her waist. "Buon giorno, mia Carissima." He cooed in her ear, trailing a few kisses down her neck. "Sleep okay?"

She looked over her shoulder at him. "Mmhmm, well what little sleep I did get. We should have done this months ago."

Resting his chin on her shoulder, as he let the hot water wash over his skin, he sighed. "I know; I'm an idiot." He kissed the back of her shoulder blades. "As much as I would love to stay in here all day with you... it's almost nine."

"Make them wait." She laughed, turning around to hand him the shampoo.

"Not really my style." He ran his thumb under her lower lip.

"That's just too bad, because I was thinking how sweet this shower is. It practically begs us to defile it."

He clicked his tongue. "Nope sorry. Got to set a good example."

Cambia poked him in the nose. "Your loss. I was actually just about finished when you came in anyway. I didn't think it would take that long to get my suitcase."

"Well, your room is a mess." He held up his hands to halt her inevitable question. "Don't even ask. Go get dressed." He kissed her forehead.

By the time, Derek finished his shower, she was already dressed in a grey miniskirt and royal blue top with a bow on the shoulder. Her bruised jaw had been concealed with cover-up, and her lipstick hid the swelling in her lip. He sighed, not wanting to see the judging looks he would inevitably get regarding the contusions if she didn't cover them. Apparently, she could smell his irritation, because she rose from the chair and stode over to him, taking his face in her hands.

In his bag, he found a clean pair of jeans and a tight fitting red polo shirt.

"Oh my god, you own a casual shirt that isn't a henley."

"Shut up." He smiled and tugged the shirt over his head.
"You should wear the Wolverine belt again. I liked it, but I really liked taking it off you." She winked. Less than five minutes later, they were out the door, Cambia once again taller than him in a pair of navy Mary-Janes.

"I like your hair like this." He twirled a lock of her hair around his finger in the elevator. With no time to actually style it, she'd pulled it into a low and loose ponytail. "I mean, it's going to drive me crazy, with your neck exposed, but you look beautiful, even if it makes me want to do this." He buried his face in the crook of her neck, nipping softly at the skin.

She squeaked, snaking an arm around his waist to pull him tight against her body. "You wolves and your biting. What am I going to do with you?" Her lips brushed against his ear as she whispered.

When he stepped back, not only was he grinning, he was blushing. "I'm not sorry."

"Good, don't be."

"I thought you weren't affectionate."

"I'm adapting."

He wrapped his arm around her shoulder, and they left the hotel to walk the block and a half to the restaurant to meet the rest of the pack for breakfast.

* * * * *

Lydia checked her lipstick in her compact, regretting her color choice. What the hell were those fashion experts thinking? Magenta? Ugh. Oh well, stuck with it now. Clearly, her and Jackson were the early birds in the group, because they'd been there ten minutes early, which was great, because the reservation was for nine. They were still the only ones there, and it was now 09:15.

"I haven't eaten since six last night; I'm starving. I could literally eat a whole cow right now."

Jackson slammed back the rest of his coffee, his fourth cup already. "I swear if people do not start showing up, I am going to chew off my fucking arm. I am a finely tuned machine with a supernatural appetite. I need to be fed, like right now. I swear to God, I am about resort to self-cannibalism, Lydia. Someone needs to fucking feed me."

Perusing her menu, she didn't even look up at him. *Boy, ugh. And they say girls are melodramatic.*

"Jackson, eat a Snickers."

He glared at her. "Why?"

"You turn into Stiles when you get hungry."

He gave her his best disgusted/bitch face, at least that's what he hoped he gave her. "Who says breakfast at nine, and then doesn't show up?"

"Sorry, I'm...late, but so apparently is everyone else. Good morning, Miss Martin, Jackson." Peter took off his jacket, draping it over the back of his chair. "How was the nightclub? Just as awful as I
was expecting?"

"No, we didn't see Derek all night, so it was tons of fun." Jackson nodded emphatically when the server asked if he wanted more coffee.

"That is your last cup, Jackson."

"My stomach is eating itself right now. I need something in my stomach right now."

"Too much more coffee, and it will do the stomach eating for you."

Peter smirked. "Well you know Derek. He was probably in a corner sulking. Other than my missing nephew, how was it?"

"We all drank, danced; Stiles disappeared at some point. He probably had a panic attack."

"Be nice, Jackson." She chastised him. "Cora and Isaac finally got their act together. So it was the three couples plus Danny and Cambia dancing in one veritable puppy pile for a while. She-Derek, eventually left citing a drink break, but I have a suspicion she went in search of a hook-up, because she did not come back."

"Wouldn't surprise me. She definitely smelled like she was leaving to do that."

Peter ordered a Bloody Mary. "Won't that just break our brooding alpha's heart! I look forward to it."

"Look forward to what?" Allison asked, sitting on the other side of Lydia.

"When Derek realizes he was too slow and Cambia gave up on him. That skirt...super cute by the way." Lydia drew attention to her best friend's floral print miniskirt.

"Thanks."

"Good morning, Scott."

"Hi, Lydia, Jackson."

"Jesus McCall, you look horrible."

Allison cupped her hand on the side of her lips, hiding her mouth from Scott. "Someone's a little hungover."

"A little? It's not my fault Cora really brought the good stuff."

Peter radiated glee at seeing Scott's discomfort. "Ah I see my niece broke into her brother's secret booze stash. Good morning, Cora. You look radiant this morning."

"Shut up, Uncle Peter. I feel like crap." She sat down across from the ladies. "Why don't you look worse for the wear, Jackson?"

"Because, unlike some people, I can hold my liquor. If you want to see what terrible looks like, let's wait for Stilinski. He had Cambia buying drinks for him and drank from your flask. He probably has his head in a toilet bowl this morning. Hopefully, we won't see him at all."
"So sorry we're late. Totally overslept." Isaac shuffled in behind Cora, looking like a kicked puppy, Danny right behind him.

"I told you we wouldn't be the last ones here. Where are the other three?"

"Don't you two look pleased with yourselves. Good night?" Lydia winked at Cora, sipping on her green tea and watched Isaac's face turn into a beet. "I'll take that as a yes. I'm glad someone in this group got action last night. Our stupid boyfriends wanted to share a suite. That wasn't at all a turn off. Nothing against you, Allison my dear, but your boyfriend is no fun to listen to. He really sounds like a puppy during sex with all that yipping." Scott visibly shrank in his chair, and Lydia returned to door watch. "I take that back, just about everyone apparently got laid last night." She said as Derek and Cambia walked through the door, both of them practically glowing and glued to each others sides. "Looks like you won't get to revel in Derek's misery." About damn time.

Isaac followed her gaze. "I told you all! Pay up everyone."

As they waited for the hostess. Derek kissed her temple, unable to hide the giant smile plastered across his face. The pair almost moved in sync in their approach to the table, a lightness surrounding both of them. Derek chose to hang his jacket over the back of the empty chair at the head of the table. He tried to pull out her chair, but she gave him a look that said 'don't even think about it', a look he promptly ignored.

Lydia tried to read into it too much that he had her sit at his right.

"So nice of you to join us, guys. You look well rested."

Both Derek and Cambia burst out laughing.

"I was being sarcastic. It's not like any of us are starving." Jackson huffed. "But glad to see you got your rifle cleaned by someone other than your right hand, and someone who isn't going to try and kill any of us. That's always nice." Lydia smacked him in the back of the head.

They both ignored him. Derek ordered a coffee; she ordered an orange juice.

"Obviously, Cam, you didn't sleep in your room last night. So did either of you see Stiles this morning?" Scott asked. "I'm worried about him."

Derek took a sip of his drink, trying not to give anything away. "Oh, he's doing just fine I'm sure. Some of us had longer nights than others."

"About that, do you think the room above us called the front desk on us? Because I am more than fairly certain they didn't close their balcony door, you know once we took our activities outside. God, I'd love to see their faces." She deadpanned.

"I love how sexually frank you can be, Cambia. It's nice to know another woman who is just as uninhibited as myself, and well as poor Erica." Lydia took another drink of her tea.

"I miss her." Isaac stared down at the table. "And Boyd."

The mood at the table turned sad just as Stiles finally arrived at breakfast, wearing the biggest shit-eating grin anyone had ever seen on him. "Fuck, you all look like kicked puppies." He stopped
behind Cambia's chair, wrapping his arms around her neck, hugging her from behind. "You, my Amazonian Queen, are the best fucking wingman/woman ever." He kissed the top of her head before taking the seat next to her, shedding his jacket.

"Nice hickey, Stiles," Cora laughed. "Or shall I say hickies."

"You should see the ones under my clothes." He winked.

Scott inhaled and promptly choked on his water. "Good night?" He squeaked.

"Fucking fantastic night. My honorary big sister over here has magical skills."

Before he could stop himself, Derek muttered, "You have no idea." He'd never felt his face flame that quickly or that much. His only response was to drop his head and rap it on the table several times.

"So... you finally got laid. Well done, Stilinski. You're no longer a virgin."

"Excuse me, Dickmore. I haven't been a virgin since New Year's Eve. I'll have you know- You know what I'm not even going to give you a response."

Scott groaned. "No, no. You gave me no details about New Year's or the time after that. Don't leave me hanging this time. What she... or he look like?"

Stiles selected his meal choice for the server. "Which one?" He was fairly certain he'd never seen heads snap towards him so fast in his life. "What?"

"Liar. You don't have the coordination or skill to pull that off."

"Listen you douchebag, just because you can't manage to make that happen, don't take it out on me. Apparently, my ADHD is good for something."

"He's lying. He has to be. I can't live in a world where Stiles fucking Stilinski not only has more partners than I have had, but also a threesome."

"And anyway, you're one short." His comment was lost to everyone in the group except for Cambia and Derek.

Derek reeled it in. "While you all can't have picked a more inappropriate place and time to have this argument, he's not lying, Jackson."

Stiles turned to him. "How do you..."

"Someone had to retrieve a change of clothes for Cam this morning. I'm frankly amazed you managed to comfortably fit that many people in a queen sized bed." Derek picked his meal, and after Cambia closed her eyes and pointed, ordered hers.

Jackson dropped his coffee cup and Scott looked like he was about to either be sick or jealous.

Cambia however looked almost as pleased as Stiles did. "When I said you had a 1 in 3 shot, I didn't actually think you would pick up all three. I mean, unless the lesbian came with to make-out with Groupie-Girl. She give good head? She looked like she would."
"No, that Lizzy girl couldn't get away from me fast enough. But oh, he did. Speaking of which, why didn't anyone tell me having no gag reflex was a legitimate superpower?"

Derek had chosen that moment to take a drink, actually inhaling the water, as his mind recalled the amazing blow job he received the night before. His face burned.

"Facile che tigre. Io preferisco te respirando." She clapped Derek on the back and turned her attention to Stiles. "Well congrats on your bisexual orgy. You stayed off my bed right and off any of my stuff?"

"Yes, by the way, thanks for your note. I would have needed to dig for extras."

"Well you seem to be walking okay today." Scott ordered his meal.

Stiles lowered his brows at him. "Why...why wouldn't I be? Do you have troubles walking after you and Allison sleep together?"

"Well...it's supposed to hurt right?"

"Why the hell should it?" He scowled.

Danny had the grace to look embarrassed for his alpha. "Not a question you just ask, Scott. I certainly don't want to know anything about your sexual preferences."

Stiles groaned. "For crying out loud! Why does everyone-- I swear with you all...might as well trade my Tom Seaver jersey for a Mike Piazza one."

Danny, who was apparently the only one in the group besides Derek to get the joke, chuckled. "Hell, if I'd known that, I would have paid you more attention, Stiles."

"Worried about incompatibility?" He winked.

"Touche, Stiles, touche."

Stiles smirked and didn't say another word about his adventures the night before. Best birthday ever.

Chapter End Notes

Translation for Italian used in chapter:
Facile che tigre. Io preferisco te respirando: Easy tiger. I prefer you breathing.

To clear up Stiles' comments at the end of the chapter for non-baseball fans: Tom Seaver, a pitcher, is the Mets' all time leader in wins among ERA other stats. Mike Piazza holds the MLB record for home runs for a catcher.
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Peter removed his carry-on bag from the overhead compartment, saying a silent prayer to the universe that his old college friend, and fellow werewolf, Paolo was waiting outside of customs like he promised. It had been almost eight years since he'd flown anywhere, and in the last year, well...he'd flown all over the place. As it was, he'd spent the better part of a day in transit, and had to leave from Reno. Ugh, he hated Reno.

He handed the customs agent his passport.

"Qualcosa da dichiarare, Signore Hale?"

"Uh..." He fumbled with the scrap of paper in his pocket, reading the phrases he jotted down. "Non ho niente da dic...dichi...No." The phrase left his mouth in such a mangled fashion, he hoped the man understood him. Leave it to him to have studied French.

"Don't worry, Signore. I speak English. Are you traveling for business or pleasure?"

"Pleasure."

"Enjoy your time in Italy." The man handed Peter back his passport.

Well that was painless.

"Pete!" A red haired man in a suit waved at him.

"Paolo, good to see you."

"Too long my friend, too long. Needless to say, I was surprised to hear you needed to come to Italy."

"Well, I'd love to say it was purely for pleasure, but I have to research."

"Research, eh? What of kind of studies."

"Studies of the lupine nature." He winked.

"Ah I see. It can wait until the car." They continued walking in silence out to Paolo's Mercedes. Once they were safely inside and driving away from Leonardo Da Vinci airport, Paolo glanced over at him. "So, what are you really doing here?"

"There is a new member to my pack."

"That's right, you have a pack again. How is it with your nephew as alpha?"

"We have two alphas, and no they are not an alpha couple. We consolidated. It was rocky at first, but the kid's grown into his role."
"That has to be rough, being beta to a pup."

"He's twenty-four, not that young. Anyway Paolo, there is a new packmate. She seems nice enough, very protective of one of our humans, practically adopting him as her little brother. So that's good."

"She a wolf?"

"Nope, she's many things, a wolf, a jaguar, several species of snakes, a bird, a cat, a deer, and who knows how many others."

"So a shifter? Why are you in Italy?"

"Well, she's naturalized citizen, in California by way of Genoa and Florence. She has this tattoo on her shoulder."

"Which shoulder?"

"Left. Does it matter?"

"It might. What does it look like?"

"A family crest."

"What shape?"

"Really all the questions? A curved hexagon. You know where the sides are curved so the points are more pronounced. It has an eagle on the left side and a stag on the right side, but there is a space in the middle like there should be something there. I just can't see it."

"Does it say anything, like a name?"

"No, just a slogan in Latin that I haven't been close enough to read."

Paolo sat in silence, deep in thought for almost ten minutes. "You know, Pete, I think I might be able to help you, but we will have to make a trip North. I will call my friends in one of the Venezia packs. We will take a trip tomorrow."

Peter sighed, feeling that his friend knew more than he was saying. "Why do I get the feeling you are keeping something from me?"

"Because it is not my story to tell."

* * * * *

"Ciao Paolo, come stai?"

"Bene Beatrice." He pointed to Peter. "This is my friend Peter, from America. We need your help. As a warning, he does not speak Italian."
"I see. Nice to meet you Peter. Are you....is he..."

"Lupo? Yes."

"Very well. How can I help?"

Peter stretched his neck. "I have packmate who is not a wolf, but is at least seven animals. She has this intricate tattoo on her shoulder. My alpha is completely enamored with this woman, and I just want to make sure he's safe. He seems to fall for ladies who are bad news"

She furrowed her brows. "I will see what I can do. I'll be right back." She left the room.

"Seems nice." Peter said.

"Oh she's nice. She's very nice. I should know."

He smacked himself in the forehead. "Not what I meant."

"So your nephew likes this woman? Well aren't you the good beta."

"Like...actually I think it's stronger than that. She seems to make him happy. I mean, the kid is laughing and smiling again, but I don't know. Lord knows he needs that."

Beatrice smiled when she walked back into the room. "Good news, Gentlemen. We are going to take a short trip. We have been granted an audience with the Vicarius of the local Nido."

Peter's lip curled in confusion. "What is a nido?"

"Nest."

"She's not a vampire."

"No, no, no, no. We have packs. They have nests. Follow me boys."

If the smug grin on Paolo's face was any indicator, Peter was in for quite the lesson in Venice.

* * * * *

Suffice it to say, the car ride to the nest or whatever the hell they called it, was well, awkward, with Paolo and Beatrice forgetting he existed in the back seat. The three of them pulled up to a palatial villa somewhere outside Venice.

"Um not to interrupt the little love fest you two are spouting up there, but where are we?"

"Mira." Using the ornate knocker, Beatrice rapped on the heavy front door.
Peter stood with bated breath as the door opened to reveal a man, around his age. The man smiled warmly. "You must be Beatrice. I must say, your voice does your face no justice." He complimented, surprisingly, in English.

"Grazie."

"Please come in. Beatrice tells me you are American, Pietro. So, I will apologize for my English errors." He led them inside the home and upstairs to the library. "Can I get any of you a drink?" He gestured to a couple carafes on a nearby table. "I am sorry to say it is not of the werewolf variety. So it will only taste good."

"I would love a glass of that red." Beatrice smiled.

"Me too."

"And you Pietro?"

"I'm not really a wine drinker. Is that whiskey in the other bottle?"

"Stravecchio." He noticed Peter's raised brow. "Brandy. Would you like some?"

"Yes, please."

He passed out their drinks. "Have a seat. I am Niccolo Cavallo. I am the Vicarius for the Nido of Regio Decima, which means second in command of the Tenth District. That comprises the regions of Veneto and Friuli-Venezia Giulia. My father, Antonio, is our Maximus, which for you wolves is alpha. Beatrice tells me, you have a packmate who can change into other animals. When she changes, does she wear the skins of animals?"

"No. I'm familiar with shamans."

"You say she has a tattoo? Can you describe it for me?" Niccolo asked, but his face already looked like he had an inkling what Peter would say.

"It's a crest made of a curved hexagon. There is an eagle on the left and a stag on the right. In the middle, well slightly above middle, it's blank. You know, like there should be something there but isn't. I only say that, because there is this floating crown thing, with nothing under it. There's some writing in Latin, but I can't read it."

Niccolo nodded. "Mutatio nos elegia. That is our axiom. It means 'Change chose us'. She's one of us, a Mutaformi. How many animals?"

"At least eleven."

The man's eyes widened. "At least? Usually we have our True Form, our Vero Corpo, the Vero Corpo of each of our parents and the form of whatever bloodline Corpi they have. Maybe we will have one more, but even that is uncommon. You say she has eleven? Have you seen them?"

"Yes, a jaguar, wolf, deer, cat, some kind of bird, a sturgeon, and five types of snakes."

"That is amazing. It takes an amazing amount of control or boredom, because the most forms I have seen is seven. That is my father. The most we've ever recorded is thirteen, in 1791."

"What does that mean?"

"She is powerful. Mutaformi are supernatural just like you, Pietro, but our powers are driven by a
magic. We are born with it, like born wolves are. We cannot bite someone and give them the power. You have a packmate you do not trust?"

"I don't understand."

"Why would you not ask her this?"

"Well, long story short, my nephew, one of my pack's alphas, is practically in love with her and damn near attached at the hip. Let's just say, his track record with women is... abysmal. He has a knack for falling for the crazies, and I mean crazy with a capital K. We're talking a psycho huntress who manipulated a sixteen year old boy, only to burn down our family home, with most of us trapped inside, killing eleven of our pack. Then, oh get this, he decides to date the English teacher of his betas. Well that worked out well until she started sacrificing people to the threefold death. Turns out she was an evil druid hell bent on destroying an alpha pack. The new woman, she seems like a great person. Funny, albeit feisty, protective...I just want to make sure my idiot nephew doesn't get his pack killed, again, because I don't think I can cheat death for a third time. Is she dangerous?"

"No more than you are. We are, as I am sure she told you, in complete control of our mental faculties as animals. If she hurts some in animal form, she knows what she is doing and chooses to do so."

"So Mutaformi, what is that?"

"A portmanteau of mutazione, or mutating, and forma, or shape. Mutating shapes. We are shape shifters, but ancient ones."

"She's ancient?"

"No. I meant the Mutaformi are an ancient species from the Romans. That tattoo is not a tattoo. It is her Marca. How we trace family lineage. We each get one on the day we turn eighteen."

"That's great, my alpha has one too."

"No, I do not mean we go to a shop to have it done. It just shows up. It is magic just like our gift. The left side is paternal lineage, the right, maternal. The Middle is for self. May I show you mine?"

He waited for everyone to nod, before removing his shirt. He glanced over his shoulder. "See? My left side is a horse and the right a dog. Horse is from the original Equus Nidus, and the dog, Canis. We call our groups Nido, or nest from the Latin. You say she has an eagle and stag. Then you have an Aquila. The eagle was very important to the Romans. The Aquila was the first Mutaformi shape. You see, each Nido can have members from many Corpi. Our Nido has several, not just horse and dog. We have wolf, a couple fish, and a lynx. We are mostly related in my Nido, but every child's Vero Corpo can be a different animal from their parent's. Myself, I'm a monkey, specifically a baboon, but I'm still a Cavallo, or horse. The stag on her tattoo is from Cervus, deer. So if she has a Muttaforma child, that child's Marca would have an eagle on the right side, and whatever the father is. Even if the father is not a Mutaforma himself. When that happens, the Marca contains the rendering of a person. What color is the background?"

"Does that matter?"

"Of course. Each Regio has its own color. See how mine is Indigo? What color is hers?"

"Purple, and there is a blue chevron behind the animals and also a golden spear and sickle."

Niccolo's eyebrows shot up. "No. That can't be."

"Why not?"
"Because that particular Nido came from Sextus Regio. They were the only Nido in Firenze. The chevron, spear and sickle were their logo. That Nido was wiped out twenty-two years ago, which was unfortunate as they were the oldest Nido left. They had been around since the Etruscans and had always had an Aquila bloodline as their Maximus. A lot of history was lost when they fell. Their last Maximus, Luciano Aquila and his whole family were supposedly wiped out."

"Apparently?"

He picked up a tablet off the desk, tapping open a program. "Let's see here. Aquila father, Cervi mother of the Sixth District, Firenze..."

"What are you doing?"

Niccolo rolled his eyes. "I'm looking her up."

"You have a directory?"

"Well yes, obviously. It is useful when traveling throughout the country. Plus there are other Mutaforni who have emigrated throughout Europe. Anytime a child earns their Marca, one of our Nidi usually gets a call. So we can update this database. We are nothing if we do not preserve our history. You wolves have your protocol; we have ours." He continued swiping through records. "How old is this woman?"

"Twenty-four, almost twenty-five."

The room was silent while the man searched. "I restate my previous comment that we thought the entire Nido in Firenze was wiped out. I give you the granddaughter of Luciano Aquila, Elianna Chiara Aquila-Cervini, born in Firenze on 12/15/1990."

"Elianna? She's changed her name since then. Bad boyfriend. Her name is now Cambia." The other three chuckled. "What?"

"That comes from the Italian verb cambiare, to change. It is just funny that is all, on the nose as you would say." He handed the tablet to Peter. "You can see her family lineage here." His finger tapped the screen. "Her mother, Alessandra Cervini, belonged to a Nido of the Tertius Regio, that is third, before marrying Francesco Aquila in 1986."

Peter continued reading through hundreds of years of her lineage. "Her parents died when she was sixteen on New Year's Eve. I don't know if you want to update it or not. Where did you manage to find all this information?"

"Let us just say the first members of our species were very good record keepers, and that practice has been maintained throughout the generations. Isolated from the elements, stone and metal carvings hold up quite well." Suddenly, he remembered something Peter had said. "Wait, you said there is a crown?"

"Yes."

"Then Elianna is a Maxima. She could take control of her own Nido, if she wanted to."

"Because her whole family died?"

"No. Unlike wolves, we cannot kill an Alpha to take their power, nor can we inherit it. You are born into it. What does little Elianna look like now? She was the most adorable baby. I remember her parents and grandfather visiting when I was about twelve."
He pulled out his phone to show Niccolo a photo from Stiles' birthday dinner. "That's my pack. The kid in the back, the tan one is Scott, he's a True Alpha, lionhearted, but a little on the dense side. Derek, my nephew, regular Alpha, is the guy with the scowl, smart but the shoot first ask questions later kind of guy."

Beatrice leaned over Niccolo's shoulder. "He's very handsome."

Peter rolled his eyes. "Ladies always think that."

"Is he unhappy?"

"Yes, but also that's just his face. Cambia, or Elianna, is the woman sitting across from him."

"She looks her mother, but with a little lighter skin."

A question popped into Peter's head. "What determines someone's Vero Corpo?"

"Their personality, just the very essence of them as people. As a child, I was very sociable and curious, but also respectful and affectionate. Her father, a tiger, I remember was confident and strong, but curious; he had gravitas. When he entered a room, you noticed him. Her mother, was something else entirely, a stoat. She was flirtatious, beautiful, an outstanding poker player who could get her way like that. He snapped his fingers.

"What would you say is the most coveted Vero Corpo?"

"That is easy. A lion. They are confident, strong, generous, but they command respect and attention. They are protective with a sense of territory, very loyal."

"Sounds like a good thing to be."

"It is, very much so. We have not seen a Leo Vero Corpo in fifty years."

"What is the most uncommon form?"

"Some of the smaller animals do not come around much. There are not many rats or rabbits, though none of our historians can figure out why. For the larger animals, I will say it is highly uncommon to have one's Corpo as a bear. We have not seen one of those since," he did a quick search on his tablet, "1783. They tend to be quite the force to reckon with. Great soldiers, but hard to contain when they go for revenge. As mythology shows, there is a reason the Berserkers chose bears, and it was not because they are cuddly."

"That is quite rare." Peter read through the tablet some more until he found a rendering of what appeared to be a Marca used for an illustration for a large piece of text. "What is this?"

"Leggenda Del Doppio Corpi. It's a folktale. No one has ever been marked with more than one Vero Corpo. In theory it could happen, but we have never seen it. That would be raw power, but all that power would be almost impossible to contain. The control it would take would be astonishing. It is a shame you do not know Elianna's Vero Corpo. I would really like to know so I can update our records. You should give her my contact information."

"I don't think she'd like that. She doesn't even know I'm here."

"Well keep my info anyway."

Peter sighed. "I will. So since she's not evil, or any more so than anyone else is, are there weaknesses
other than the not healing as fast as wolves, that we should know about?"

"You mean like Wolfsbane?"

"Exactly."

"Delfinio. I'm sorry, I don't know the English word for it. Do either of you?"

Beatrice's brows furrowed as she thought. "Larkspur."

"What does that do?"

He noticed Niccolo's expression darken. "Believe it or not, our stupid town gets attacked by all kinds of supernatural creatures kanimas, witches, and even fairies, not to mention those that hunt them. Knowing what weapons they might use, helps save our lives. I don't plan on killing her. Just because I'm here gaining information, it doesn't mean I want to hurt her. I actually like her; she seems good for my nephew. It would be nice to know how to recognize if she's been hurt by the stuff" 

"It forces our animal out of us. The real problem is guisquiamo. That's henbane. It causes vivid hallucination, and they are not pleasant. I know of many Mutaformi who have committed suicide to stop the hallucinations. One man took a hammer to his head to drive out visions of his dead wife. In high enough quantities convulsions and fever."

"What about like what Mountain Ash does to most supernatural creatures?"

"Like prevent you from crossing? Sap of the Leccio tree...um that's..."

Paolo clarified. "Holm Oak or Ilex."

"When do your forms start to manifest?"

"For Maximi? Usually about three years old. The rest around age six."

"Any antidote?"

"Time and a way to keep them from killing themselves. As a recommendation, if I might, perhaps you wolves would be better served with a directory such as this one. For as old a species as you are, I never could understand why you did not keep in depth records."

"Hard to do that when hunters constantly want to kill you." Peter said through clenched jaw. This was a lot of information to take in. However, he knew the information would prove useful with the little hunter problem they found themselves facing. For once, Peter was actually helping the pack without an ulterior motive. Or at least without one that was for his sole benefit. It felt weird, and he wasn't sure he liked that.

Chapter End Notes

Tried my hand at original mythology here. Hope it's clear. Also, I'm considering splitting this story into two parts, making it part of a series. Feedback on that idea would be appreciated.
Italian used in this chapter:

Qualcosa da dichiarare- Anything to declare? (For customs)
Non ho niente da dichiarare- I have nothing to declare.
Come stai?- How are you?
Nido- Nest (pl. nidi)
Leggenda Del Doppio Corpi- Legend of the two bodies

Latin:
Vicarius- Deputy, successor, second
Maximus- highest (Used in this sense for their version of Alpha)
Regio- district, region
Mutatio nos elegia.- Change chose us
It's Rhyme Time (And That Can't Be Good)!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

In the middle of carrying his groceries out of the market to Roscoe, Stiles saw the grocery bag of nearby man about his age rip open, spilling the contents onto the ground of the parking aisle. His mother instilled in him a strong desire to help, and he was sure he’d have made a good Boy Scout if he had the attention span for it. *Curse ye Gods! I could be an expert at woodcarving.*

Stiles hurried over to help the young man pick up his groceries, well the salvageable ones anyway. He was pretty certain the eggs were beyond saving. Why was it always the bag with the eggs?

Unfortunately, a driver wailed on his horn, sticking his head out the window to yell at them to move. "Come on dumbass! Get the hell out of the way! Some of us have more important things to do than to wait for some clumsy idiot to clean up his groceries.

Stiles glared at the man. *Look at this fucking asshole.* "What crawled up your ass and died, Cabrão? You ever hear of a thing called human decency? Try it sometimes, cause karma sucks for people like you!"

"Go to hell, kid!"

"Chupa-mos! Put your little BMW in reverse and go harass someone else!" He crouched down and began moving his own groceries around in the bags so he would be able to free a bag for the young man. However, he purposely did so at a snail's pace."Some people are such jerks."

"I don't have time for you two to talk while you pick shit up!" The man wailed on the horn again.

Stiles stood up. "Go blow it out your ass!" His words must have finally got through to him, because the man backed into an empty space and turned around, driving out the other end of the aisle. "Bet you feel pretty stupid yelling at me when you had that option all along, Dickwad!" Once more, he knelt down. "Here," he handed him the empty bag, "you can have this one. It's reusable so it's pretty strong. You think you can get everything to fit in this one?"

"You didn't have to do that, but yes I think I can manage." He averted his eyes, playing coy.

When he smiled at him, Stiles saw a warmth in his hazel eyes. *Huh, your eyes kind of look like Derek's, and wow, you are seriously attractive. God, I love blonde guys.* He was pretty sure he sighed out loud, and for a moment he contemplated asking for a phone number.

Their fingers brushed together as the young man took the bag from him; he flinched, his eyes glazing over. "You're very kind for one who runs with wolves."

Stiles lowered his brows at him. "How do you know that?"

"So unappreciated by your Lycan friends. You feel so fragile, always wondering what it would like to be one, without having the courage to accept it."

"I have courage! I just don't want the bite. I like being me, thank you very much."
He grabbed Stiles' wrist.

"What are you doing?" Stiles asked, watching in horror as his warm blonde locks grew, falling around his face in frosty blue curtains.

"Allowing you to see." A smirk spreading across his face, his eyes turned a frosted shade of opaque blue, the iris and pupil disappearing into a sea of ocular snow, as he began to chant

"A thirst to run with wolves full speed
Be it as cat, or bear, or stag, or steed.
I'll grant you the power of which you seek,
Effects of this shall last a week.
No longer shall you feel the least
Take a deep breath, unleash the beast."

He blew a handful of green powder in Stiles' face.

Coughing, he fanned the air in front of his face, trying to clear his field of vision. "Hey! What in the hell?" He stared at the empty space in front of him, suddenly very glad he didn't try flirting with the man who had vanished into the aether. Anxiety growing by the second, he snatched up his groceries, secured them in his jeep and sped towards his house, petrified of what was to come. Fucking witches!

Lydia and Allison sauntered through the mall, both carrying sacks of new clothes in their hands. "I tell you what, there is nothing as cathartic as shopping to get over a bad fight, which, mind you, you still haven't told me about."

Allison sighed, taking a drink of her smoothie. "I don't even know what started it, but while we were yelling, Scott lost control and shifted. He didn't hurt me; hell he didn't even touch me, but I may have said something things that were uncalled for."

"May have?" Lydia raised an incredulous eyebrow.

"Okay, so I called him a mindless beast. That just made things worse, because he started yelling that I have no idea what he goes through sometimes just to keep from shifting, knowing that any moment some hunters, who are not friendly could come to kill him. It was in the heat of the moment, and I tried to apologize right away, but you know Scott. He wears his heart on his sleeve."

"Well, he's right. I mean, at least you have the skills to fight him off. I just find dead bodies. Some gift, well that, and apparently resurrect annoying members of Derek's family."

"Pretty sure all them are annoying. I don't think any of them are immune to it."

Lydia laughed. "You know, Derek really isn't that bad. He just has poor judgment and a lot of baggage."

"I dare you to say that again after he bites your mother."

"Would you rather he have let her kill Scott? Or just killed her outright. She did chose to kill herself"
rather than be a werewolf. Who knows, she could have made an even better werewolf. Personally, I think your mom would have been a badass werewolf. And anyway, Scott was still a kid when she tried to kill him. He hadn't hurt anyone, still hasn't. I've thought about this for a long time when I finally learned the truth about everyone. I know she broke the code an all, but remember, your aunt killed children who were completely innocent. Part of me thinks, Derek probably saw part of her in your mother that night. Stress and trauma triggers can be fickle things."

Allison glared at her. "He doesn't need anyone to put themselves in his shoes or make excuses for the things he's done."

She raised a hand in surrender. "Fine, he's a horrible monster who did a terrible thing preventing your mother from choking your boyfriend to death with a fatal cloud of Wolfsbane. Now can we please go look for shoes?"

In front of them, a couple young men ran into a woman as they walked past her, knocking her to the ground.

"You could say excuse me!" Lydia called after them, her hands on her hips. Neither of them turned around.

Allison extended a hand to help the woman to her feet. "Are you okay?"

"Kids these days. Some of them are so rude." Still holding onto Allison, she grabbed Lydia's wrist. "What do we have here? A wailing woman and silver soldier?"

Lydia's eyes widened. "How do you know what we are?"

"You and I, young Banshee, are not so unalike. I bet you wish your talents were more useful sometimes. And you, huntress, you could use some empathy for our kind."

"What do you mean? I feel horrible that Lydia keeps finding dead bodies and hearing things no one else can. People think she's crazy."

"Let me correct myself, the supernatural kind." Her eyes frosted over, her blonde hair turning a similar icy shade.

"You can feel when death is near
Words unspoken only you can hear
An unappreciated gift for the one who shrieks
To know even more for just one week
No longer a knack for bodies found
See those below, now above the ground."

Lydia recoiled, but just as she did so, the woman turned to Allison.

"A code your line chose to enforce
Still some of blood showed no remorse
So take a deep breath and you will feel
An enemy our kind know is very real.
A week to experience, a week to learn
What it is to run, and hide, and fear, and burn."

She blew a handful of green powder in their faces. Before either Allison, or Lydia could react, the
woman was gone, leaving the two young woman baffled.

"What the hell was that about?"

Lydia pursed her lips. "No idea, but whatever it was, it tastes like stale beer."

*   *   *   *   *

Danny loaded his younger siblings into his car. "Mom and Dad won't be home for a little bit. Do you guys want to stop and get ice cream on the way home?"

"Any kind we want?" His eleven-year-old brother, Kevin, asked.

"Whatever you want, Kiddo." He smiled and drove them all to Dairy Queen. "Go decide what you want. I'm right behind you." He watched as his nine-year-old sister, Nicole, tripped over her feet and careened into a blonde man about Peter's age, sending both of them to the ground. Nicole began crying, clutching her bloody knee. "I'm so sorry, Sir. Are you all right?"

"It's fine."

"Hey, Nikki, how about you?"

"Danny, it hurts. I'm bleeding. See?"

He felt his stomach drop. You'd think spending all that time around werewolves, that his aversion to blood would dissipate. Nope. Even Stiles had moved past that for the most part (Though particularly gruesome things still did a number on the guy). "Kevin, can you get some napkins for me?" Nausea washed through his body.

"Here, let me." The man took the napkins from Kevin, using them to wipe Nicole's wound clean. "Oh it's not too bad. Just a bad scrape." He pulled a bandage from his backpack, securing it over the girl's knee. "There we are." He looked over at Danny, and shook his head. "Try putting your head between your knees. You look like you're going to pass out."

"That's Danny, our big brother. He's a big baby when it comes to blood." Kevin laughed.

"Yeah," Nicole sniffled. "He won't watch zombie movies with us because he hates blood and guts, and all that stuff."

The man placed a wet napkin on the back of Danny's neck, flinching slightly when his fingers touched the shaken man's skin. "What a shame you don't have the stomach for it."

Danny looked over at him to see only icy white eyes staring back at him; where cropped blonde curls had been before, were now long frosty blue locks. "What?" Just given the change in the man's appearance, he had a bad feeling about what would come next

Leaning forward, so that his lips were right up against Danny's ear, he whispered:

"There is a power you possess
To help those in pain and in duress.
To keep the skill a week displayed,
And have forever powers which cannot fade,
For the learning curve is very great,
Just say the words, "I accept my fate."

He blew a mysterious green powder in his face.

As her brother coughed, Nicole asked. "What's that stuff?" She looked around only to find the man gone. "Where'd he go?"

* * * * *

Cambia was in the process of restocking the bar's supply of a few alcohols, when she heard someone sit down. "Be right with you." She set a bottle each of Tanqueray, Grey Goose, and 1800 Resposado up on the shelf, before walking over to the blonde woman. "Good afternoon, what can I get for you?"

The woman looked up from her menu. "I'll have the double bacon cheeseburger, and an MGD 64."

Cambia groaned silently. Way to be a walking contradiction lady. "Sure thing. Do you want a short or tall?"

"Short please."

"Coming right up." She turned and punched the order into the system.

"That's a pretty tattoo."

She looked over her shoulder. "Oh thanks."

"Is it like your family crest or something?"

"Or something, yeah." She passed the beer across the bar and ducked into the cellar to bring up a fresh keg. On her way back up, she could feel the woman's gaze on her. She fought back the sense of dread building in her stomach. Either this woman was going to ask her out, which she could politely decline, or she was up to something. Cambia felt it was probably the latter. Call it animal instincts.

"I thought bars hooked up the kegs in the basement."

"We have an under the counter cooling system." As she started to switch over the taps, the way the woman watched her unnerved her; it made her hair stand on end.

"How heavy is a full keg?"

She slid the keg from the dolly, lifting it into the cooler, and pushed it into place. "On average, about 160 pounds."

"Well then you must be very strong." She made eyes at her.
Cambia's boss walked in. "You kidding? Cambia here is built like an MMA fighter."

"There's a good reason for that. I trained in MMA."

"Yeah, well I'm pretty sure she could carry the kegs up over a shoulder."

"No, Gary. I can't do that. Just because I carried that shitfaced guy to his drunk bus last week, doesn't mean I can carry a keg that way." She deflected, because, yes, she absolutely could do that, but no need to draw more attention to her strength.

"That guy had to weigh two hundred pounds easy."

"That's why they call it the fireman carry, better distribution of weight." She turned to the woman. "How's your burger?"

"Good thank you."

Gary collected the cash for the evening deposit. "See you next week."

"Enjoy vacation, Gary."

The woman watched him as he left. "Can I get my check?"

"Sure." Once Cambia handed the bill to her, the woman dug through her wallet.

"Oh I am so embarrassed; I am short a couple dollars. You ever have one of those bad days and just need to treat yourself, even if you really shouldn't?"

Cambia nodded, giving her a sympathetic smile. "It's okay. I got you covered."

"Oh thank you."

The woman brushed her wrist as she handed over her payment. A jolt of electricity coursed through Cambia's veins, white hot, like lightning. "Excuse me?"

"Well aren't you an unusual creature. It's been a while since I've come across an ancient one like you." As she tilted her head to the side, her eyes turned frosty blue, skin grew ashen almost grey, and her otherwise blonde hair looked like winter. She grabbed Cambia's arm.

"Too many sides too long denied,
Presents a soul with great divide.
To fix you up and make you whole
Spend a week with no control.
Only when your ferine side has been released
Can you become a queen of beasts."

Cambia coughed violently at the green powder blown in her face. The woman, of course, had vanished by the time the air cleared. Cambia didn't need to think twice about what had just happened, because she understood what the words meant, and they terrified her.
Cliffhanger!

Just a heads up (and quick thanks to the new subscribers, kudos, and bookmarks), I will be taking a hiatus on this story for a couple weeks so I can make a dent on the Teen Wolf Zombie Apocalypse AU I've been trying to get ready to post for Halloween (If anyone is interested in that)

Translation for Portuguese:
Cabrão- lit. cuckold, but used in practical usage to mean asshole (also means male goat). Chupa-mos- Suck it/Suck my balls
Halfway between the grocery store and his house, Stiles felt an itch on his scalp, just above his ears. The sensation was unlike any he'd had before; it felt like electricity or hell, bugs even, crawling under his skin. When the tingling moved from the top of his head to the bridge of his nose, his mind went immediately to the dust the man had blown in his face.

"What in the hell was in that powder?" Worried about a possible allergic reaction, he thought checking for hives was a pretty good idea. When he looked in the rear-view mirror, what he saw almost made him crash the Jeep. He'd never slammed on the brakes harder in his life.

Two russet colored ears had replaced his own. They were slightly rounded with tufts of hair sticking up off the top of them. Where his own, slightly upturned nose used to be, there was now a triangular pink one with the same tawny fur covering the bridge. Long whiskers protruded from out the sides. His mouth hung open for a few seconds. "That asshole! That overly attractive dickwad! After I was nice to him, he turns me into a bobcat! The fuck?"

After a faster than legal drive home, he jumped out of the Jeep, his hood pulled down tightly over his head, forgetting about the bags of food. "Oh shit! Oh shit! This can't be happening. Fuck!" He rapped the back of his head on the inside of the front door.

"Language!"

"Dad! I didn't know you were home. The driveway was empty."

"Parrish dropped me off. Cruiser's getting a tune-up. Now, what has you so worked up?" John called from the kitchen.

"It's nothing." He tried sneaking towards the stairs, but stopped halfway, when he felt a burning from the base of his spine. At that point, he abandoned a stealthy retreat to his room and bolted up the stairs, tripping on the top step and crashing to the floor. "Ah fuck." He groaned from where he landed. His wrist throbbed, but he picked himself up and ran into the bathroom.

Downstairs, John shook his head at his clumsy son, wondering what had him out of sorts this time. All of the sudden, a loud shriek carried through the floor.

"I have a tail?! You've got to be fucking kidding me! What kind of sick game is this?"

He heard the bathroom door fly open and then Stiles' bedroom slam shut not even a moment later.

In his room, Stiles dug through his drawers for a pair of sweatpants and boxers he wasn't particularly attached to. After a quick hack job to make room for his unwelcome new appendage, he tried to make sense of everything, but felt a panic rising in his throat. His tail, the traitorous bastard, kept twitching, and every time he turned around, he knocked stuff over. "Dad!"

He hurried downstairs where he gave his father a quick run-through (Leaving out the minor detail of
how he found the man seriously hot and almost asked him for his number), in which John could not stop laughing. Once finished, he finally had the nerve to ask, "So how do I look? Do I make a good bobcat?"

John turned him around to see the tail. "Son, I don't think you're a bobcat."

"What? You think maybe a lio? I mean, the fur is red not blonde, but-

"What did this witch or whatever he was say to you?"

"Something about unleashing my inner beast, spirit animal or whatever."

"Stiles, in no world is your spirit animal a lion."

He looked insulted. "What are you talking about? I'm brave and wise!"

"I don't contest that. It's just, well..." John went out to the garage to grab a handheld mirror he sometimes used for car projects. "See?" He moved his son in front of the hall mirror and gave him the mirror so he could see behind him.

Stiles stared at the tail, the same russet color as his ears, long and puffy. His eyes bugged out of his head. "A squirrel! I'm a fucking squirrel? I couldn't be something intimidating like a tiger, something that could protect itself. No! My goddamned spirit animal is a rodent! Well doesn't that just sum up the story of my life! I spent the majority of my life a skinny, spastic kid of average height, and now, when I finally seemed to hit that growth spurt I was always promised...now...I'm a six one-" His eyes finally fell on his arm. "Oh my god! Look at my arm!"

John inspected his son's arm. "Yeah, that's broken. We should get it taken care of."

"How? I have a tail!" He grabbed his phone and called Derek.

A car screeched to a stop outside the den. Lydia jumped out, running blindly towards the house, her hands clamped tightly over her eyes.

"Lydia wait!" Allison cried with tears streaming down her face. "Wait! I can't face him. I can't do-"

"No, no, no, no! I am not staying out here! There are spirits everywhere! The house is new; there are no ghosts in there." She fumbled with the key locker.

"That's only for emergencies."

"Well this constitutes as one! If I see one more dead person, I'm gonna lose it. I saw Erica!" She turned around to snap at her weeping friend only to several spirits loitering around the home. She need only look at their dark hair and light eyes to know they were Hales. "Derek! Let us in! Hurry please! Please!" She knocked frantically. "I can't get the key out."

A few seconds later, the door opened revealing Derek, a towel tied around his waist, with shampoo
still in his hair.

"Um." Lydia stared at him.

"Lydia, what is it?" He glared at her.

"Let us in."

He quirked an eyebrow. "What's wrong with Allison?" He could deal with frantic, terrified, and irrational people. Crying on the other hand... Yeah he couldn't handle crying. Lydia pushed him out of the way before drawing all of the curtains on the first floor. She took up residence on the stairs.

"What in the hell is going on?"

"I see dead people everywhere!"

"Like dead bodies piling up?"

"No. Ghosts."

"That's really... umph!" He grunted as Allison enveloped him in a tight embrace, which was, needless to say, awkward. One, she didn't like him, and two, the only piece of clothing he wore at the moment was a towel. "What's going on?"

"I'm so sorry. I didn't understand. How could my family do that to yours? Those children? I can feel the flames on my face."

He said nothing, just retreated up the stairs to finish his shower.

"No, come back! I have more to apologize for!"

Ten minutes later, he returned, freshly showered and dressed, tossing his greasy work coveralls into the wash. On the kitchen counter, his phone rang filling the room with the sounds of "Seven Nation Army." When he answered, he was met by a hysterical Stiles.

"About time you answer your damn phone! We have a big problem!"

"Hi Stiles. Girls or guys this time?"

"Very funny, asshole!"

Derek held the phone away from his ear as his best friend shouted through the line.

"Are you even listening to me? I have a fucking tail, Derek, ears, and this little pink nose... I'm a giant rodent!"

"So you've been turned into an R.U.S."

"This is not a fucking joke, man! I helped him with him groceries, and he repays me by turning me into a seventy-three inch tall squirrel! My tail is one fluffy appendage of annoying. So far, I've broken two vases, knocked a coffee mug off the counter, shut it in the bathroom door, and hit my dad in the face. Plus, I tripped on the stairs, and I'm pretty sure I broke my arm. But fuck if I can go to the hospital, because I have a six foot long fucking tail!"
He set the phone down on the counter and turned on speaker phone. "So what you're saying is... you have a tail?" He couldn't help it; the situation just screamed sarcasm required.

"Fuck you, Derek! My arm is swollen and purple. It fucking hurts, and I just want medical treatment!" He whimpered.

"How did you wind-up?"

"A witch or something. He blew this green powdery shit in my face, and before you say I'm hallucinating, my dad was here. He's seen the ridiculous monstrosity I have to call a tail. But, he got called in on a ten car pile up over near 32. So can you please come get me before I pass out from the pain?"

"Did he say green powder?" Allison sobbed. "That happened to us too."

"Okay Stiles, stay put. We'll come get you. Umph! Would you stop hugging me Allison? I get it; you're sorry for what your family did, but I swear, if you hug me one more time, I'm duct taping your arms down!" He grabbed his phone and keys and walked out the door to the garage, Allison still trying to hug him.

* * * * *

In the car, Lydia forewent the safety of a seat belt, choosing instead to lie down in the cargo area of the SUV.

"What are you doing?"

"Derek, without saying too much and depressing you further, just know that surrounding this car, I can see twenty-two ghosts. There is no way I am looking out the window."

Not even halfway to Stiles', his phone rang. "Stiles would you just hold on. I get it that your arm is broken. I'm on my way over." He snapped without looking at the I.D.

"Stiles? Sorry, this is Derek, Cam's boyfriend, right?" The woman's voice on the line asked.

"Yes. Something I can help you with?"

"She's having an allergic reaction and needs a ride home."

"Allergic reaction? Life threatening?"

"No, she seems fine, but said she has really bad hives and is a lot of pain. She's locked herself in a bathroom stall. I think maybe she's thrown up a couple times too."

"Can you put the phone on speaker?" He heard rustling on the other end of the line.
"Derek?"

"Dolcezza, how bad of pain are you in?"

"Does it matter?"

"Well I am on my way to pick up Stiles. He broke his arm and is stuck at home in pretty awful pain. Can you wait for me to get him, and then I can swing by and get you?"

"Yeah."

"What did you eat that caused the allergy?" He listened as she spoke with her co-worker on the other end of the line

"Strange question, Kendra. What language did you learn in school?"

"German why?"

"So no Spanish or Italian?"

"No."

"Good, Derek?" She spoke into the receiver

"Yeah."

She took a deep breath before continuing. "Un po strega ha portata via il mio controllo."

"What?"

"Forzata il mio cambiamento."

"Total change?"

"No, sono bloccata a metà."

"Which form?"

"Serpe."

"How bad?"

"Zanne, lingua biforca, e squame sul mia viso. Just come get me, Derek!"

The line went dead as the call disconnected.

"Why did witches attack? Were you and Allison rude to yours?"

"No, the opposite of rude." Lydia piped up from the trunk.

"That's what Stiles was saying. Call Danny."

"Why?"

"Because so far, the only people the witches cursed have been our non-wolves." Before Lydia could even dial, his phone rang again. "Hello?"
"Derek! I'm apparently some magic dude or something. So far, I've found four people with undiagnosed cancer, told one woman she needed her inhaler dosage upped, and recommended a plant for arthritis."

"Danny?"

"I don't like medical shit."

"Stay where you are. It was witches. They got all our humans...well sort of humans. I'll come and get you."

"You can't. I'm babysitting until my mom is home from work."

"Well try not to get into trouble."

"Derek, I'm pretty sure my little sister has diabetes! How am I going to explain that to my parents?"

"Look-up the symptoms and claim you've witnessed them. Stay put. Bye Danny."

Allison's phone rang.

"Oh what now?" He grumbled.

She answered crying. "Scott?" Pause. "Because my family did horrible things. I feel Derek's hatred and anguish and-"

Derek snatched the phone from her hands. "Scott, get your ass to Deaton's. Why is your girlfriend in my car? That's the first thing you want to know? Witches, that's why. They're after our humans. Where are you now? Good, stay there, because I'm dropping Allison off with you." Derek winced as Scott yelled in his ear. "Yes, I know I'm not your damn alpha. Since I am the only one of the two of us who has even the slightest idea what's going on, you should listen to me. Why? Because your girlfriend keeps hugging me and crying while she apologizes non-stop! I can't deal with it anymore!" He abruptly ended the call.

Several minutes later, Derek screeched to a halt at the gas station, practically pushing Allison out of the car.

"What am I supposed to do with her?"

"She's your girlfriend, not my problem, while my girlfriend is locked in a bathroom stall stuck halfway between snake and animal!"

Allison latched tightly onto Derek's hand. "I felt her burn. She screamed; she hurt the most. How could my aunt burn a baby?"

He shook her hand free like it was a hot coal. "Get her away from me, Scott." His growl rumbled in his chest.

"I don't understand why you're so angry." He whined.

"Man up and grow a set! Do you think I want to hear how my nine year old sister suffered the worst as she burned alive? Or do you still think the whole family deserved it?" He pointed angrily at Allison. "I don't care that she's sorry. It doesn't bring any of them back!" He pulled the door shut and sped to Stiles, fuming, struggling to remember the coping techniques he'd been working on with his therapist.
To Derek’s surprise, when he arrived at the Stilinski-McCall house, the garage door was open, which he figured was on purpose, so he pulled the car on in. "Be right back, Lydia. I would stay down. We're at Stiles' house. You might see his mom's ghost. If you do, don't tell him."

Inside, he found Stiles shut up in the bathroom. "Stiles." He rapped on the door. "Can I come in?"

"Yes." A weak voice called from within.

When he opened the door, it took everything Derek had not to start laughing. Sitting on the bathmat, with his injured arm resting on the tub, his other arm clutching the porcelain god, his best friend currently wore a beanie pulled down low on his head, which did not disguise the ears. Instead, two little points stuck up under the fabric. "You look like you have horns."

"Shut up." He grumbled, his whiskers twitching. "Did you know too much pain can make you throw up? Because now I do." He groaned. "Please just get me to- Hey what are you doing?"

Derek took his non-injured arm, and soon, black lines of pain rolled up his arms. He watched Stiles sigh in relief. "How's that?"

"Thank you. Can we please get medical attention; my arm is... holy shit. It's like the size of my calf! Bad enough she unleashed my spirit animal, which is a fucking squirrel, but she didn't give me werewolf healing. How am I supposed to drive? I broke my shifting arm!" He paused as he came to an even more horrific realizing. "Oh my god! How am I suppose to jack-off? I'm right handed!"

Derek reeled in his best friend's rambling.. "Come on. We have to rescue Cam, and then we'll get you fixed up."

"What? No, we get my bone set first."

"She is stuck at work, locked in the bathroom halfway between a snake and a human. She's lost all ability to control her shift, and I don't want her accidentally killing anyone. Can I borrow a hoodie?"

"Sure. In my room." He gestured errantly to his door. "I have them all hanging in the closet."

He ducked in and grabbed a black one before they headed downstairs. "Thanks." Once at the door to the garage, Stiles kept turning to hide his tail.

Eventually, Derek grabbed his shoulders and spun him around, getting a faceful of fur. "That is quite the tail." He plucked the knit cap from his head. "Aren't you adorable!"

"Fuck you, Derek. They are not adorable."

"No, they totally are. You are just about the cutest squirrel I've ever seen." He burst out laughing.

"Stop patronizing me, Asshole."

"Look at the little tufts." He reached out and touched one of the ears.
"Stop that!"

Derek chuckled. "And look at your little nose." He rubbed the bridge of Stiles' nose. "Who's a good giant Squirrel?"

Stiles visibly gulped, turning bright red, stepping back before Derek could touch him again. "No, don't do that again! I mean it." He swatted away Derek's hand.

"What did I do?"

"Just don't. No, don't touch the tail either!"

"It's just so twitchy." Almost as if he'd been hypnotized by the damn thing, he reached out and brushed his hand over the red fur. Stiles squeaked, jumping back in shock. "We're going! Now!" He ran through the garage to the car.

Derek stared after him. It was only after he took another breath that he realized what the problem was. He started the car. "You should have said something. How was I supposed to know touching your new nose and tail would turn you on?"

"How were you... How was I supposed to know? Ninety minutes ago, I didn't have a tail" As if on cue, it snuck out from behind him, hitting him in the face. "Blech! Stop that, you punk. Do you think I will suffer serious bodily harm if I hack it off? Jesus Derek, it's bad enough you already know I find you ridiculously attractive. Do you think I want you knowing about my fluffy new erogenous zones? You're hot, but... no, just no."

From her prone position in the back, Lydia coughed. "I'm still here you know?"

Stiles shrieked. "Fuck! Why didn't you tell me she was back there? Forget that. Why is she in the trunk?"

Derek turned off Stiles' street and onto the county road leading to the restaurant. "Apparently, she sees dead people."

"Wow! Really? Like the Sixth Sense dead people?" Is it like all the time?"

"Yes, but unlike that stupid movie," she huffed, "these people are aware they're dead."

"Yeah and?"

"They keep talking to me. It's been a non-stop ride of, 'Did my daughter go to college?',' 'Can you tell my wife I love her,' and the most verbose one of 'Would you tell Mi Cucciolo I am so proud of him, of the man he's growing to be? He's doing the best he can with the heavy burden he's been forced to carry. We're so glad he finally sought help, and we're glad he's found people to talk to for once. It was painful to watch him suffer in silence for so long.' It's horrible, hearing the dead beg me to talk to their loved ones. I can't do it."

Stiles looked over to see Derek white-knuckling the steering wheel. "Derek are you okay?"

He opened his mouth to speak and closed it several times, his chest heaving as he struggled to find words.

"Derek, did witches get you too?"

Finally, his voice returned to him. "You saw my mom?" His words didn't even sound like they came
from him. "She said that? She said she's proud of me?" He pulled the car over and got out of the car, sitting down on the ground, his back to the car. Staring out at the woods, he tried to keep from breaking down, and it was hard, so hard not to fall apart.

Inside the car, Stiles turned around in his seat. "Why did you have to say that? He's going to be a wreck now." He inhaled sharply. "Did you see my mom?"

"No Stiles, I didn't, and I didn't even see his mom. I just heard it. You should see how many ghosts are hanging around the preserve. If I'd seen her, how would I even know it was Mrs. Hale?"

"He looks like her... a lot." He opened his door. "Derek, we can talk about this later if you want. I will buy you the biggest Oreo Blizzard from Dairy Queen they have, and I won't even criticize you when ask for a whole brownie to be thrown in the mix. Then you can talk my ear off. But please, please can we get my arm fixed?"

Derek stood and wiped his face. "Yeah okay." He got back in the car and drove without saying another word.

* * * * *

Derek pushed open the door to the women's bathroom at the restaurant, relieved to find it empty besides Cambia. He knocked on the stall door. "Hey Cam? I brought you a sweatshirt. Can you open the door? It's just me."

"No."

"You mean you can't or you don't want to?"

"Don't want to."

"Please. I don't want to rush you out of here, but Stiles is going to have my head if we don't get him to a doctor quickly." He heard the door unlatch. "Here's one of his hoodies." As she shrugged the thing on, he noticed her trying to hide her face from him. Turning her face to his, he smiled softly. "Don't do that. Don't be ashamed of it."

"You don't understand. This isn't one snake, it's all my venomous ones. I only have one set of fangs, because in each species, they come in the same place in my mouth." She pointed to her face. "Look at my scales! I'm a hybrid freak." Her words slurred around the long recurved fangs sticking over her bottom lip.

Steady fingers reached out, brushing against the scales across her cheeks. Multicolored, as opposed to one single shade, the scales felt unusually warm to the touch. "You're not a freak." On the inside of the door, he saw several deep scratch marks, obviously from claws. She'd been struggling to hold her animal back. She opened her eyes. Where normally sage green ones would be looking out at him, now only black ones stared back. "I thought snakes had slitted pupils."

"Nocturnal ones do. Diurnal snakes generally don't."

He touched a fingertip to the bottom of one of her fangs, not hard enough to break the skin. "You
could do serious damage with these."

"Shut up." She chuckled.

He continued running his fingers across her face, and she leaned into his touch. "Scales or not, you're still beautiful. Now come on. If you think you look bad, you should see Stiles."

Her hair fell over her shoulders and part of her face when she pulled up the hood. "Can you see my face?"

"Not really. Just lean on me." They walked out the door, and after a clever story for her coworker, he promised to take her to the doctor, but that she might not be back to work tomorrow.

"Take all the time you need, Cam. We'll find someone to cover your shifts. Feel better."

She flopped into the back seat and almost immediately quit fighting the full shift. Writhing and thrashing, she let out a feral scream as they drove away. Derek looked back to see her shifting rapidly between forms. Angry claws tore into the upholstery of the seat. Eventually, she stopped phasing.

"Holy shit! That is a massive snake." Stiles jumped as she struck at him. "Don't bite me. Fragile human, remember?"

"She can't help it, Stiles." Derek steadied himself as felt her curl around the headrest and her forked tongue flick over his earlobe and neck. When the witch meant feral, she clearly didn't just mean anger. She slithered down the side of the seat and over his thigh until about two feet over her body was in his lap. Nervously, he fidgeted. "Hey Tesorino, you mind keeping your fangs away from my crotch?" She shifted into a small monkey and climbed up his body to perch on his shoulder only to run her hands through his hair and caress his face. He gulped; in his head he knew it was his girlfriend in the body of a monkey, but to his eyes, he just saw...well a monkey. It was a little too zoophilic.

*   *   *   *   *

Soon, they arrived at the animal clinic, parking around back. Stiles, who had pretty much given up at ever having his broken bone set at that point, actually began crying tears of joy, kissing the back door to the hospital. "Oh thank you, sweet merciful door that will take me to an awesome rainbow cast or something, and hopefully very strong pain meds."

Lydia whizzed past him to rush into the building.

"Stop trying to bite me, Cam. I'm going to get you out of the car and in to see Deaton. I'd like to not be in horrible pain. Can you focus on me? Good, now I'm going to stick out my arm, can you wrap around it?" He held out his arm, waiting for her to coil around his arm. She hadn't spent long as a monkey, but instead found himself met with snarling. He jumped back. "What the hell kind of animal is that?"

She snapped at him, her teeth catching on his arm, and refused to let go, eliciting a yelp of pain from the man. Seeing no end to the vice grip she had on his forearm, he walked into the clinic with arm outstretched and girlfriend dangling from his arm by her jaws.
"I'm so sorry about your family, Derek."

He groaned at the return of Allison. "Just stop! I don't care anymore. Just stop talking to me. Sit there and cry for all I care. There are more important things to worry about right now."

Deaton walked into the exam room. "Derek, why do you have a wolverine hanging from your arm?"

"So that's what she is? Witches have attacked our pack." When the doctor moved to help him remove the animal, he stopped him. "No, take care of Stiles first. Better her hurt me, than someone who can't heal."

"What's wrong with Stiles?"

The man in question whimpered from his chair and looked at him. "I broke my arm."

"Why isn't he in a hospital?"

"Look at me!" The black beanie flew across the room. "I'm a six foot squirrel! It's like Harvey without the comedy, the alcoholics, vintage wardrobe...or Jimmy Stewart."

Deaton patted the exam table. "Scott, can you help him take off his shirt. The long sleeves are only going to get in the way." Once the teen was free from the confining shirt, the veterinarian took a look at the arm, though he kept getting distracted by Stiles' tail flicking up over his shoulder and hitting the man in the face.

"Would you knock it off?" Stiles snapped at his tail. "I will cut you off if you don't stop."

"Okay Stiles, have you ever broken a bone before?" When he shook his head, the doctor pulled over the x-ray machine, handing him a lead apron. "Put this on. Now, I am going to position your arm. It's probably going to hurt." He worked quickly to snap several pictures. "I'll be back shortly."

The rest of the pack filtered in soon after the man left to room. Isaac and Jackson fought giggles when they saw Stiles, but stopped when they saw Derek shake his head.

"Derek, where's Cam?"

He lifted his arm to draw attention to the animal attached to it; the movement startling her enough to let go. Wincing, he inspected the damage. He cast his eyes to the ground next to him. "Thank you."

No sooner did the words leave his mouth, than she shifted again.

The rest of the pack jumped back as the large Bengal tiger stretched out on the floor, turning onto her back. Contented chuffing filling the room.

"If I pet you, are you going to bite me?" Derek asked. He only managed to get a few strokes of the soft downy fur complete earning his hand a tongue bath, before she flipped over and walked to the counter, sniffing the air constantly. Something clearly had piqued her interest. Her large maw pounded on a cabinet several times until it opened. Undeterred, the tiger rooted her nose in the cupboard until she found the source of her intrigue. A plastic bag fell to the floor, and she pounced on it, ripping the plastic to shreds before rolling around in the contents.

"I thought she was a wolverine." Deaton said as he came back into the room. "But I see she found the catnip." Scott moved to sweep up the mess, but the good doctor stopped him. "Just leave it. It will keep her occupied. Good news, Stiles. It's only one broken bone, and only broken in one place. You don't need surgery. Okay Scott, hold him. I should warn you this is going to hurt. This, is an anesthetic, but it won't completely take away the pain." He injected a liquid into the area and waited
a few minutes before continuing. "Now, one, two," he pulled, and set the bone in place.

"Mother pus bucket! You're evil! What happened to three?" Stiles screamed at him.

Ever the professional, and with nerves of steel, Deaton continued. "Particular cast color? I have white or brown."

"What, no tie-dyed gauze?" He groaned.

"Well, I'm a veterinarian, Stiles. The animals don't usually care. I have pink too, but I figured you might not want that. It is October after all. You could say you're supporting Breast Cancer Awareness month."

"Pink's fine."

In no time, Stiles sported a fancy pink cast on his broken right arm.

"Okay, because I am not a physician, Stiles I can't write you a prescription for the usual pain medications. I can give you a shot of something here. The closest I can prescribe to Vicodin or Oxy is Opana. It is used for animals and humans after surgery or injury. It's stronger than the other two, so it's a small dose, and I think it goes without saying, to be responsible with your medication." He handed the prescription to Derek.

"Why are you giving it to him?"

"Because according to my records, his cat, well girlfriend who was a cat at some point, is my patient. So I wrote it for Molly." He injected a dose of pain medication into Stiles' upper arm, before retreating into a back room and returning with a heavy worn tome. "Now, whichever of you five is the most lucid, tell me what happened. I need to know what the spells said."

"Our witch cursed the two of us after we helped her up. She said in her spell the effects will last a week. Just by touching us, she knew who we were," Lydia said.

"She said that to me too." Danny added.

Stiles raised his hand in assent.

The vet looked down at Cambia. "Care to join us?"

"She can't. She just shifts at random. Who knows what animal will come next." Derek pinched the bridge of his nose. No sooner said than done, the tiger disappeared and was replaced by a chimpanzee. "Can you still understand me, Cam?"

The ape nodded

"Good, did she touch you and know who you were?" She gave Derek another nod and scampered out of the room. When she rejoined the pack, a pen and pad of paper were clutched between her teeth. "Can you write as a monkey?" She scribbled on the pad, and he read aloud. "A chimp is not a monkee. Its an ap." I see you haven't lost your sense of humor, though your penmanship sucks as a chimp."

She stuck her tongue out at him.

"What else, what were her words explicitly, Lydia?"

The banshee inhaled, and recited:
"You can feel when death is near
Words unspoken only you can hear
An unappreciated gift for the one who shrieks
To know even more for just one week
No longer a knack for bodies found
See those below, now above the ground.

That's what she said to me. Allison's was:
A code your line chose to enforce
Still some of blood showed no remorse
So take a deep breath and you will feel
An enemy our kinds know is very real.
A week to experience, a week to learn
What it is to run, and hide, and fear, and burn.

Then she blew some green powder in our faces. Now I see and hear ghosts everywhere, and Ally has spent the last three hours apologizing for her aunt.

Deaton turned to Danny. "How about you? Do you remember what she said?"

"Not verbatim. He said I possess a power to heal those in pain, and if I want to keep this so called gift. I just have to accept it. I can't actually tell you what I'm supposed to say or else I will be stuck seeing cancer and illness. Not sure if I want it."

His eyes widened. "You're a kahuna?"

"What?"

"Ancient Hawaiian shaman. The practice and religion began to die out with the white settlers. There are many types. Some could pray someone to death, send spirits to cause illness, send spirits to possess another, and perform human sacrifices. My guess is somewhere in your bloodline there is a Kahuna Lapa'au or a Kahuna Haha. They heal with herbal medicine and can diagnose illness."

"Whatever Doc, blood makes me queasy."

"I have a book on it. Consider it, Danny. It is a useful thing to have in the pack." He turned to Stiles, who unbeknownst to the vet, had lain down on the exam table. "Stiles?"

"Why do they tell you to break a leg for good luck? I haven't broken a leg before, but let me tell you, I have this broken arm, and I don't think it's very lucky. Who comes up with this shit man?" His words had slurred a little. "Heeey Derek, Doctor Cryptogram gave me some good drugs. I ever tell you that you are unfairly attractive?"

"Would you believe me if I said yes and on more than one occasion? Including about half an hour ago."

"Totally, man. So, like, if you ever decide to sample the other team, I will totally be your experiment. I volunteer!" He paused and licked his lips. "Dude! I can taste the rainbow!"

"Focus, Stiles." Derek snapped.

"Take it easy, Derek. What you say Doc?"

Deaton sighed. "Do you remember what the witch said to you?"

"I helped that meatbag with his groceries, and he turned me into a squirrel! Which is too bad, guy was pretty damn hot."
"We can see that."

"Oh, s'pose you can. I have a tail, dude, and I don't like the twitchy bastard. It's always knocking stuff over. He told me he was unleashing the beast so I didn't feel so little or some shit like that. Why couldn't it be a useful animal, because squirrels are like so mini-school." A stream of giggles broke out from his mouth. "Dude, I said mini-school. Get it mini-school? It's like miniscule, just mini-school."

Derek tried not to laugh with his friend, but found himself chuckling along.

"Cambia, did you help her too?"

The chimp scribbled down a note,cocked her head to stare up at Derek, and gave him the paper.

"It says "No, I sirved her a god dam cheezbirgir a beer. We tawked abowt mi marca, thats a tat2 by the wa. I thot she was hiting on m. I chanjd a tap, and she fukd wit my kontrol. Hir kurs was:

  2 maneek sids 2 long Dnid,
  Presints a sol wit grat Dvid.
  2 fiks u up and mak u hol
  Spind a wek wit no kontrol.
  Onlee when your Feerin sid has bin releesd

Can u bcom a kween ov beests"

Jackson looked over his shoulder at the note. "Dude, how the hell can you read what says? She take away your girlfriend's brain too?"

Without hesitation, Derek clocked him on the jaw. "It's phonetic spelling, Jackass."

"Okay, she should probably stay at your place for the week. You too Stiles. The rest of you can stay at your own homes. What did the witches look like? Anything memorable?"

"No," Lydia sighed, "well not until she touched us. Her eyes were frost blue with no pupils. Blonde hair."

Cambia tapped Derek on the shoulder, handing him another paper.

"She says the woman's skin turned grey when she cursed her, and her hair grew icy blue streaks. She was blonde too."

"You know what, come to think of it, so did ours." Allison sniffled.

"Mine was blonde too."

"So you mean you got cursed by the Jötuns? Like in the comic books?"

"Oh Scotty, Scotty." Stiles giggled. "No, Scotty, Scotty."

"The plural of Jötun is Jötnar" Lydia corrected him.

"Whatever, Miss Know-it-all." Scott glared.

Stiles sighed. "If that's the case, please for the love of Asgard, Odin, send Thor to take care of me! I will be the best behaved patient you've ever seen. I'll even braid his hair-wait." He looked at his arm. "Hey, why is my arm pink?"
"You broke it."

"Then how can I braid Thor's hair? Oh hi, Man. You're here too, Der?" He reached out and petted the man's arm. "So pretty...so pretty."

Derek bit his tongue to keep from laughing, but really, all he wanted to do was fuck with his friend and get as much blackmail material out of the guy as possible. "How those drugs treating you?"

"Dude, it's like being hugged from the inside. And everything is so beautiful. You, Scott, you're beautiful, and Blondie, you're pretty handsome too even with that ridiculous scarf. Oh hey ladies." He looked at Lydia and Allison, "You look like radiant princesses. And you, anyone ever tell you you were one handsome asshole?"

"You did about five minutes ago."

"But you," he pointed at Jackson, "You have a resting bitch face. I don't like it."

Deaton ignored Stiles' drug fueled ramblings and flipped through his book, unsuccessfully. "I will look through my materials and get in touch with my contacts. So I guess sit tight for the time being. We still don't know. If the curses say they will last a week, then maybe we just let it run its course. And definitely keep Cambia locked up. If she is completely out of control of her shifts, and can turn into something as dangerous as a tiger-"

And a big fucking green snake. Saw it in the car. Tried to eat me." Stiles giggled. "And she felt Derek up...with her cute little monkey hands."

"And snake, we do not want her anywhere near people."

Derek thanked Deaton and herded everyone out of the clinic where Allison latched onto him again.

"I'm so sor-"

"Nope. Forget it. I don't care." He climbed into his car and sped towards home, where he was extremely unwilling to lock Cambia up for a week. His phone rang, and when he looked down to see it was Allison, he ignored the call.

Before he could arrive, she'd called again four more times. It was going to be a long ass week.

Chapter End Notes

For those that aren't aware or haven't seen "The Princess Bride," and R.U.S. stands for Rodent of Unusual Size

Italian Translation:

Un strega ha portata via il mio controllo- A witch has taken away my control
Forzata il mio cambiamento- forced my change
No, sono bloccata a metà- No, I'm stuck in the middle
Serpe- Snake
Zanne, lingua biforcuta, e squame sul mia viso- Fangs, forked tongue, and scales on my
face.
Mi Cucciolo- my puppy (Italian term of endearment for children)
Suffer Slowly--Is This the Way It's Gotta Be?

Chapter Notes

Trigger Warning!
Chapter mentions prior canonical violence from season one episode eleven and contains additional non-con kissing (In a nightmare sequence). This is in the second scene. See end of chapter for brief summary of scene missing the prose.

Chapter title comes from Breaking Benjamin's "Dear Agony"
(link is to acoustic version)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=se9A1w93gz4

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Leave me alone
God let me go
I'm blue and cold
Black sky will burn
Love pull me down
Hate lift me up
Just turn around
There's nothing left

Somewhere far beyond this world
I feel nothing anymore

Dear Agony
Just let go of me
Suffer slowly
Is this the way it's gotta be?

The pack settled in that night, a sense of unease washing over the den for those that chose to stay over. At Derek's insistence, Scott took Allison home. It didn't take a genius to recognize Derek growing more agitated with each tear-filled apology. Maybe agitated was the wrong word. No, the man seemed to be unraveling in front of them.

When they all arrived back at the house, Cambia shifted down into a rattlesnake...a very angry one, hissing and striking at anyone who came close. They had her circled for about twenty minutes until Derek pushed down his still lingering fear of snakes to catch her behind the head where she couldn't bite him.

Unwillingly, he marched her down to the basement and stared at the bars of the cell, well aware that the thing wouldn't hold her at all. "Trust me; I do not want to keep you in here. From what you've told me, most of your forms are capable of seriously hurting or killing someone. I know you don't want to hurt anyone like this. You said it yourself; you've never hurt anyone in your animal
form...well except my arm earlier, but I'll let that slide. Do you have enough strength left in you to shift into a large animal and stay there?"

A furious hiss was sent in his direction, and before he had time to react, the scaly skin in his hand became a fistful of coarse dark brown fur. The roar she let out, had him running for the cell bars. He slammed them shut behind him just as she hit them head first with full strength. Snarling with saliva dripping from her considerable canines, she glared at him, and all he could see was pure rage.

Before he retreated upstairs, he slid a bowl of water (And also a few bottles just in case she shifted back) through the slot in the door. "I'll check on you in the morning. I'm sorry about this, Cam. Really, I am, but I'm the alpha. I have to be responsible for keeping my pack from hurting anyone. With you like this, in this size, no one would stand a chance." He secured the thick steel door to the basement.

Upstairs, another roar echoed through the house, and what he assumed was her ramming the doors shook the walls. She was relentless down there, and he was worried about her hurting herself and getting stuck as a bear. One, he was not confident in his ability to produce ninety pounds of food a day for her to eat while a grizzly. Two, he did not know how he would explain her continued absence from work. Another bellow from below startled him from his thoughts.

Isaac rubbed his neck. "Look, I don't want to sound like a dick, but are you sure that cell will hold?"

"No."

As if things couldn't get worse, Peter chose that moment to pay his pack a visit. "I got the 911 text, and what the hell is all that noise? You got a lion in the basement?"

"Nope. I have a half ton grizzly in our cell."

Peter quirked an eyebrow at him. "Where did you get a grizzly-- strike that, why do you have one in the first place? I'm gone for two weeks, and we get another pack member." He threw up his arms in surrender. "Whatever, My Alpha. You do what you want."

Stiles, who, up until Peter walked through the door, had been lying supine on the sofa singing 'Twinkle, Twinkle; Little Star,' with his own spin on the lyrics, which included 'Twinkle, twinkle little cow, how I like to hear you meow;' and 'Like a hot dog on the lawn, I'll will eat your little smokies spawn'(The song was now on it's thirty second verse), sat up. "Heeeey Derekkkk! Your pervy uncle is here! Make him go away, he'll want to pet my tail, and we know how that ends." He winked at Derek. "But if you know any blonde guys...besides Curly Sue in the scarf, they are welcome to touch the tail." He looked at his arm. "My arm is pink. Dude...that's so cool." He flopped down on his back again. "Man, pain meds are great. I feel like my head is floating."

"Derek..." Peter pointed to the couch. "What happened to Stiles?"

Another roar rattled the house.

"Witches. They are precisely the reason Stiles is a six foot rodent, Lydia is seeing ghosts everywhere-" His phone buzzed in his pocket. He glanced at the screen and ignored it. "And why Allison won't leave me alone. Atonement for familial injustices to the the supernatural community is her curse for this week. Also, being a Hawaiian witch doctor or something, apparently runs in Danny's genes. So there's that."
"Doesn't explain the bear in the basement."

"That would be a nearly rabid Cam. Witches, Peter. You were on vacation, and we have a bunch of blonde witches causing trouble in Beacon Hills. We don't know what they want, or if they're done causing mayhem. That said, I'm escorting this RUS upstairs, so he doesn't fall and break his other arm. Then, I'm going to bed."

"It's only 8:30."

"It's been an exhausting evening. Sue me. I have a midterm in the morning."

Stiles latched onto his arm. "You're such a good friend, ol' buddy ol' pal. How long you think these drugs are gonna last?"

Derek ignored his friend's ramblings and walked him into his room, where he helped him out of his hoodie and shoes. When he tried to divest the guy of his pants, Stiles burst out giggling. "What?"

"If you wanted to get in my pants, all you had to do was ask."

"Shut up. Would you rather sleep in jeans?"

Answering that question, was apparently quite difficult. "Um...no. Go ahead and pants me."

Derek finished the task and pushed him into bed, handing him the covers. "Night Stiles."

*   *   *   *   *

Derek tried to sleep, but tossed and turned for hours before succumbing to exhaustion. Still, he wished he could call the slumber he fell into restful. Allison kept calling to apologize, waking him up every half hour. So much for that fucking midterm in the morning. He was screwed. When he finally did fall asleep deeply enough, his subconscious plagued him with memories of the past.

_His eyelids fluttered open, and he took in his surroundings. His hands were bound in heavy manacles above his head. No matter how hard he pulled on them, they didn't budge. He blinked trying to clear the fog from his brain._

_He'd been injected with a mild Wolfsbane. Of that much he was certain. The familiar burn of it coursing through his veins haunted him. Nowhere near as strong as the dose in the bullet the Argents shot at him, it still hurt like hell._

"Hi there, handsome. Long time, no see." Kate Argent's voice echoed through the cellar. "I wouldn't try struggling if I were you. The more fight you put up, the more I will make it hurt."

"What-" Hoarse and painful, his voice didn't even sound like it belonged to him. "What do you want?" He scowled at her.

"Look at that sour face. I bet you always used to get people coming up to you saying, 'Smile Derek.' 'Why don't you smile more?' Don't you just wanna--kick those people in the face?"
"I can think of one." He panted. "What. Do. You. Want?"

"Where is the alpha?" She waited several long minutes. "What's the matter, Derek? Don't feel like talking. That's okay. I can fix that." Her fingers tapped a dial on a machine. "Gee Derek, I wonder what this one does." She turned it up. "Can you feel that in your, hackles? Do werewolves even have hackles? Doesn't matter. Who is the alpha?"

"I don't know."

"Liar. How about this one? Who is the other beta?"

He remained tight-lipped. Even when she turned up the dial, so the shocks grew from something manageable to voltage so high he passed out from the pain. When he came to, however many hours later, Kate was still there, smiling maniacally at him. His side burned and bled from several open cuts. What the hell had she done to him while he was unconscious?

"Oh, you didn't think you were going to get off that easy did you?"

"I have. nothing. to. say. to. you."

"You don't wanna talk?"

"You killed my family!

"Well then let's change tactics. Shall we? If the pain of losing your family was bad, then this...this should be a cakewalk." She stood in front of him and licked a long stripe up his stomach. Derek struggled against the cuffs. "I thought I told you not to do that. You had to be difficult. I will get you to give them up. I know all your pressure points. I have all night." She crashed her mouth to his, but he kept his mouth shut. He turned his head away from her until she backed away. He howled at her, fighting against the cuffs.

"Stop it!" He thrashed in bed.

"Derek! Wake up!" Stiles shook his shoulders.

"Get your hands off me!" Still asleep, his hand clamped around Stiles' arm, claws piercing the skin.

"Wake up!" With his other hand, Stiles slapped Derek hard across the face.

Gasping, he sat up in bed throwing his legs over the side of the bed, palms pressed to his eyes.

"Are you okay?" Stiles sat next to him and rubbed his shoulder.

"No."

His voice, small and fraught with emotion, barely registered, but Stiles could hear the sniffle within that one word reply. He noticed Derek eyeing the small cuts his claws left behind. "Don't worry. They're not deep at all. They won't turn me. Okay? I'm fine, and they don't hurt. Do you want to talk about it?"

Derek nodded, reaching over to his nightstand where he snatched up his phone. Without looking at his friend, he handed the device over. "She has called me non-stop. It's," he looked at the clock on
his bedside table, "four in the morning, and I can't take it anymore. I'm no longer upset about how she talks about my family. It's what she isn't apologizing for that is killing me. I'm about to snap and OD on Wolfsbane." He pointed to his dresser. "Have some in a bottle in my sock drawer."

The pain medication had long since worn off, and Stiles jumped off the bed and dug through the drawer, pulling out a container of pills. He shook them at Derek. "These them?" Derek nodded, shame written on his face. Stiles marched into the bathroom where he flushed the whole bottle. "I know you have days like this, Derek, but please don't do that again. Please don't make me be the one to find your body." He threw an arm around Derek's shoulders, pulling him against his side, a calming hand pressed firmly against the man's chest. "Don't do that. You know how much I'd miss you. Deep breaths, man. In and out. In and out." Suddenly, the phone came to life in Stiles' hands. "Oh for crying out loud."

"Give it here." He took the proffered phone from Stiles.

Before he could even get a word out, Allison's sobs carried through the line again. "Derek, I'm so sorry about what Kate did to your family."

"It's four in the morning. Stop calling me! Please, I can't take hearing it anymore. You don't understand what it's doing to me. Please just leave me alone." Near tears, he had resorted to begging. His pleas fell on deaf ears, however.

As she continued her mea culpa, Stiles took the phone and laid it down on the bed. "Sit tight. I'll be right back; I promise." He slipped out of the room, double checked that the door closing the third floor off from the rest of the house was shut and latched and returned not even a minute later, his own phone pressed to his ear. "Sorry to wake you, Mr. Argent. It's Stiles. I assume you're aware Allison's been cursed." He paused. "Yes, it's true I look like a giant squirrel right now. Yes, I do have a tail. No, that is not why I'm calling." He hissed through clenched teeth. "I'm calling about your daughter. What about her? She won't leave Derek alone. She's called now... How many times, Derek?"

"Fifteen since ten p.m." His phone shook in his hands.

"Fifteen times since ten p.m. That's harassment. And well, I don't know exactly what she's been saying, but I now have a suicidal alpha to deal with." Stiles' nostrils flared when he heard the man's reply. "No, Chris, you don't understand. To me, this is a big problem. He's my friend, and I care about him. It is my job to intervene and prevent him from killing himself." He clenched his jaw in frustration. "I don't care that you were not involved with the events; your family has been making Derek's life hell for eight years. It's time for you to man the fuck up and do something about it!" He snapped and put the man on speaker, guiding Derek's phone back to his ear, mouthing 'Keep talking' to his friend as he crawled to sit behind him on the bed and wrapped his arms around Derek's shoulders. Despite what the rest of the pack thought, cuddling could totally save a life.

"Allison, you don't get it. I don't want to hear you apologize anymore. You're not the one who lit the flame."

"But you have to let me do this. I can't help it. It's driving me crazy."

"Driving you crazy? What do you think it's doing to me hearing all this? You have me about to put a Wolfsbane bullet in my brain, Allison! I have a gun and a box of bullets in the basement. If you think I'm bluffing, you should know it's not the first time I've thought about it, and it certainly wouldn't be the first time I tried!"
"But you have to let me atone for what she did to them."

"For them? How about what she did to me?" He whimpered.

Oh no. Allison was not going push Derek over the edge. Stiles knew there would be no way for him to physically stop Derek if he finally met his breaking point and went after the gun. He rubbed the back of his friend's neck, telling him to keep breathing in a soft voice.

Her sniffle carried through the line. "I don't understand. What do you mean, what she did to you?"

"For starters? The night you learned about werewolves, she'd had me chained in that basement for eight hours already when she brought you in. Eight hours! She electrocuted me, sliced me open, and beat me. She wanted me to give up Peter, give up Scott. She treated me like an animal, because she thought I was a monster. The only innocent person I've ever hurt was Paige. I didn't know her body would reject the bite. I was fifteen! She begged me to end her her misery, but according to your family's warped code of conduct, I should have continued to let her suffer."

"But compared to her killing your family, torture is not so bad."

"Funny, she said almost the exact same thing to me that night! I hate to break it to you. The dead don't feel pain, Allison! The scars from your Aunt, will haunt me forever. How old do you think I was when she weaseled her way into my bed for information?"

"How should I know that?"

"How old was she when she died?"

"Thirty."

"How old am I?" He waited a beat, and heard her sob. "Do the math, Allison! You didn't believe me when I told you why I bit your mother. I'm not the monster; I never was. Your mom was torturing an innocent teenage boy, trying to kill him when I bit her. I walked in, and all I saw was another Argent woman abusing another teen werewolf. When your aunt decided that I would not respond to physical torture... Chained up and drugged... you think I could stop her? You think me telling her no made any fucking difference? Do you think what I didn't want mattered to her?" He pushed out from under Stiles' arms and flopped on his back, seething with rage. "So excuse me if I don't want to hear it anymore Allison. I don't want to hear anymore about your psychotic aunt who took whatever she wanted from my body in order to justify her sick twisted morals! How she did it...TWICE! Do not call me again until this stupid curse wears off. All you're doing is reopening wounds I had finally begun to close and only after a hefty therapy bill. Your apologies don't bring them back. Apologizing doesn't magically turn those into positive sexual experiences! I can't get back what she took from me no matter what you do. So stop trying, please. I'm begging you."

He hung up the phone, trying to keep from shifting.

Stiles coaxed the phone from his hand. "Give it here, Derek. Focus on your breathing. Better yet, go splash some water on your face. Please don't do anything drastic okay?" He kept the tone of his voice soothing. When Derek shut the door to the bathroom, he turned his attention to his phone. "Did you catch all that, Chris?"

"I had no idea my sister went to such extremes."
"So being a torturer was acceptable, but being a rapist, that's extreme? You realize his angry moping is her fault right? He's this way because of what she did. I don't care that he's a grumpy sourwolf. He's my friend, and I accept that about him. What I don't accept is why. But you know what? It wasn't just her. Did you know your dad kidnapped and beat me senseless trying to get to Derek? I'm not a werewolf, but aside from you and Allison, your family had no qualms about hurting children. That's just not acceptable. If she really wants to apologize, if you do, then try making a donation to an appropriate charity. I'll be happy to send you a list. Otherwise, all her words of apology are just that, empty fucking words! Good night." Shaking with barely contained fury, he rubbed his forehead, almost forgetting about his new nose...almost. Luckily, he caught himself before he inadvertently turned himself on with an errant grazing of it.

*He found Derek sitting, fully clothed on the floor of his shower, head buried in his knees as the water soaked him. "Do you want me to leave you alone in here?"

"No...I don't want to be alone. I...I...I need..."

Stiles dug under the bathroom sink for the roll of trash bags to wrap his cast tightly. Praying that it would keep out the water, he opened the door and sat down beside him, his tail flicking him on the side of the head every so often. "Then I guess I'm getting soaked too." Derek dropped his head onto Stiles' shoulder. "Just let go, Derek. I have the door to your room shut, the third floor is closed down, and the bathroom door is latched. With the water and the exhaust fan, no one is going to hear you but me. I won't say anything, nor will I think any less of you. You know I won't. Sometimes, you just have to let it out before it eats you alive." Derek broke down as sobs wracked his body. "There you go, buddy. I'll stay with you all night if you want. Eventually though, the hot water is going to run out and we'll get cold." Derek chuckled. "Jokes, you want jokes? Or how about a constant stream of words? I can recite the Gettysburg Address if you want. I also have a good chunk of the Magna Carta memorized too, as well as chapter three of The Art of War."

"How about a story?"

"Well um... Did I ever tell you about the time I tried to make my mom a birthday cake and forgot to actually bake it? I mean I was seven, so I had no business working the stove alone anyway. I just wanted to do something nice. I'm pretty sure I didn't crack the eggs very well either, but she ate a couple spoonfuls of batter anyway."

"Only you, Stiles. Only you would forget to bake it."

"Hey, I'm trying to cheer you up here. Don't insult the storyteller." He scoffed in mock outrage.

"Thanks."

"Anytime."

Derek's lip quivered, tears still falling. "How could Scott kick you out of his pack?"

"I've decided to look at it this way. He didn't kick me out. Yours was gifted with my amazing qualities, because you needed them more." He kissed the top of Derek's head, and if bothered him, well Derek didn't say a word. He also didn't say a thing about the few tears Stiles shed on his behalf either.
The second scene mentions a nightmare Derek has about events from season 1 episode 11 in which Kate has Derek chained up in the basement (Yes, the ab-licking scene), but she also kisses him to try and get information out of him. Allison calls him again, and this time he scolds her for apologizing for what Kate did to his family but not for what she did to him. Stiles intervenes and calls Chris telling him better ways for their family to make amends, which is basically make a donation to a charity.
The last half of the scene starting with text: He found Derek sitting, fully clothed on the floor of his shower (I marked the sentence with an *)
Does contain some really touching interaction between Derek and Stiles, and I don't think it's triggery if you want to check it out
Stiles flipped through the photo album Allison had uploaded to Instagram. Halloween had been especially epic that year, well until hunters crashed the shindig, sending Wolfsbane smoke through the fog machine. Totally ruined the night really, and after all he'd done to get tickets. The nerve! Though he supposed the fact that a college student was abducted from the party was more upsetting. So far, they had not been able to tie her to anything supernatural, but with the number of missing people lately, they weren't taking any chances.

He smiled as he got to their group photo. Damn, he made an impressive Viking. He found his favorite and shared it on Facebook. Scott and Allison had repurposed the costumes they’d worn to a Renaissance fair earlier in the summer. Isaac had gone as Thomas Jefferson, Derek as Blackbeard, and Cambia as a Praetorian Guard in a pretty impressive set of replica armor that once belonged to her dad. He sighed. Good times...

...When Stiles burst into the den two weeks ago, fresh off his stint as Squirrel Man, Derek didn't seem to even care. Then again, Stiles guessed, that's how he usually entered a room, all at once, limbs flailing, and unaware of the space he occupied. Seemingly undeterred, Derek continued making note cards from his textbook.

"You'll never guess what happened?"

Without looking up or missing a beat Derek, answered him, "You have a significant other?"

Stiles stopped flailing. "No, but that would be pretty significant now that you mention it." He waved an envelope through the air with great enthusiasm. "Guess what I have in this envelope!"

"Clean test results?"

"What?" He wrinkled his forehead. "Oh! No, I'm good on that front. Safe sex is paramount. I have here, in this beautiful orange envelope, the key to happiness." Stiles could tell by Derek's demeanor, he was in no mood for Stiles' habit of beating around the bush.

"And that would be a college acceptance letter, yes?"

"Nope. Too early for that. Just started sending out apps." Stiles bounced on his toes in excitement. "I will preface the big reveal with a story of just how I came in possession of said contents. So I have tried to buy these for years, literally years, but have been terribly unsuccessful. Never mind the fact that I never seem to be able to afford them anyway. That is an entirely different matter. I always figured if it came down to it, I could beg my dad to front me the cash."

Derek groaned. "Stiles, it's not that I don't love your stories, actually in this particular instance, I am not loving your story, but I'm kind of busy."

"Right. So, the radio station was giving them away as part of a contest, and I may have blown off two periods to make sure I was able to call as many times as possible every time they asked for the thirty-first caller." He took three tickets from the envelope, and laid them on the desk in front of
Derek with a flourish. "Here you are, my good man. Three tickets, one for you, one for Cam, and one for Isaac to the Beacon County Historical Society's 75th Annual Halloween Bash. Before you even think to decline, you are coming and that's that."

"A Halloween Party. That's what you are so excited about?"

"Well, yeah. Obviously. This party is like the event of the year in this stupid county. They only sell like three hundred tickets, and they are crazy expensive. I won six of them. So you three, Scott, Allison and myself are all going. The best part, the costumes have to be historical in nature, so no more of those stupid sparkly vampires that ruin every Halloween party every year. No Sexy "Insert Profession Here" outfits that seem to be the only things available for women anymore, not that I don't admire the additional display of skin. None of that crap. I expect you to go all out, D. Don't let me down, Man." And with that, the kid left as quickly as he came...

Where was he going with this? Oh yeah. That was two weeks ago, and he'd managed to practically drag Derek out of there one handed, feigning drunkenness anytime they passed by someone he suspected of being a hunter. He would have been impressed with himself, if Cambia didn't show up five minutes later with an unconscious Scott thrown over her shoulder while Allison gave Isaac a piggyback ride. He'd been shown up by girls, not that he had a problem with it, but he supposed he'd never hear the end of it, especially if Jackson got the details.

Okay, break time was over. Time to finish cleaning his room. They had guests coming over.

"Stiles, can you get the door, please Sweetie?" Melissa called from the kitchen. "My hands are covered in ground meat!"

He bounded down the stairs, greeting his relatives... well Melissa's relatives, as he opened the front door. "Hi Diego, Angela, Carrie."

"Hi Stiles. Have you gotten taller since we saw you at the 4th of July barbeque?" Angela, Melissa's sister asked.

"Yeah, about an inch and a half. Come on in. Melissa's working on dinner. Got her hands in the meatball mix. She's in the kitchen." He excused himself and returned to his room to finish cleaning it. He'd offered up his room to their guests for the weekend. Why? He had no fucking idea. It was a fit of temporary insanity.

All his lore and mythology books (The ones he didn't keep at Derek's) went into a box and were hidden atop the shelf in his closet. Any spare creature printouts, crime scene photos his father didn't know he had, and the like, he hid in the most uninteresting books he owned: The Oxford English Dictionary and his AP Chemistry study guide. Locking and shutting his laptop, he closed up his Lego Batman flashdrive that contained things he had in the works for the bestiary, nestling it on the shelf above his desk where he kept his assorted knickknacks and geek toys (So he had a little TARDIS, a couple action figures, and a model AT-AT, who cares?). Then he turned his attention to his nightstand. Now that his porn collection was secured by the locked laptop, he definitely did not want prying eyes in his bedside table drawer. Condoms? What teenage boy doesn't have those? The Fleshlights? Yeah those had to go. He dug in the bottom of his closet for an empty shoebox, tossed the pair of toys in, and at the last moment grabbed the bottle of anal lube from the drawer (Not that he'd had any use for it lately...God, he was horny. He needed to get laid, and like yesterday. Maybe he could pick someone up at a club later) leaving the regular old lube alone. There, this drawer has been straightened. He chuckled at his joke, choosing to hide the
box under his bed behind a few items of dirty clothes.

Once he'd set up the air mattress on the floor for Carrie, he declared his mission complete. Downstairs, he found their guests in the dining room talking to Melissa. "I can show you where you'll be sleeping. I just finished cleaning my room. I honestly tried my best to rid it of that lovely teenage boy smell, but I'm not sure how successful I was."

Angela laughed. "Thanks for giving up your room."

"Don't thank me yet. You'll be sleeping on a full size bed which is too short for anyone taller than 5'10". So sorry about that Diego. It sucks, trust me. My feet hang off the end of the bed every night." He opened the door to his bedroom. "Here we are, make yourselves at home. Extra blankets are in the hall closet. I think there are a couple extra pillows in there as well. I shouldn't need to bother you guys later for pajamas, but I will probably need to duck...you know what, let me just grab clothes for tomorrow and my homework now. Save you the hassle later." He pulled a navy blue button down down from his closet (One of his favorites, because the inside of the collar and cuffs had a light blue plaid pattern, and if he rolled the sleeves right, that contrast fabric would show. Yes, he was definitely learning the art of dressing. Thank you, Cam), his favorite pair of jeans, an undershirt, and undergarments. For good measure, he took out a pair of pajama pants too.

"What happened to your arm?" Diego asked drawing attention to the cast on his right arm.

One more month...one more month of that stupid cast. "I broke it."

"I figured that with the pink plaster."

"Gotta support Breast Cancer Awareness month, anyway, it's a little embarrassing."

"Oh it can't be that bad. Carrie broke her leg jumping on a trampoline when she was ten. Surely it can't be worse than that." Angela said.

"I assure you it can. I tripped up the stairs while dressed as a giant squirrel. The costume description grossly underestimated the length of the tail, and voila! Broken ulna. May have put me off Halloween forever. And no, I was not drunk when I tripped. Though in hindsight, I really wish I had been. Might have made it more believable." He lied in a scarily convincing fashion. Then, he balanced his clothes on the broken arm, grabbed his laptop and headphones, Spanish textbook, dictionary and binder.

He left the three in his room and settled on Scott's bed to study along with his favorite studying music. His soon-to-be step-brother had work at the clinic until nine, and would miss dinner, the lucky bastard. It's not that he didn't like Scott's Aunt and Uncle...well Angela was nice (Not as nice as Melissa, but really who was?). Diego was deeply religious, and normally Stiles would not have a problem with that. Who was he to tell someone how to practice their faith or in what to believe? Hell, he hung out with supernatural beasts on a regular basis. For all he knew, Jesus played golf with the Pope once a week. That would be pretty funny to watch. I'd pay to see that. To each their own, or whatever, but Diego and his chip off the old block daughter were the kind who liked to preach to you, and sometimes, if you were really lucky, they'd try and force their beliefs on unsuspecting victims. In fact, he was pretty sure Carrie probably belonged to one of those very strict religious clubs at college, or at least he remembers hearing it in passing over the summer. He offered up a silent prayer to the universe that conversation stayed light-hearted.

Stretched out on his stomach, laptop on the left, textbook on the right, he hunkered down to make a
dent on his project due Tuesday. Why had he picked a history topic for the presentation? He could talk about culture in the Spanish speaking countries, or food with no difficulty, even in Spanish, but a five minute presentation on England's defeat of the Spanish Armada was going to kill him. Plus his teacher liked to point out that he spoke Spanish with a Portuguese accent, like he could do anything about that.

"Stiles, dinner's ready." His dad poked his head into the room to find his son engrossed in homework, noise cancelling headphones clamped down over his ears, the fingers of his left hand typing away. "Stiles! Dinner." Not wanting to startle the kid, lest he flail in a trademark fashion, fall off the bed and re-break his arm (How the boy had only broken one bone in his life still amazed him), he walked towards the front of Scott's bed until he appeared in his son's line of sight.

"Yo, Dad."

"Dinner's ready."

"Right. Let me save this, and I'll be right down." By the time he made it downstairs (not even two minutes later), everyone had already seated and dished up their food. No one was eating yet, because he figured to be respectful, and also probably for the premeal blessing, or whatever. So he sat down and suffered through the thing; it was way too long. Whatever happened to 'Lord, bless this meal for which we are about to receive?' He managed to tune it out quite effectively. "Why is there a glass of wine in front of my plate?"

"Your dad and I didn't want you to feel left out. Everyone else is having one."

He pushed it across the table to Melissa. "Thanks, but not in the mood for wine." He hurried into the kitchen and returned with a glass of chocolate milk.

"You still drink chocolate milk?" Carrie looked across the table at him. "What are you, ten?"

"Never too old for chocolate milk, and as I am apparently still a growing boy, need my calcium."

"You better not grow anymore. Can't afford to buy you a whole new wardrobe." John joked.

Stiles shoveled a bite of salad into his mouth and quirked an eyebrow at him as he chewed. "Can't really help it, Dad, but I certainly hope so. Finally started to fill out. The last thing I need is to grow more." He loaded his plate up with a second helping of meatballs.

"You keep eating like that and you won't have to worry about being too skinny."

"I'm an active, eighteen year old guy; we eat." Stiles chose not to roll his eyes at Diego and focused on his food.

John reached for the butter, and Stiles leveled a glare at him, stopping him in his tracks. "I swear you two are conspiring to make me miserable." He gestured back and forth between his son and fiancee. "This is a Kennedy style conspiracy."

"Not really, honey. It isn't a secret. Stiles even called the guy who stocks the vending machines at the station."

"Wait, so you're telling me Stiles is the reason Benny stopped putting Chili Cheese Fritos in there, and now everything has a healthy option green check next to it?"
"I knew it! I knew you smelled like Fritos two weeks ago."

John muttered something about overbearing family members under his breath.

"When can we expect, Scott?" Angela asked her sister.

"He works until nine."

"Still at the Animal Clinic?"

"Yep."

"And Stiles, what do you do? Or do you only focus on school right now?"

_Damn it, Diego._ He took an angry bite of garlic bread, scowling inwardly. "I give music lessons. Not that there is anything wrong with focusing on school. Number three in my class, and though there is no way I can catch one and two, I can go down."

"Speaking of school, Son. How did your tests on Tuesday and Wednesday go?"

"So for Tuesday, my Stats midterm was a 95%, and my Calc test was a 94 I think. Wednesday I only had a midterm paper due for Child Psychology, but I don't have that score back yet. Pretty sure I rocked the he...heck out of that fifteen page monster, even if I did have to type it one handed." See, this...lighthearted talk about school. No problem. He could handle this.

"You and Scott have a cross country meet on Tuesday right?" Melissa asked.

"Yeah."

"Where's it at?"

"Truckee. Yeah I know, rough terrain. It's going to kick my butt."

Angela sipped on her wine. "You and Scott still play lacrosse?"

"We do. Hopefully, since I've been lifting more, I might actually make first line this year."

They settled into pleasantries about jobs and life, but eventually Melissa noticed that Carrie had been extremely quiet. "You okay, Carrie? You haven't said much."

"Don't worry about her, Meli." Her older sister sighed. "She's just going through a rough break up. It's got her in a bit of a funk."

"I'm sorry to hear about that. Break-ups can be tough. It's okay to be down about it. Want some more wine?"

Carrie stabbed an angry hole into her bread with her fork. "Not hurt. I'm pissed."

"Oh, he cheated. Eesh, that's rough." Stiles added without thinking, earning him a scowl that would give Derek a run for his money.
"I wish he'd cheated. Turns out he decided that two years into our relationship that he's gay."

And there it went...the easy going conversation flew right out the fucking window. Deep breath, Stilinski. Handle the conversation like a professional. Diffuse that metaphorical bomb. "Well maybe he finally realized it, or decided that it wasn't fair to you or him to keep lying to himself. It can't have been easy. I'm sure, if he was with you for two years, that he had to have had strong feelings for you. There's truth that old adage of, 'If you love something set it free.' Maybe he just wanted you to be happy, even if that meant with someone else. Wouldn't you want the same for him?"

"No, I don't. If he is choosing to live in sin, in filth doing unnatural things, then I don't care about him at all. The Bible says-"

"Please don't quote scripture at me, Carrie. I know what it apparently says on homosexuality. I was just looking at it like a mediator would. Obviously, you feel betrayed by him, angry, and I was trying to help. I thought maybe if you viewed it from his shoes, it might make things easier for you. My mistake; clearly the wound is still fresh."

"Of course it's still fresh. I loved him. I was going to marry him someday. I was saving myself for him, and..."

"Now you can go have lots of revenge sex?"

"Premarital sex is evil, Stiles."

Oh my god. She was so much worse than Diego. "What about for those poor kids who find themselves victims of sexual predators? I mean they had sex before marriage; are they evil?"

"Sex is sex."

"Strangely enough, I know someone who feels a lot differently about that, and very much wishes they'd given their virginity to someone instead of having it stolen, but I will make sure to pass along your thoughts on the matter."

John looked at his son cautiously, as if trying to figure out to whom he was referring.

Despite a rage building, white hot, within him, he kept his tone even and open. "I mean if sex is sex, and premarital sex is evil, then by your logic, rape victims are evil, which is contrary to what the Bible says, that it's a gross violation of God's design for the treatment of the human body. See, he could quote scripture too. "I'm just trying to understand your position Carrie, but I'm confused by your meaning."

"Spoken like a true psychologist. Just what the world needs, another shrink."

"Don't talk down to psychiatry like that. Some people have legitimate mental health issues. After my mom died, therapy really helped me deal with grief. It's no different than seeking religious council for problems. You're just trading a priest or pastor for a therapist."

"It's only fitting his parent's disowned him when they found out."

Stiles pushed what little food remained around his plate with a fork. "That's horrible."

"No it isn't. It's karmic. He deserves it, the Sodomite."

"No really, it's parenting failure at it's finest. Parents are supposed to give their children unconditional love, and doing that is pretty much the opposite of unconditional love. Maybe I was just trying to treat the man with humanity and compassion. Your ex was trying to be honest with himself, and he lost his family. Having the tether cut like had to be devastating. I mean, if that were me, and my dad disowned me for being gay, I would be rudderless."

"They gave him a choice, either go to a camp, or he was no longer their son. He made his choice."

Melissa quirked an eyebrow at her. "Camp?"

"Conversion camp. You know, those 'Pray the gay away' camps?" Stiles clued her in. "They believe if you pray hard enough, and atone, asking God or Jesus, what have you, for forgiveness then the urge to be a homosexual will," he pretended to blow smoke off his fingers, "vanish. There is some controversy around their methods and whether or not they work or just traumatize the attendees."

"Figures. You'd be one of those 'We're born this way' supporters."

"Yeah, but I also know some gay people, and I treat them with compassion, because I believe in the Golden Rule."

"Well fine, we'll ask your dad his take on it. If Stiles came to you and told you he was gay, would you just magically accept him or would you do the right thing?"

*Please say yes, Dad. Please say you'd love and support me.*

"He's not gay."

"It's called a hypothetical, Mr. Stilinski!"

"I don't know, but it's not an issue I have to think about. So I really don't have an answer."

"Carrie, I am trying to facilitate an intelligent discourse on the subject, since you and I have a difference of opinions. That's all. You don't need to yell at my dad. In fact, I'd actually appreciate it if you didn't. It's rude. I mean, if more people from both sides sat down and had a knowledgeable and respectful conversation on the topic of human sexuality, maybe less gay, bisexual, and transgendered people would be subjected to bullying and/or commit suicide."

"Bisexuality isn't a real thing. People who identify as such are just confused, and will eventually find their way back to the light. It's a term invented by people who want to seem trendy while they experiment with sin."

That was it, he couldn't deal with her anymore, but in order not to disrespect his dad and Melissa he bit his tongue. He bit it so hard, he tasted blood. "Okay now I want your opinion on this, Dad."

"Why do you both insist on bringing me into this?"

"Because you're someone I care about, and whose opinions I value and respect."

"I don't know son. I guess it seems unlikely that someone could really be attracted to both sexes equally."
With that, all hope of his father ever understanding him, crumbled around him. He kept his breath even, despite the fact his heart was breaking. "Look, I'm sorry you got dumped. Really. Break ups suck for all parties involved, and there are plenty more men out there. You will find one who truly deserves you, Carrie." One who is just as horrible and sanctimonious as you are. "Is there dessert, Melissa?" He asked without looking up from his plate, afraid if he looked up at his father in that moment, he'd begin crying.

"No, sorry, Sweetie." She assessed his change in tone from a curious one to one of fake chipperness. Something that had just been said had caused him to wall off his emotions. She had her suspicions but chose to keep them to herself. He'd talk when he was ready.

"That's okay. Anyway, this has been an enlightening dinner, but I have major Spanish project to work on. So, I'm going to head over to Derek's, if that's okay, Dad. Cora is home from college for the weekend and offered to help me, since you know she lived in South America for five years. Are you all finished with your plates?" When everyone nodded in assent, he began clearing the table, muttering to himself as he loaded the dishwasher. "Vai-te foder. Vai chupar um canavial de rola, tu cabra farisaico."

"Stiles, what have I told you about speaking Portuguese in the house? No one knows a word of what you're saying." John chastened.

"Not my fault you never bothered to learn her language." He said as he began to walk up the stairs. "Since it bothers you so much, I'll stop. Bad enough, I look just like her. Wouldn't want me to remind you of her more than I already do, right?" He ducked into his room to hide his condoms and lube, making sure to stick one or two in his bag. "Definitely hitting the club later. Need a distraction."

As he gathered up his bag for Derek's, he could sense someone behind him. "I'm sorry, Dad. That was rude. Shouldn't have said that. I insulted Carrie, that's why I used Portuguese. It was stuff I wanted to say to her, but wouldn't have gone over well, and would have reflected poorly on you. I just had to get it out. Does it really bother you that much when I use Portuguese?" When he turned around, he saw John leaning up against the doorway. "Why are you looking at me like that?"

"Melissa seems to think I need to come up and talk to you. She thinks you're more upset about that conversation than you let on."

"Would you disown me?"

He rubbed his temples. "How many times...You're not gay."

"Short of assassinating the Pope, desecrating the grave of Mother Theresa, or just, you know a general life of crime, is there anything I could that would make you say 'You're no son of mine'?"

"You really are upset by that?"

"I mean that poor kid had parents that loved him, and assuming he was a good guy, if he'd never said anything, lived in the closet his whole life, they’d keep on loving him. I was just wondering if there is an arbitrary breaking point for all parents. You know, to make sure I never come close." He zipped up his backpack. "And anyway, I have a lesson tomorrow morning at ten. Though I have no idea how I am going to explain and demonstrate polyrhythms one handed. Who knows, maybe the kid will just get it. Though that is really doubtful. So I shouldn't be over at Derek's too long. I'm mostly finished as it is, but I may just stay over. I get a bed that way." He hooked his bag over his shoulders. "Just so you know, bisexuality is totally a real thing. Human sexuality is a complex equation. Not everyone can be just this or that, or like both sexes equally. There are sexual identities Carrie didn't
even talk about like pansexual or asexual. If you want an enlightening read, look it up.” He noticed
his father's furrowed brow. "Once again ADHD has enhanced my intelligence. I'll learn about
anything if I get there on a tangent."

"You're not gay."

"Heard you the first time, Pops." He managed to actually make it into the jeep and the edge of the
preserve before breaking down.

Chapter End Notes

Translation for Portuguese used in chapter:

Vai-te foder. Vai chupar um canavial de rola, tu cabra farisaico.: Fuck you! Go suck a
whole cane field of dicks, you self-righteous bitch.
Sorry this chapter took a little longer than usual, because my time and energy is being devoted to my zombie au story right now. TBH I'm kind of in a block on this story, and seriously lacking motivation to finish it. I will, of course, finish it. So thanks for hanging in there I guess.

Derek rubbed his neck, flexing the overly stiff muscles. His last class of the week always drained him. A three hour long seminar on multicultural literature for children and young adults was just too much on a Friday.

Grumbling, he walked across campus to the parking spot he bought for the semester. Instinct told him to immediately be on alert at the sight of a young blonde woman hanging around his car. From his pocket, he found his keys and unlocked the car. He tossed his backpack in the backseat before acknowledging her presence. He couldn't see a gun or anything on her, but still chose to keep his distance out of Wolfsbane mace range. "Need something?"

She ran her fingers along the lines of the car. "Such a beautiful car."

He tried to place her accent, but drew a blank.

"Yours?"

_I just unlocked the doors. What do you think._ "Seems to be. Look, if you need a ride or something, I'm not down with giving one to a complete stranger. Gotta be safe you know? S'what my mother taught me. But I mean, if you're in trouble. I can give you money for the bus."

She laughed. "Me? In trouble? Oh no, no, no. We patrons of Joukahainen in trouble? No, no, no. **We are trouble.**"

_Yep, that's what I was afraid of._ "I see. And what do you want?"

She batted her eyes at him. _"Same thing we always want. To cause mayhem. Did you like our display last month? I was particularly proud of Arthus. A giant rodent? Genius."_ She leaned across the closed trunk, and grinned a large, toothy smile at him.

He watched the rest of her appearance changed to exactly what the rest of the group described in their prior attack. Long snow white hair and frosty blue eyes with no pupil. Oh crap.

Faster than his werewolf speed could move, she thrust out her arm snaring him around the wrist, her fingers ice cold on his skin. He glanced down to see her fingernails grow into claws, not entirely unlike his own, but appeared to be made of ice as they pierced his skin. She yanked him towards her until he was mere inches from her face. He tried to struggle from her grip, but found himself to either be dealing with a creature stronger than a werewolf or to be temporarily disabled.

_"We were nice to your little humans. They're so much fun to taunt, but you..."_
The maniacal grin she'd just given him was now quite horrific as every one of her blunted teeth grew into points. When her frigid tongue trailed down his face, he tried not to flinch as he felt the skin of his face begin to burn.

"Your little pack now strong and tight
Armed with teeth, and claws, brains and might.
A mix of wolves, shifter, and a wailing one
A huntress, kahuna, and human son
Work together to protect your town
Let's see you hold your fort when the power's run down."

He steeled himself for the face full of powder like before, but found himself utterly shocked when a white hot pain shot down his body from the back of his neck. Her hold on him suddenly released, and he crumpled to the pavement. By the time he recovered his breath, she was gone.

* * * * *

Not even halfway home, Derek realized something to be very wrong. He shut off the car radio immediately and tried to focus on his heartbeat. He couldn't hear it. When he tried to pick apart the mix of scents normally found in his car, he could only detect the faint hint of Cambia's coconut shampoo.

So that's what the woman had meant. Feeling naked and vulnerable without any of his werewolf powers, he sped towards home only to find his driveway occupied with every pack car available except for Cambia's. As he stepped out of the car, he felt dizzy like he'd been dosed with mild Wolfsbane, and once inside he determined he'd not been alone.

Jackson lay, curled up in a ball on the couch. Scott had his head in a bowl, presumably throwing up. Peter looked pretty miserable, and Isaac was unconscious. Well that's just great.

Stiles, nose buried in a book, looked up. "So, witches again. At least I think so. I was with Scott and Isaac after cross country practice when they got hit. Said something about the pack, but I couldn't hear anything else. She had a bit of an accent. I remember that." He returned to reading. "We stopped and got this from Deaton. It's been a crapton of useless so far, but we'll see." He pointed to Isaac. "Fucker's heavy when he's unconscious. Just sayin'."

Jackson groaned. "My head is killing me."

"Mine too." Derek sighed. "It feels like my eardrums burst or something." He collapsed onto the loveseat.

"Dude, what happened to your face?" Stiles asked.

Derek raised an eyebrow at him. "What do you mean 'what happened to my face'?"

Stiles crawled over to him, cupping his chin and turning his face to the light. "Looks freezer burnt or something."
"Oh that. She licked me, burned pretty badly too."

He grimaced. "Gross. Oh hey, Cam." Stiles said to the open door.

"What's with the 911? That's all my text said."

Stiles gestured around the room. "As you can see our wolves are in a state of duress. Seems those oh so helpful witches," he raised and shook his right arm, still encapsulated in its pink cast, "made a return visit. This time they weren't nice."

"I remember she said they were patrons of Yokaha something." Derek groaned. "She also called one of them by their name, called him Arttu, I think."

"As in D2?"

Derek rolled his eyes. "Yes Stiles, R2-D2 the plucky little robot sidekick. No."

Cambia looked deep in thought for a second. "Did she maybe call him Arttu?" She asked, rolling the 'r' emphasizing the 't' in the guy's name.

"Yeah I think she did." He scooted over to give her space to curl up next to him. "Why?"

"Come here." She patted her thigh, and he lie his head down on her leg where she began to rub his temples. "It's the Finnish equivalent of Arthur. If she said Yokaha, maybe she actually said Juokahainen. He was a mythical Finnish frost giant. I mean, I'm just guessing, but it would fit their appearance."

Stiles gawked at her. "How do you know that?"

"I'm from Minnesota. You'd be surprised how many people I know of Finnish descent. I read the Kalevala, which is the epic poem where you find Vainamoinen who struggled with Joukahainen, for an English report in high school. I don't know what we're supposed to do with it, but it gives you a place to start."

"Wait...so like a Jotun? Like Thor? Is he real?" To say he looked more than hopeful was an understatement.

"Doubtful." She tapped Derek's shoulder. "Roll over," She moved her hands to start working the back of his neck. "I don't think the people that attacked us are frost giants in disguise. I think they're probably some type of sprite or something drawing on the power of winter, whatever. If that's the case, they picked a shit place to try and harness the power of winter. I can tell you that much."

"Mmph, you.." The rest of Derek's sentence got muffled into her leg.

"What was that?"

He lifted his head. "You have magic hands. I haven't ever had a headache this bad. Why can't people just leave us the hell alone?" He whined, dropping his forehead back onto her thigh.

"Well, this book is totally useless, as I totally suspected it would be. If you'll excuse me, I'll be researching in the library and making some calls. We need to figure out what they want, and how to stop them." Stiles clapped the book shut, eliciting more than a few groans from the ailing wolves.
"Can someone try and rouse Isaac?" Without looking, Derek pointed his arm in the guy's general direction.

As if on cue, Isaac groaned on the floor. "Am I dying? I feel like I might be dying."

"Might as well be." Scott said, emptying the rest of his stomach into his 'barf bowl.'

It was going to be a long night, of that much they were all certain.
Derek looked up from where he sat on the couch. He'd never been sick in his life, and thanks to those stupid witches, sprites, whatever, he was a snotty, sniffling, and ache mess of the flu. The fleece blanket he had wrapped around him felt like heaven, a warm fluffy piece of heaven. Cambia appeared beside him with a bowl of soup. "Don't wanna. Not hungry."

"Come on. It will make you feel better."

"Doubtful."

"Don't be a baby. Eat the damn soup."

Derek grabbed the bowl, begrudgingly at that, and took in the rest of the room. Jackson, had made himself scarce since they'd all been cursed, only coming around once. Isaac caught the flu from someone at school, and because it was the gift that kept on giving, passed it on to both Derek and Scott. The blonde bastard.

Three weeks since their little run in, and none of them showed any signs of regaining their lupine powers. Christmas was approaching, and he did not want to be sick on his birthday.

Just then, Stiles practically fell into the den in a rush of frantic energy and enthusiasm, and was that a broadsword in his hand? Struggling to catch his breath, he panted like an overgrown puppy. "I think I figured it out!" He wheezed out before sliding to the floor.

"Did you run here?"

"No, well yes. Jeep broke down just inside the preserve." He patted the book next to him on the floor. "This book holds all the answers. Deaton is working to put a localized blizzard around the Nemeton as we speak. We need to be ready to fight when I get the signal. That means all of us."

"Localized blizzard, Stiles?" Scott coughed.

"Yes, Scotty, a localized blizzard. Cam, you were right, kind of. They're not sprites. They're tricksters. Specifically, they are..." He flipped rapidly through the book, all while still trying to catch his breath. "Oh god, I am going to butcher this. There is such a thing as too many vowels. Like is the j pronounced like in Spanish a "h" sound, or like in English? Maybe a 'y' sound. Fuck, I don't know, it just seems-"

"Stiles, get on with it."

"Cool your jets, Sicknesswolf. They are called Huurrekujeilijat, which roughly translates into Frost
Tricksters. Yes, they are devotees of Joukahainen, just like you said, Cam, but they can be either good or malicious. Just sort of depends on their motivations. If they are malicious, like with draining you guys of your powers, then they feel slighted or threatened."

"Threatened? How the hell... they attacked us. Remember, we all tried to help them first. They knew we weren't hurting them. We didn't hunt them down and rip out their fingernails or anything after they cursed you guys." Derek groaned.

"You want my non-expert opinion?" Stiles asked pointing to his chest.

"And what exactly qualifies you as an expert?" Isaac asked from where he lay on the loveseat.

"For starters? I'm the one doing all the research. So shut your yap. Anyway, Derek, my honest guess, whatever Assholes are stealing all of you guys around the state, took one of them and not too far from here. Naturally, they assumed it to be the work of another SuperN not hunters. They first messed with us so that we wouldn't see them as a threat. And the book says...the book says..."

Derek groaned. Fuck, his headache was back. He shrunk into himself and curled up into a little ball. *Someone kill me please.* "What does the book say?"

Stiles stared at him, fear in his eyes. "They won't stop until the threat is dead." A hushed anxiety fell over the room. "Derek, these things are hundreds, if not thousands of years old. They don't fuck around when threatened. Everything I could find on them says this is how they managed to survive so long."

Derek swallowed hard, and big mistake. His throat burned. "Is there anything we can do?"

Stiles nodded emphatically. "Yes. Absolutely, but it's tricky. So um, their boss, this guy they call the Lumimyrsky Kuningas, or get this, the Blizzard King, best guess is 5000 years old, or so my research says. To stop their curse, we have to kill him."

Of course they did, because killing beings that were multiple millennia old was just something they did everyday. Derek's head could not take this much thinking right now, and the man whimpered, legitimately whimpered. Cambia felt his forehead only to return a moment later with a thermometer. This routine had become common in the last few days.

"Fever's back."

Great, and just when he thought he was turning a corner. "So, how do we kill him?"

Stiles pushed to his feet and opened the book to show Derek a full colored plate illustration. "We have to sever his head with the sword of some mythical folk hero named Väinämöinen, who absolutely does not exist in the present as far as I can tell, and neither does his magical sword." He picked up the piece of weaponry next to him on the floor. "Now, I have been on the phone with every supernatural and mythology expert in the country I could find, and I managed to find one gullible yet knowledgeable sap in the Upper Peninsula who was willing to help out a "Cosplayer who strived for authenticity," and bless this damn broadsword. Thank you very much. By the way, this thing, this Claymore, weighs like ten pounds. Good luck any of us swinging that around multiple times with all our wolves out of commish. I had an edge sharpened, so it could do it, but how the hell are we going to get close enough to this King dude to even do that?"

Everyone in the room sat deep in thought for a long while, Lydia and Stiles throwing out ideas once in a while, that after careful deliberation, were determined to be pointless. After nearly an hour, Cambia finally spoke up. "I could do it. I mean as it stands, right now, I am the strongest person in
"Right," Stiles said, "Did you miss the part about getting close enough to the guy to attack? I'm pretty sure he'll see you as a threat, all six menacing feet of you."

"What if I don't attack him as human? Sneak attack?"

Stiles deadpanned. "Yeah good luck with that." Before his eyes, she shrunk down, shifting into a Great Horned Owl and flew across the room to perch on the arm of the couch. "An owl? That's what you got. What is your plan as an owl?" She tapped one foot on the sofa. "Morse code?" She hooted and patted the couch again. "Do you want me to do something?" If owls could roll their eyes, he was sure she would have. Cambia hopped off the couch and walked over to peck at the sword, then retreated to her perch to tap it again with her foot. "Oh. Put it on the couch? Got it." He lay the sword on the arm of the sofa and watched as she clutched it in her talons, flapping her wings trying to lift off. It took a couple adjustments to get the weight balanced, but eventually, she hovered for quite awhile with the sword.

She landed, dropped the sword and shifted back, walking back across the room to pick up her clothes. "I can fly with that thing. You said it's sharpened, yeah?"

"Yes."

"I can do it."

Stiles crossed his arms over his chest, convinced of her ability, but afraid for her safety. "We don't know what will happen to anyone around Ol' Frosty when you decapitate him. What if you get hurt? Die?"

"If we do nothing, we all die, yeah?"

"Yeah." He nodded, his face solemn.

She stared at him, her eyes boring into his skull. "One life for ten? Benefit outweighs the risk. I'd take those odds any time. You don't think that if sacrificing myself would have saved everyone in my last pack, that I would have done it? Easy choice. I can do this."

* * * * *

An icy stillness settled over the preserve, frost creeping at all the windows in the den; a harsh winter wind blew in from the north. The pack didn't even need Deaton's text to know the spell worked. Of course, Lydia's Banshee intuition also helped tell them when their adversaries entered the preserve in search of the Nemeton.

They thought they'd been ready, but they were wrong. What they pack didn't expect was to be facing eight frost tricksters as well as the Blizzard King. Why would they leave their leader unprotected, and how did the pack not foresee that little obstacle? By little, Stiles meant massive obstacle.

In order not to reveal their secret, and really only, weapon, everyone agreed that Cambia should pick a tree and hide in it, keeping the sword as hidden as she was. She protested a little, that her strength could help them, but both Derek and Scott said she needed to wait for their signal to make her move. Naturally, this did not sit well with her.
What kind of hope did they really have with what boiled down to essentially nine humans with no supernatural strength, two of the battling illness at the moment, and one of those reverting back to his pre-bite self, the one with breathing troubles? The answer was none. Huurrekujeilijat came at them from all sides. At least in this regard, with Cambia stowed away, they were even numbered, but clearly far outmatched.

The tricksters launched blasts of frigid air at the pack, concentrated and absolutely frigid. The bolts connected with bare skin, turning it blue. Stiles did not want to get frostbite out of this. How the hell would he explain that to his dad? 'Um gee, Dad, so we battled with some mythological snow tricksters in the woods, and well I got blasted,' didn't sound all that convincing.

If the cold air was not enough, they also threw icicles, trapping more than one of the pack in a cage of the icy picks. Allison, lay unconscious surrounded by great icy pikes sticking out of the ground. Isaac stood, quite literally, frozen in place.

Doing this battle at night had been the stupidest idea any of them ever came up with, but thanks to the lifting power of Great Horned Owls, which Stiles forgot to point out are nocturnal, they were all getting their asses handed to them while Cambia sat idly by biding her time.

As Derek found himself mostly buried in a snowdrift, his already flu-battered body shaking from the intense cold, Stiles could see they were going to lose. It wouldn't be whether killing the Lumimyrsky Kuningas would kill Cambia, but whether he and his minions killed them all.

Stiles watched as a stream of super-cooled air hit Scott in the face, triggering an asthma attack. Knowing Scott, and Stiles knew him very well, he would have forgotten to bring an inhaler. He rushed over to his step-brother and dragged him away from the melee.

"St....sti..." Scott gasped, desperate for a full breath.

Stiles sat him up against a tree. "I need you to stay calm. Inhale."

"I...ca...."

"Yes, you can. Breathe with me. Come on, inhale." He took full lungfuls of air. "Now exhale. Keep going. Inhale..." Stiles continued talking him through it. His method wasn't perfect, but it kept Scott from dying in the preserve. He looked out from around the tree that concealed them. They were losing, and badly. "Cam," he said. "I hope you can hear me. Forget Scott and Derek's signal. You see a shot you take it." He checked on Scott. "Okay, Buddy, I am going back to help our friends, you do NOT get up from this tree. You understand?" Scott nodded. "Good."

When Stiles got back to the fray, their group of nine was now only three, with everyone but himself, Peter and Danny incapacitated. Great, just great.

* * * * *

Cambia waited anxiously from her branch until she heard Stiles' voice carry over the wind. His message had not been entirely clear except for the words 'find one, take your shot.' That seemed to be all the motivation she needed.

To be fair, she hadn't stayed on the branch the entire time. She did soar high above the preserve a few times minus the sword to look for the Lumimyrsky Kuningas, finally finding him in all his frozen blue and white glory, sanding atop the Nemeton, pulling frigid energy from the Earth, a maelstrom of snow swirling around him. His white robes billowed in the harsh wind, and even
though it was dark out, he almost glowed, the moonlight reflecting off the pale blue stones in his
crown. If he weren't trying to kill her friends and found family, she probably would have stood back
in awe.

He was beautiful; there was no denying that. But he also terrified her, of this, she was certain.

She circled back to her branch just in time to see Peter turn into a block of ice. Now, she thought, I
have to do it now. Her talons wrapped around the sword in the same places she'd practiced earlier
and took off, beat her wings furious to combat the added weight and wind. She would not be able to
get the lift she wanted in these conditions. She knew that, but she only needed to surprise him,
because there was only one shot at this.

Approaching the king's back, she used everything she had to get above the storm around him.
Higher, higher, high...When the air around her cleared, she shifted, dropping like a stone. However,
once she hit the winds again, they blew her slightly off target and onto his back, her hand clutching
tightly to the sword.

Okay so that was not exactly how she'd wanted this to go down. She'd wanted to land in front of
him. Clearly, that option was off the table now, and she held onto his collar, taking her remaining
strength to swing the sword until it was perpendicular to his neck. She latched her other hand around
the blade, snapping the sword into his skin.

The Lumimyrsky Kuningas shook her like a ragdoll, but as he did so, the razor sharp edge of the
blade sawed back and forth across his skin, a hundred and sixty pounds of weight behind him pulling
the sword deeper and deeper into his skin, until...

Cambia suddenly found herself, falling seven maybe eight feet off his shoulders, and hit the ground
hard, severed head in hand.

The Lumimyrsky Kuningas, and all his magnificent glory began to dissolve in front of her until he
was nothing but a pile of empty robes and ash. When his crown hit the ground, the wind howled, in
a mournful wail, and whipped the pile of yellow and black dust into a frenzy.

As soon as it hit her skin, every nerve lit up in a white-hot, searing pain which knocked her flat on
her back and reduced her to a writhing mess. She felt as though she was at once, on fire and being
frozen alive. Cambia could hardly catch her breath.

Still, she managed let release a horrifying scream that echoed throughout the preserve.

* * * * *

All around them, the Huurrekujeilijat turned into ash. Stiles knew enough to tell everyone not to
touch them, well he told Danny. Everyone else was still momentarily out of commission. Within
moments, the ice cages melted away, and the frosted patches of skin returned to their normal glory.

"Thank god." He sighed in relief as Scott stood up, his Alpha red eyes flickering. One by one, the
wolves seemed to regain at least a little of their powers. It was a beautiful thing to witness. The
fatigue and joy written all over their faces served as a reminder of the impossible thing they'd just
accomplished. Then they heard the scream.

Derek froze in place, eyes wide in terror.
"That sounded like Cam." Scott said, and judging by both Derek's and Stiles' panicked expressions, they thought so too. Another scream, carried on the wind. This one sounded like a name: Bianca.

The pack rushed in the direction from which the noise had come. There, they found the Nemeton covered in crumpled white fabric and a crown. What appeared to be blood, blue blood to be exact, dripped from what remained of the tree trunk.

"Disgusting." Stiles said. No matter the species, blood still made him queasy.

"Cam!" Derek called out. "Where are you?" His voice cracked when he saw the smeared pool of blood on the ground. It looked as though someone had rolled around in it, and Derek wondered if she'd had to kill the Blizzard King while flat on her back. "Fan out. We have to find her. It might not be snowing anymore, but it's still cold out here, and she doesn't have any clothes on.

Derek grabbed Stiles and sniffed the air. Hint of coconut. "This way."

No one managed to get far, because Cambia stumbled out of the tree line soon after, dragging the sword behind her in her right hand, while her left clung to...the severed head of the king? Why didn't that dissolve too?

Derek ran over to her, stopping mere feet from here when he took in her appearance. Covered in blood, blue of course, her eyes were glazed over and a haunted expression sat painted on her face. "Are you hurt?"

"Dove è il mia gattina?"

"What?"

"Mia gattina? Bisogno di lei, mia Bianca, bambina. Dove?" She wandered away from him. "Bianca! Dove sei? Mi stai spaventando!"

When the pack started to close in, Derek held up his hand to halt their advances. Then, he changed tactics. "Cam? Why are you carrying a severed head?"

She held it up. "Questo? Questa è una bambola." She thrust it in his face. "Vedi?"

He nodded. "She's hallucinating." He looked over at Peter who was examining the remains on the Nemeton.

Peter sniffed. "Henbane."

"What?"

"Look Derek, earlier this fall, I took a trip to Italy. I was worried about you giving us a repeat of Jennifer. So I learned everything I could about the Mutaformi. We are susceptible to Wolfsbane; they have Henbane." He stared at his nephew, absolute seriousness oozing out of his pores. "These hallucinations are vivid and can turn them suicidal. Distract her. I'm gonna grab the sword."

Derek turned his attention back to Cambia as his uncle sneaked around behind her. "Bianca is your cat?"

Cambia looked around, mumbling incoherencies he couldn't catch except for one.

"Did you catch any of that, because we sure did-"

He held up a hand to silence Isaac. "What?"
"Dove lei?"

"I don't know. I've never seen her."

Cambia stumbled and then shook her head as if she was remembering something. "Morta. Come tutti gli altri."

She shivered, and Derek shucked off his jacket, wrapping it around her shoulders. "Come on. Let's go get you cleaned up." He nodded to Peter who seemed to understand they needed to stay and clean things up.

Derek swallowed hard as he led her back to the den, finally understanding the small cat tattoo on her hip, the loss she'd never be over. He'd lost a lot, but not one like this. The only word in her stream of babbling he heard clearly?

Daughter.

Chapter End Notes

Translation for Italian used in this chapter:
Dove è il mia gattina?- Where is my kitten (but gattina is also a term of endearment)
Mia gattina? Bisogno di lei, mia Bianca, bambina? Dove?- My kitten? Where is she, my Bianca, baby? Where?
Dove sei? Mi stai spaventando!- Where are you? You're scaring me!
Questo? Questa è una bambola." This? This is a doll.
"Vedi?" See?
Morta. Come tutti gli altri- Dead. Like everyone else
Cambia opened the door to the Stilinski home, balancing a cake on one hand while carrying several bags in the other, Titan hot on her heels. "Merry Christmas!"

Stiles came bounding down the stairs, tripping on the last step. He only managed to catch himself at the last second. "Fucking hate that step." He smoothed out his clothes and crouched down to rub the dog between the ears. "Hi, Boy. You got a nice big chew toy from Scott. Here, let me help you, Cam." Soon, he had taken the cake off her hands and pulled her into a hug. They walked into the living room where they unloaded her gifts under the tree. "Scott will be here in a couple hours. He had Christmas morning with Allison and her dad, but he swears, 'Scout's Honor' that he will be here tonight. I'm just worried he's gonna flake out on us and forget. So glad you didn't blow us off."

She sensed the irritation rolling off his shoulders. "Why would I do that?"

"Now that you have a boyfriend and all..."

She kissed his forehead. "Don't do that. Derek and I have been good about spending time with you, haven't we? And not just as a couple either. He makes sure to keep up with your workouts and bro time, and I'd like to think I have too."

"You have; you both have. I'm just worried and waiting to be shut out again."

"I said I would come. So barring an emergency, I follow through. Besides, Derek is spending the day with Cora and Peter, but will be here for dinner." She inhaled. "It smells wonderful in here."

Stiles set the cake down on the counter. "The lamb should be done in half an hour. Help me finish the salad? Think fast."

A bell pepper flew at her, and she caught it one handed. Like she'd known the kitchen all her life, she grabbed a cutting board and knife, setting up shop next to Stiles while he shredded some carrots. "Care to broaden your musical horizons, Kiddo?"

"No, no heavy metal."

"I hadn't planned on putting that on." She pulled out her phone, finding a message from Derek. She smiled.

"What?"
"Derek says hi." Soon the sounds of Christmas carols filled the kitchen.

"Broaden? I happen to like Christmas music."

"Even when it happens to be in Italian?"

"Even then." They both found themselves bobbing their heads to the music as they finished preparing the meal, which is how John and Melissa found them, Cambia singing and Stiles humming along. Choosing to observe rather than interrupt, John couldn't help but smile at how much their relationship had grown to resemble siblings.

Cambia stole a piece of carrot of Stiles' cutting board. "So, is it just your family, me and Derek tonight for dinner?"

"No. I have a feeling Allison is joining us too. Plus my Aunt Nancy and her husband, my Uncle Bryan are bringing my cousin, Kevin. He's like thirteen...no fourteen now. My mom's brother and his wife are coming. They're my Uncle Roberto and Aunt Estela. I haven't seen them since the funeral. They are invited every year, but I think they're only coming now to congratulate Dad on remarrying. I guess they want to meet Scott and Melissa, or something. Well, I guess they get to meet you too then." He glanced at his watch.

"I see you actually wear the watch I got you."

"You kidding?" He held up his wrist. "This thing gets me compliments all the time. You were totally right. Anyway, Dad left to pick Melissa up from work. They should be home soon. Not sure exactly when Scott will get back. He spent the night at Allison's last night so they could celebrate Christmas this morning."

"Mr. Argent lets him stay the night?"

Stiles scoffed. "Are you kidding? He hates it, but they have a guest room, and I secretly think Scott is terrified of Mr. Argent."

"I'm terrified of Mr. Argent, of all of them, Allison excepted."

"Chris isn't so bad. The rest of his family? Yeah total crazies, especially Gerard." He shuddered. "Who knew the old man could hit so hard?"

She quirked an eyebrow at him. "When was this?"

"Sophomore year. Kidnapped me from my lacrosse game and beat the crap out of me."

"That bald fucker beat up a kid?"

"You know Gerard?"

"Caught one of our betas, a young one, only nineteen. Tabby found him hanging from a tree, cut in half. Damn their code; he never followed their code. Sam had only been a wolf for two months. He hadn't hurt anyone."

"I hadn't either. I'm pretty sure if Dad wasn't the sheriff, he would have killed me."

"Excuse me?" John asked, alerting the pair of his presence. "You told me it was kids from the other team."

"Don't worry about it, Dad. Gerard is dead now. Anyway, Cam, Dad, Melissa you guys want
something to drink? I had Dad pick up some Scotch for you."

"I'd love some, but I can get it myself. Anyone else? I brought a bottle of red, and Grappa, but that's for later."

John eyed the treats on the counter. "Ooh, cake!"

Cambia returned to the kitchen just in time to bat his hand away from the cake. "That is for after dinner." John grumbled. "I didn't say you couldn't have any Panettone. Just that it's dessert. You get to argue with Stiles about whether you get any." She snickered and went back to prep work with Stiles, the pair of them effectively tuning out John's and Melissa's conversation while they worked

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"You're so much taller than I remember, Stiles." His Aunt Estela patted his cheek.

He shrugged and helped them unladen their arms of presents. "Well...almost ten years will do that to a kid." His uncle walked through the front door. "Como é que vais tu, tio Roberto?" It was hard seeing his uncle again after all these years, like Stiles, the man looked a lot like his mother. Stiles pressed his lips together to keep his emotions at bay.

Roberto stopped and stared at him, before continuing on in Portuguese. "Joãozinho, you- You look a lot like Cláudia."

Stiles winced. "I get that a lot. Good flight?"

"Not so bad. Long layover in Chicago."

Stiles nodded and welcomed them into the house, abandoning his Portuguese for his Aunt's sake. "So yeah, the house is pretty much the same since the last time you were here. I mean Melissa got rid of the horrible wall paper, and Scott's room used to be the guest room. Other than that..." He was just about to close the door when he saw Derek park on the street. "Cam, Derek's here!"

She poked her head out of the kitchen. "He's early. Christmas with Peter must have been more miserable than he expected."

Estella turned to him. "And who is this? Your girlfriend? She's very pretty."

"No," he said, his face turning red.

"That is Cambia. She doesn't have any family left so Melissa has practically adopted her, calling her the daughter she never had and always wanted. They're practically best friends now. She's an honorary member of the family." John busied himself with setting up the hors d'oeuvres. "Stiles does not have a girlfriend. Speaking of girlfriends, Scott called and is definitely bringing Allison. They're on their way over. I hope you made enough food."

Stiles rolled his eyes. He'd made enough food to feed a small army- or a pack of werewolves. Instead of answering his dad, he looked at Derek as he walked through the front door. "Hey, Man. Good day so far?" Derek pressed a bottle of red wine into his hands, speaking only with his eyebrows. "So...uncle Peter up to his usual level of creepitude?"
Derek threw an arm around his shoulders. "Try: I walked in on my sister and Isaac in the kitchen. They were supposed to be making breakfast. Pretty sure cooking requires more clothing and less—You know what? You get the picture. My point is, it's not hygienic to do that in the kitchen. It's why they have a bedroom." He lifted the large bag in his hand. "Where do you want these?"

"Ooooh presents. What'dya get me?"

"Coal."

"Ha ha. Some friend you are." They walked into the dining room where they found Melissa and Cambia sitting at the table enjoying glasses of wine and sampling the cheese plate.

Cambia’s eyes brightened when Derek walked in. "Carissimo," she kissed his cheek, "Buon Natale e compleanno." She handed him a glass of wine. "Grappa?"

"Grazie."

Soon, everyone crowded around the table—ten people were a tight fit—and Stiles' relatives slipped into easy conversations, and he had never been so glad that Melissa's sister was spending Christmas with her in-laws. His Aunt Nancy sat directly across from him.

"So, Stiles. Get in to any schools yet?"

Stiles munched on a forkful of salad. "Yeah San Diego State, but I'm really hoping to hear a yes from Stanford. That's my first choice. Scott's going to Sacramento."

"I was hoping for Davis," Scott grumbled with a mouthful of lamb.

"No worries, Scotty. You can transfer sophomore year."

"There is no shame in that." Nancy took another scoop of salad. "So, Cambia—"

"Cam is fine."

"Cam, did you go to college?"

Cambia swirled her Scotch around in her glass. "Started at the University of Minnesota, finished in Reno."

"See, Scott. You can transfer. Derek, how about you?"

"Oh he's still in school. He'll be there forever."


"Oh how nice. What are you studying?"

He pushed his food around on his plate. "Working on my Master's in Education."

Nancy took a sip of her wine. "And don't take this the wrong way, but you're clearly a bit older than Scott and Stiles. How do you know them?"

Good Lord, the woman was nosy. Derek tried to chew as slowly as possibly while he came up with an answer that did not make him sound like some kind of serial stalker, but Stiles was much quicker on the uptake.
"Derek's my mechanic. The Jeep, bless her heart, well she's getting up there in years and breaks down a sh- a lot. Derek started working at the shop where I've been bringing Roscoe for years. He's much better than the last guy that worked on her. We got to talking one day, and now we're friends." Stiles looked over at Derek and gave a smirk as if to say, 'See, that's how you bullshit an answer to my nosy aunt.'

Derek hoped that was the end of her questions. It wasn't.

"Cam, how did you meet Melissa?"

Cambia clicked her tongue against the roof of her mouth to give herself a moment to think. "Do you want the full answer or the sugar coated one? As a fair warning, in the interest of not being a downer on Christmas, take the sugar coated option." Derek squeezed her knee under the table.

"Well, I guess the second then."

"I got shot by some hunters while running in the woods. Thankfully Stiles and Scott found me and took me to the hospital. And now here we are." She smirked and went back to her meal.

"How terrible! And how good you ran into Stiles and Scott. Derek, what about your family?"

"What about them?" He asked with a mouthful of dinner roll; he looked absolutely terrified.

"Did you spend Christmas with them before coming over or are you alone too?"

"Had Christmas with my uncle, my little sister and her boyfriend this morning."

When Nancy opened her mouth to no doubt as a follow-up question, Stiles cut in. "And I'm sure it was a lovely Christmas, walking in on kitchen 'hijinks' notwithstanding." Aunt Nancy, good hearted as she was, sometimes didn't know when to stop. So, as usual, Stiles tried to lighten the mood. "So, Kevin how's life been treating you?"

Kevin pushed his shaggy hair out of his face and shrugged. "Meh."

"Ah the eighth grade, 'Meh's'. I remember those well."

Allison cut through the chit-chat. "Hey, Stiles. Can I borrow your notes from AP Lit? Tell me you did the reading."

"Me? Do the homework, what do you take me for? Of course I did. Remind me before you go home, and I'll get them. Or you know what? I'm done eating. I'll get them now so I don't forget." Stiles excused himself, cleared his plate and hurried up the stairs to try and remember where he put his damn backpack.

The search took ten minutes.

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By the time Stiles made it back downstairs, everyone had gathered around the tree. His dad had taken it upon himself to play Santa and had begun to pass out the gifts.

John pointed to the pile of presents next to Scott on the floor. "Those are yours."
Stiles cackled, sitting down to look at his haul. He shifted the present from Scott. Movies. Definitely movies. There were several packages that he knew with absolute certainty to be clothes. One poorly wrapped one, was likely a blanket of some sort. Both Scott and himself had large squishy presents of the same size. Bedding for their dorms next year, probably. The gift from Derek came in an envelope, so it was either a gift card or something to that extent. He didn't dare pick up the one from Cambia figuring it to be way too expensive just like his birthday.

Everyone took turns opening presents, and Stiles waited nervously as everyone got closer to his presents. There were a couple in the mix that had him on pins and needles as he worried about their reception.

"Boys, this is beautiful." Melissa pulled the bracelet from the box, admiring the charms her son and step-son had picked out.

"They didn't have a nurse one, so there's a lifesaver charm we picked out instead." Scott pointed out the charm in question. "And there's an owl because you love owls, and a lacrosse one for each of us," he said pointing back and forth between himself and Stiles. "Um, we picked out the 'first dance' one, and there are a couple more that were on back-order, but in the box is the order slip. The jewelry store will call you when they come in."

Melissa beckoned both of them in for a hug. "Thank you."

Stiles swallowed the lump in his throat. "Scott forgot to mention this one." He pointed to the 'mom' bead. "They don't make a stepmom one, and he was hesitant about picking this one, because I'd feel left out... but I told him to pick it anyway and..." He looked down at his knotted fingers. "I said it could be for both of us if you wanted." He licked his lips.

Melissa patted his cheek. "Of course it can. Are you okay with that?"

He gave her a silent little nod. First anxiety causing present down, three to go. Waiting was the difficult part.

"Awesome!" Scott pulled a set of Superman pajamas, a shirt with pajama pants, out of the box. "Open the one from Mom and your dad. That one right there." He handed the box to Stiles who promptly ripped open the paper and also found a set of pajamas, only his were Batman. "Dude, we like match."

John laughed. "I think Cam needs to open her box too."

Scott looked like a literal kid on Christmas. "We need a picture with us in these. Yeah, Cam?"

She looked at the tag on her Wonder Woman pajamas. "How...my size?"

Melissa pointed to Derek. "He helped. I went with the shorts, because you're so tall. We thought the pants might not be long enough."

"No, these are great, and you're right, they probably wouldn't be. Thank you."

His relatives opened a present each before the gift circle got to Derek who opened up a box from Scott to reveal a new set of batting gloves.

"Stiles, told me what kind to get you."

"Thanks, Scott."
Stiles held his breath as his dad opened the gift from him. Honestly, he had no idea how well it would be received. The thought terrified him. John pulled out the small bound book from the tissue paper inside the box. "So um...bit of an explanation for that, because I gotta say, you are impossible to shop for. No joke. So back in October when I miserably only had one hand to type with, I found a pretty sweet scholarship that is for fifteen thousand, and they only give out three of them. Anyway, I had to write an essay a minimum of five thousand words in Portuguese. I was pretty damn proud of it, hope it wins. Incidentally," he pointed to the book, "that is my essay, but in English. Plus some pictures."

John ran his fingers over the cover, on which was a picture of himself and Stiles from when his son was about six years old. The whole family had gone fishing, and Stiles caught his first fish and just couldn't wait to show his dad. He loved this picture, had it in a frame on his desk at work. The book had maybe thirty pages, most of it text, but with pictures of the two of them interspersed throughout. The title, Not the Easiest Kid, made him choke up, because the first paragraph pretty much told him what the essay would be about: "When I was eight, my mother died. I was hyper and inattentive, impulsive, still am, with an insatiable curiosity. All the parenting suddenly became my dad's job, and I didn't make it any easier on him. To put it plainly, I was not an easy kid to raise, but despite my faults, I think I turned out okay. The fact I am anything at all is a miracle, and that is mostly because of my dad."

"So..." Stiles looked over at him with large and anxious eyes. "Too much? Total crapfest for a Christmas present? I mean I am not the best judge of stuff I come up with. It might actually be crap, total crap, embarrassingly bad, so much so that I probably should not have sent it in, but I hope you like it." Stiles exhaled sharply as John pulled him into a hug. "So we're hugging? That means you like the gift?"

"Yeah. Thank you, Son."

Stiles' shoulders sagged in relief. When Scott started to open the present from him, Stiles didn't even feel nervous. There was no way this gift would be poorly received.

"Sweet!" Scott pulled the noise cancelling headphones and Itunes gift card from the box. "These are really nice, Stiles. Thanks, Bro."

"Thought they'd come in handy at school. Even if you're not listening to anything, should you get an, ahem, inconsiderate roommate who does not follow the door code and brings someone back to the room with you still in it, put those babies on and you'll hear nothing!"

Scott rolled onto the floor, clutching his sides laughing. "Oh my god, I hadn't even thought about roommates. That is terrifying. What if he's a total dick?"

Stiles pointed to his gift. "Headphones save lives."

"Open mine." Scott patted his knee.

Stiles lifted the small package and gave it a shake. Gift card. Definitely. "XBox Live Gold membership for the year. Thanks, Scotty." They continued around the group opening presents. He'd been right about the bedding. Batman would make an excellent addition to his dorm room next year. Derek bought Scott and him tune-ups to their respective vehicles. He would definitely enjoy the All Time Low tickets Cambia bought him.

Cambia shifted Titan's head off her lap and hefted up the box from Stiles. "Did you buy me a brick?"

"Not exactly." He waited for her to tear off the paper revealing Sandman Omnibus Vol.I. He
watched her ignore the cover and flip through a few of the pages, obviously trying to find a font she could read better. When she looked over the first few pages, he watched recognition flash across her face. "I looked for that in Large Print because I know it makes it easier for you. They don't make it, so I hope your reading pen thingy works on graphic novels."

She leaned down from the loveseat and hugged him. "Thank you."

"Oh boy, a toaster." Scott tried to sound excited about his next present, but Stiles could hear the disappointment. Most likely, a toaster would not be allowed in his dorm room, so the gift would go to waste. Stiles made sure to sound extra excited when he opened a box containing the exact same thing.

"Thanks Aunt Nancy and Uncle Bryan." Out of the corner of his eye, he watched Derek pick up the gift from him, Stiles stopped him. "Um, you may not want to open that in front of everyone."

"Okay." Derek eyed him warily.

"Oh my god, Derek. It's not that kind of present! Why would I buy you something like that? Just s'kind of a personal gift, and you might not want your reaction to it seen by people you just met."

"Not helping, Stiles."

"Trust me. It's a pretty awesome gift."

Melissa handed Cambia a small box. "So this one is from all of us."

Stiles held his breath.

"This...this is-" She took a deep breath. "Thanks."

John could see she was about to cry when she handed the cornicello necklace to Derek to fasten behind her neck. "We tried to find the one that was stolen from your evidence bag, but it's gone. I know this one doesn't have the same sentimental value as the one your parents gave you, but-"

"No, it's perfect," she rubbed the pendant from where it lay on her collarbone, "thank you."

"I thought, well actually, we all thought, especially Melissa, that it would be a nice gesture."

"It can't be easy to be alone, Sweetie." Melissa patted her shoulder.

"And I meant it when I said you were an honorary member of this family. You help keep Stiles out of trouble, and I imagine Scott too."

Stiles almost knocked her over when he hugged her, and soon Scott joined in. Somehow, hugs turned into an impromptu wrestling match that soon found Stiles pinned on his back beneath Scott. How Cambia had managed to scramble out of it. She sat down on the spot next to Melissa on the couch where she found herself pulled into a one armed hug.

"You know what this means don't you?"

Cambia furrowed her brows. "Um, should I?"

"We expect to see you," Melissa poked her in the arm, "for Sunday dinner or breakfast, whichever one our work schedules allow, more often. And also..." She grabbed her camera from the coffee table. "Ease up boys, family picture time." She grabbed Cambia's hand and tugged her off the couch. "Allison, do you want to do the honors?" She gave her the camera. "I'll get one with you and Scott"
"Sure." Allison finagled the group into the dining room where the lighting was best. "I think John, Stiles and Cam are going to need to stand in the back. Melissa, stand in front of John, and then Scott can stand next to you." She worked with supreme efficiency and took several pictures, including one with silly faces before handing Melissa back the camera.

"Okay, now just the three of you." Melissa pushed the three 'kids' together. "Say, 'We used to be the only child, now look at us.' Oh, don't give me that look Stiles." She waited for smiles and clicked the shutter. "Beautiful."

As she finished up the pictures, the rest of the family readied themselves to leave for their respective hotels, and Stiles made the rounds saying his goodbyes. When only the immediate family (Plus Allison and Derek) remained, he sat down next to Derek on the living room floor.

"So," Derek said, considering the present in his hands, "real reason you didn't want me opening this? Supernaturally related?"

"Nope." Stiles let the 'p' pop off his lips. "Though I am not sure if you might wolf out a bit upon opening it."

He gave the box a little shake. "Nothing's going to jump out at me is it?"

"Way to be paranoid, Derek. Just open it."

With hesitant fingers, Derek began to tear away the paper, revealing a thin, brown box underneath. He sliced the tape with the claw of his index finger and looked inside. Similar to the book Stiles had made for John, Derek pulled his present out and turned it over. "A cookbook?"

"Better."

Derek flipped through the pages and felt his breath catch in his throat. "Where..." He closed his eyes and took a shuddering breath. "Where did you find these?" He ran his fingers lovingly over recipes he remembered from his childhood, ones he was sure were lost forever.

"The library book sale back in October. As it turns out, most community events with bake sales and recipe swaps made their own little cookbooks and gave copies to the library for their 'Local' section. I bought every one that had one of your mom's recipes in it. I mean," he scratched the back of his neck, "it's not everyone, and there are only a couple of your grandmother's, but I found about forty recipes."

Overwhelmed with emotion, Derek felt his alpha red eyes flash for a second. So that's why Stiles wanted to wait until everyone left. His throat felt thick with emotion, eyes wet with unshed tears. He clutched the book to his chest. "Thanks, Stiles."

Stiles spread his arms, motioning for Derek to come closer. "Bring it in buddy. I expect a text message when you make those gingersnaps on page 27."

Derek laughed, sniffling into Stiles' shoulder. "Deal. I'll even make you extra to take home."

"Sounds like an excellent plan, Buddy."
Claimed

Chapter Notes

See end of chapter notes for possible trigger warning and translation for Italian used in this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Cambia panted and collapsed onto Derek's chest, kissing his shoulder. "Oh fuck. That was...yeah."

Derek chuckled. "I know." He was as out of breath as she was, which should have surprised him. Hello? Werewolf and all, but fuck if he would ever tell anyone how Cambia could put him through the ringer in bed (He meant that in the best possible way).

Still breathless, she rolled off him and onto the space next to him on her bed. "Pretty sure I can't feel my legs right now."

"Yeah?" He turned his face towards her and quirked an eyebrow. "Good thing?"

"Very good." She sighed. "So, so good."

Derek sat up. "I'm thirsty. Do you want some water too? You really should drink something. From what I know or read...it will help." He took her wordless smile as a yes and ventured downstairs. In reality, he needed to collect himself. Well, he was parched, sure, but also nervous.

He'd done his research on the Claiming Bite, but without being able to talk to anyone who'd actually gone through it, he prayed he didn't screw it up. Were Cambia fully human, if he screwed up, at least she could become a werewolf...if the bite didn't kill her. Being supernatural, he was pretty certain she did not have that option.

After that accidental Intention Bite back in September, neither of them had any desire to not eventually go through with the next step. Hell, Derek hadn't felt this fulfilled in his whole life. It didn't mean he wasn't anxious.

Relax, Derek. You are a master of control. Oh yeah...remember to breathe.

He downed several glasses of water and filled another, before returning upstairs where he found her looking entirely blissed out and boneless. "Here."

"Thanks. So," she said between gulps, "how did you want to do this? You want me to go first?"

He shook his head and crawled next to her on the bed. "Actually, it's probably best that I do. Since I'm the only one of us who has the potential to cause lasting damage, I'd rather I have total focus and not be distracted." He brushed the hair from her forehead. "I don't want to hurt you. I mean...the bite will hurt, but I don't want to injure you." He kissed her forehead.

Cambia squeezed his arm. "I'm good when you are."

"You got your legs back yet?" When she nodded, he took her hand and led her into the bathroom. "So um..." He felt a flush creep up the back of his neck. "I thought it would be easier to do this in the
shower. Sort of...

"Aww. Were you worried about ruining my comforter?" She patted his cheek. "Adorable."

"Shut up." He grumbled, though the small grin on his face betrayed his attempt to feign annoyance.

"Come on." She turned on the shower and tugged him in after her. Steam began to fill the bathroom as the almost too warm water soaked them both. Despite that, the shower tiles felt cool against her back as she leaned against them, looking down her body at Derek. "Fuck...that's so hot. Why haven't we had sex in the shower?"

"No idea," he mumbled against her hip, his hands holding her steady and looked up through his lashes as if to ask 'ready'?

"I'm good."

When his fangs sank into her skin in almost the exact same place as he'd placed the Intention Bite, Cambia let out a slight whimper. It hurt, but it was nothing she couldn't handle. She'd been through a lot worse, and on a pain scale, it didn't even come close to being shot or stabbed. This was more like being tattooed, as his fangs sat barely beneath her skin, and yeah, she could see why he'd wanted to go first. Depth of the bite, she suspected, determined if it was a Claiming Bite or 'The Bite.'

The pain quickly ebbed and turned into something else, something warm and comforting in her chest, almost like protective armor around her heart. Where the Intention Bite had felt like a flashbang or shockwave, sending white hot sparks throughout her body, this started slow and kept building until the feeling flowed throughout her veins and she could feel it in the marrow of her bones. It said, 'I've got you. I'm here.' Or maybe that was just Derek. To be honest, her mind was a bit hazy.

Derek's fangs receded and he pulled back, eyes going wide at the angry red bite staring back at him. From where his hand still rested on Cambia's hip, he took as much pain as he could. He found himself quite surprised that there was little to take. A hand in his hair brought him out of his thoughts.

"Hey." She looked down at him with a dopey grin. "Still with me?"

"Yeah. Are you-"

She grabbed his hand and urged him to stand, capturing his mouth in a soft kiss. "Better than fine...except I can feel your anxiety. Stop it." She splayed her hands against the small of his back. "Let's get me patched up, because you need to feel this...it's... well you'll see." She rinsed off her hip one more time and stepped out of the shower, pressing a wet washcloth to the bite while she sought out her first aid kit in the kitchen.

"Huh. I would have thought it would bleed more."

When she returned, large adhesive bandage secured on her hip, Derek had stretched out on her bed. Though the bite didn't hurt, the way the bandage pulled on her skin as she lie day beside him did. "So...it's up to you. Which teeth would you like?"

Derek hummed in consideration. "Vero Corpo."

"Well," she held the 'l' at the end of the word, "I'd probably advise against that. The bear teeth are quite long, and I don't trust that I wouldn't bite through your femoral artery." She mulled it over for a second, and dropped down a set of snake fangs, not failing to notice the wide eyed expression on Derek's face. "Ever hear of a dry bite? No? Means no venom." She drew her index finger down his
He caught her hand and intertwined their fingers, shaking his head slightly. "I want you at your truest form. I trust you." When he saw large, thick canines replace the thin and needle sharp fangs, he steeled himself the way he always did when he knew he was about to hurt.

However, he barely noticed the pain as she bit him, only a small stinging sensation, like pin pricks, even though he knew otherwise. He waited for the need to protect, the possessiveness to flood his system, but there was none. Had she done it wrong?

No, wait. There it was, but it didn't feel like 'Mine,' the way every source said it would. It was better than that. It told him, 'You won't feel alone anymore. You'll never be alone.'

Never had he felt so glad to have been misinformed as he watched the smaller punctures from the blunt teeth close before his skin knit closed where the deeper holes the long canines left did. When the open wound had healed, he was left with a permanent reminder of the bite, his first and only scar. It was beautiful.

"See what I mean?" She said, turning off the light and curling in next to him, moonlight flooding in from the window behind them. "It's so-"

"Warm."

"Yeah."

His thumb stroked her side as he felt the mate bond encompass him, them, like a security blanket. Before it lulled him to sleep, he had to do something he'd always wanted to do, having watched his parents hold countless silent conversations between themselves when he was younger, knowing thousands of unspoken silent conversations between themselves when he was younger, knowing thousands of unspoken words passed between them.

No need to speak, when minds were linked. "Mia carissima."

After a few seconds, Cambia's thoughts filled his head.

"Tesoro" She cupped his cheek. "Ti amo."

He returned her soft smile with one of his own. ''Io sono tua."

"E io tuo."

They lay in silence for several minutes sending thoughts back and forth, before Derek got lost in his affection for her. "Ora tutto i miei sensi sono pieni di te. Senza di te la vita era un inferno. Ero così sola, e io non sono più. Mi hai salvato."

"Cuore mia." She kissed his forehead. "Penso che abbiamo salvato l'un l'altro."

*   *   *   *   *

Derek woke up in the dark shaking and gasping for breath. He lie there in bed, confused for only a moment until memories of the nightmare came rushing back. Foreign and horrific, he couldn't make
sense of it. None of the imagery was clear enough for him to figure out what the hell had been going on in his head while he slept. He only knew he felt grief so strong, it not only felt like he was drowning, but being stabbed in the gut and having his heart ripped out at the same time. He'd never experienced that before.

Grief, yes? But when he lost his family, lost Laura, Boyd and Erica he couldn't breathe for the all the pain in his chest. Suffocating loneliness, and guilt, and failure- He felt that, and it was nothing like what he'd just awoken from.

He sat up, rubbed his eyes, and immediately noticed he was alone in bed. His ears focused on finding another heartbeat with him in Cambia's apartment. The closest one he could find was muffled, almost as though it came from next door. The bed next to him was still warm, so she couldn't have been up long.

Derek grabbed a sweatshirt from his drawer in her dresser and went looking, eventually finding her out on her balcony.

Cambia sat outside in only a pair of pajama pants and a t-shirt, seemingly unfazed by the cold. Then again, Derek remembered, she was used to temperatures colder than this. She had her back to him as she sat, hunched over on the ottoman to one of the patio chairs, her knees pulled into her chest. "Sorry. I tried to close off my mind, as soon as I woke up, but- I'll work on it. I didn't mean to wake you."

Derek took the seat on the chair next to her, laying a comforting hand on her knee. "Hard to close the mate link when sleeping. I imagine you'll be subjected to one of my nightmares eventually too."

Her shoulders shook with a broken laugh. "That's just it. It wasn't a nightmare. It was wonderful right up until it wasn't. What you felt was me crying myself awake and everything since then."

"Come on inside? I'm freezing, and you can't be too warm either."

She wiped her eyes. "I'm okay, actually." Still, she let him pull her to her feet and lead them both inside where he sat up against the arm of the couch, stretching his legs out in front of him on the cushions. He patted the empty space between his legs, and when she sat down, he tugged her to his chest, tossing the throw blanket over both of them.

Derek waited until she was settled before broaching the subject. "Wanna talk about it?"

"There's nothing-"

"Cam...I've lost a lot of people: parents, five siblings, my own betas. I have never felt grief as strong as I felt in that dream."

"I-"

He hated to do this, but he was a poster child for what running from one's problems could do to a person. "Tell me about Bianca." Her whole body stiffened in his arms, and she tried to wriggle free. He let her.

She pushed away from him. "How do you know about Bianca? Who-"

"You did."

Genuine confusion washed over her face. "No, I- I've never said anything about her."
Derek held up his hands, showing her he was no threat. "When you killed the Blizzard King, and you got hit with Henbane...you carried around his severed head, calling it a doll while you shouted for Bianca. The others think you were talking about your cat, but...they don't know Italian. Hard to hear the words 'morte' and 'figlia' and mistake your meaning for something else. You can tell me as much or as little about her as you want. You can tell me nothing, but I hope you know you can trust me. Sooner or later your grief, your memories of her are going to sneak through the bond, and I'll learn anyway. Maybe talking about her now, will help you. If you're worried about me judging you, don't. I've made more than my share of mistakes...I mean, not that I think- You know what I mean. I am in no place to judge anyone about their past."

She nodded and nuzzled back against his chest. "She was...I know it's cliche to say she was the light of my life, but she was. She was so curious, always getting into things."

"Was she like you? Mutaformi?"

"Yeah, this sweet little white kitten. She was the most affectionate child, fit in perfectly with a pack of wolves, always giving everyone hugs."

When he heard her voice break and a sniffle, he kissed the top of her head. "Was her dad part of your pack?"

"No. She's why I changed my name and ran. Tommy put me in the hospital, and I was nineteen and pregnant. I didn't want him to be able to use her against me to make me stay with him. He never knew about her. One of the betas, James, owned the bar where I started working when I got to Reno. He was third in the pack hierarchy after the Alpha pair. One day, Tabitha and Charlie came in for lunch. James just had to fire a server so I was waiting tables, all while wearing a baby carrier because day care was closed that day. I smelled what they were immediately. The thing is, when I lived in Genova as a kid, my parents were friends with a local wolf pack. My father always said, if, when I was on my own, if I ever found myself in trouble and alone, find a friendly pack. Bianca was six months old then. She fit right in. Charlie Jr. treated her just like his own sister, and she adored him."

Derek tightened his hold on her. "How old was she?"

"No. I don't want to talk about that, because then you'll want me to talk about the how...I'm not ready to do that. Maybe I never will be. I'll talk about her all night if you want, but not about that."

He shifted behind her and stood up, offering his hand.

"Where?"

"It's cold down here. Let's go back to bed. You can tell me more up there."

Upstairs, when they were both bundled up under the covers, she told him everything she could about her, the way her brown eyes reminded her of rooibos tea, her hair the color of wheat, how the smattering of freckles on her face danced delicately across her cheeks and nose. She spoke of that laughter that could fill a room and make any bad day brighter. She spoke of that laughter that could fill a room and make any bad day brighter. She told Derek of a little girl who loved peas but hated carrots, described the small birthmark on her shoulder and the way it looked a little like the state of Maine. She said of all the characters in Winnie the Pooh, Rabbit was her favorite, how despite Bianca having her own room, she woke up almost every morning with a small warm body snuggled up next to hers; she never minded it.

She told him everything, and for the first time since she lost her, she mourned her properly. Instead of shedding a few tears when too exhausted to put on a brave face, she finally let herself break down, chest heaving with heavy and fractured sobs.
Chapter End Notes

Italian Used in this chapter (As per usual, I tried my best at it. Let me know any errors that need fixing):
Ti amo- I love you
Io sono tua. - I am yours
E io tuo- and I yours
Ora tutto I miei sensi sono pieni di te- Now all my senses are filled with you.
Senza di te la vita era un inferno- Without you life was hell
Ero così sola- I was so lonely
E io non sono più- and I'm not anymore (Direct translation: and I am no longer)
Mi hai salvato- You saved me
Cuore mia. Penso che abbiamo salvato l'un l'altro- My heart. I think we saved each other.

Possible trigger: Though not described in detail, the second scene in the chapter talks about death of a child that happened before the fic, specifically Cambia's daughter. Manner of death is not mentioned at all. If this topic is triggering for you, the scene can be skipped, and you should be able to follow just fine.
Stiles opened the passenger door of the Camaro. "Okay Mysterion, why the hell are we at Pizzeria Arturo?"

"Because we are meeting a potential packmate."

"I see, and why did you bring me? Wouldn't you rather have extra muscle like Isaac?"

"Very funny, Stiles. I brought you because I trust your judgement."

He scratched his chin. "Don't you think you could have given me the heads-up? As the resident human, and now that Danny is some magical shaman thing I can honestly say I am the only human in the pack, I need to make a good impression."

Derek took in his friend's red button down, distressed denim jacket, jeans and Timberlands, trying to figure out what the hell the kid was talking about. "What are you talking about? I'm the alpha and this wolf needs to make a good impression on me. Besides, you look fine. Don't be such a diva. Trust me, no one is going to care what you're wearing."

"Well I would have at least shaved first! Not everyone can rock the stubble like you do. I just look like I'm going through puberty. It's all patchy."

"Stiles?"

"Yeah yeah. Shut up. I know." Derek furrowed his brows at him. "And stop with the brows of doom, man. They don't work on me anymore." He held up his hands in surrender. "Fine, I'm done. I'm done. You owe me dinner for this. You know that right? No, don't open the door for me. I'm not a girl, and this isn't a date. Jesus, does Cam let you do that?"

"She tries to stop me, but usually she gives in. Oh, and don't ramble. I know how you get when you're nervous."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. Whatever you say Oh Alpha, my Alpha. Let's just go meet this wolf."

They walked up to the hostess. "How many?"

"Three, well we're supposed to meet someone. They might be here already."

She read her seating chart. "Are you Derek?"

"Yes."

"Your server didn't write down the table number. Wait here and I will check."

Stiles scanned the busy restaurant, his eyes settling on man in the corner. His blonde hair stuck out from under a blue beanie. So captivated by the man's appearance, he didn't even hear Derek talking to him. He was staring, he knew he was, but just could not look away no matter how hard he tried. The man's strong jaw, slightly clefted chin, and piercing eyes alone would have been enough to warrant a second glance, but he was quite possibly one of the most attractive man...scratch that, most attractive people Stiles had ever seen. Sure, beauty was subjective, but come on. Anyone could see it.
"Where the hell did he get that rider hoodie? Is that a funnel neck on that thing? Fits him like a tailored suit. Wish I looked as good in a sweatshirt."

"Earth to Stiles?" Derek passed a hand in front of his friend's face. "Hellooo? Are you listening to me." He followed Stiles' line of sight and noticed a man smirking at them. "Quit staring."

"Sweet Baby Jesus.Fuck. That mouth. Those lips." He choked out, finally running out of air. Damn, how long was he staring, and just how long had he forgotten to breathe? "They look so soft, wonder what they look like wrapped- I'm sorry. Did you say something?"

Derek shook his head laughing. "You're impossible. Do I need to give you a minute to go talk to the guy?"

"Not as easy as that. It's not like when I walk up to a girl and ask for a number. Flirting with the wrong guy could get my ass kicked. I'll just admire from afar."

"Oh I don't know. That could be your future husband."

"Stop mocking my dilemma, Derek."

The appearance of the hostess broke up their banter. "Follow me gentleman."

To Stiles' horror, she led them towards the man's table. Stiles mentally face-palmed. Of course this guy just had to be their prospective packmate. "I'm just going to go throw myself into an open grave." He turned to flee, but Derek grabbed his collar and yanked him back before gently guiding him into his seat. Okay so gentle was an understatement, Derek practically man-handled him. But whatever, Stiles was a grown ass man, he could be a professional about this.

"Sweet Baby Jesus, eh? Most people call me Casey."

Stiles would have been totally embarrassed if he wasn't busy admiring the elfin gleam in the guy's eyes. Fuck. He was screwed. How the hell could he make a character judgment if his dick was doing all the thinking?

The server took their drink orders, making sure to check Derek's I.D. for his beer. "I'll be back with your drinks in a minute."

Derek removed his jacket and offered his hand. "I'm Derek. We've been speaking on the phone."

Casey shook his hand. "Nice to meet you." A look of realization washed over the man's face, as if he suddenly remembered something. "Oh shit. My dad always said if ever I needed to meet with another alpha, to look put together. It's just, I woke up late today and didn't have time to shower, do my hair or apparently not dress in my rattiest pair of jeans. I came straight here from class. Please don't take my Uni slob attire to mean I don't care. I desperately need this meeting to go well."

Derek put the man out of his misery. "It's okay. Stiles here didn't even know about this meeting. He didn't shave today. So don't feel bad."

Casey gave Stiles a once over before sitting back down. "Gotta say, I've never had an alpha meeting where the alpha brought a human beta."

Stiles took Derek's proffered jacket and tucked along with his own beside him in the booth. "I'll have you know, I am very important to our pack. I do all our research."

"Stiles-"
"I'm the one that figured out a solution to our Finnish witch problem."

"Yeah and you-"

"Got turned into a six foot squirrel. Believe me, Derek, I remember. That broken right arm resulted in six weeks of inadequate wrist action." He mimed jacking-off. "Surprised I didn't die of blue balls by Thanksgiving."

"You let your beta talk to you like that?" Casey looked almost horrified.

"Stiles is my best friend. Basically only him, my little sister, and my girlfriend get to talk like this. This one," he pointed a thumb at Stiles, "has a knack for spotting bad news. First things first, let me see your eyes."

He leaned his head down to obscure his gaze from any unwelcome viewers before flashing his golden beta eyes. Slowly, the yellow receded back to normal leaving irises like seas on a stormy day, gray with little flecks of white scattered throughout. Stiles was not staring at them; he absolutely was not.

"Now you." Derek obliged him. "Thank you. I wouldn't ask if I weren't an omega right now. Never can be too sure. I mean you smell like a wolf, but hunters can be good at disguising themselves."

"Where are you from? I mean originally. I know you're a sophomore at Chico State right now. By the way, we could have met on campus if it was easier for you. I'm there three days a week myself for grad school. We could have met at your dorm."

"No, I'm in a six person cluster at UV. Two of my flatmates pretty much never leave the house; there is no privacy. Besides, this was not that far of a drive, and my mate was gracious enough to lend me his car. Anyway, I'm from Long Beach. I lived out of the country when I was a kid, but in So Cal since I was ten."

"What happened to your pack?"

Casey tied knots in his straw paper, his jaw clenched tightly. When he opened his mouth to speak finally, the server returned with their drinks.

"I have a Coke, a Sprite, and a Sam Adams. Ready to order?"

"Anything you don't like, Casey?" Stiles managed to choke out. *Don't stare at his mouth. Don't stare at his mouth.* He chanted silently when he noticed the man taking a sip from his drink. The sight of those lips around that straw was not one Stiles needed in his head.

"No. I'm a big boy, I'll eat anything."

"Great." He turned to their server. "We'll have the Spaniard, and Derek, what's that one you like?"

"The Venetian."

"Right. So I have one Spaniard and one Venetian. Anything else?"

"Nop-"

Derek cut Stiles off. "Actually we'll also take a Caprese platter and an order of the bruschetta with extra pesto. Could you also bring some of that garlic olive oil you serve with the focaccia?"

"Sure thing."
"Thanks."

"I always thought bruschetta was pronounced with a sh sound not sk sound."

"Then it wouldn't be spelled with a c in it. Piece of advice. Unless you're a native speaker, don't correct my Italian....ever." Derek growled.

"Derek, we've talked about this. You need to play nice with others."

"I meant no offense. Please don't kill me." Casey placated him. Obviously, the kid was not used to being without a pack.

"Stiles-"

"No, I mean it. I don't correct your Portuguese, no matter how strange you sound when speaking it."

"There's nothing."

"Oh yes there is. You speak it funny. What is your... You know what, back to the task at hand."

"So," Derek continued, "what happened to your pack?"

"I'm not sure exactly. The LA metro has like twenty packs in it. I'm sure you know the big cities always have several packs in them. We weren't a big one. Only eight people. My dad was our alpha, my mother, my younger brother and two sisters, my aunt and uncle. All the wolves were born wolves, strong and fully in control of our shifts. My little sisters hadn't begun to shift yet. Anyway, I was up at Uni. Classes were kicking my ass so I wasn't able to come home for Thanksgiving, but I got a call from the Cops on Black Friday telling me I needed to come home. They called it a home invasion, but when I saw the bodies, I knew. Hunters. The whole room reeked of Wolfsbane. We had no blue eyed betas. Neither my brother nor my mother were wolves. My dad was a good man. He'd never even turned anyone. There was no reason to attack us. We were peaceful, and we never had a problem with hunters. They'd come to meet with my father on a few times, giving their warnings about the code, which we never broke."

Stiles heart broke a little as Casey continued with his story, the hint of an accent he couldn't place sneaking through every so often.

"I don't understand why this happened, and now I'm alone. I've never not had an alpha. I'm scared shitless; I don't know what to do. My eyes should be alpha red now, and they're not. That means they had a wolf working with them, nicking my father's power. That's just... wrong. You don't do that. I mean, I've heard of wolves and hunters working together to handle feral omegas and dangerous rival packs. But, you don't team up with hunters to take out wolves following the code. You don't kill children. You don't do that." His fingers played with the shark tooth pendant on the leather cord around his neck. "Fuck, and Christmas was...bad. I didn't have anywhere to go. My flatmates are all from out of state or the country, and a couple of them offered to let me spend the holidays with them, but I couldn't afford a plane ticket. The emergency ticket down to I.D. the bodies drained my bank account. Every month my dad would put money in there for me. Between school and sports, I don't have time to work, and he wanted me to focus on school... I.... fuck." He propped his elbows on the table and rested his forehead on his clasped hands, taking several deep breaths before continuing. "I can't do this by myself. Save my life here, because I won't make it alone. I've never hurt anyone in my life outside the required contact in sports, only been in one fight, even then I didn't get in a single punch. I'm a nice guy, and omegas like me do not survive. I am willing to do whatever it takes, interview with the whole pack, a trial period, permanent dish duty. I don't care."
Derek nodded. "I understand, believe me. I wish I didn't, but... unfortunately I do. I lost ten, but
seven or ten doesn't matter. After the meeting, if it goes well, I'll invite you to a pack night. If the rest
of the pack or at least most of them like you, you should be fine. We have two members who pretty
much don't like anyone. One of them still hates Stiles, and he's known him since, what?"

"First grade. Hates my guts."

Casey nodded. "Look, you knew I was at Chico right? My dad would have contacted you. He was
very big on protocol. He would have wanted me supervised in another alpha's territory."

Derek closed his eyes and appeared to be counting.

"Dude, what are you doing?"

"Stiles, I am aware of the children of ten different alphas attending Chico State. Three from
California...and only one male. Your dad was Alpha Callaghan?"

"Yes."

"How do you manage all that information, Derek?"

"Very carefully. If Scott would pick up his slacking alpha duties, it would be much easier."

"You should let me make up a database."

Derek waved him off. "Anyway yeah, your dad made sure I knew about you."

Casey looked shocked. "The Beacon Hills Pack has two alphas?"

"Technically," Stiles grinned, "it's three. I mean, we have one non-wolf member who is her species'
equivalent of an alpha."

"How do you manage?"

"Stiles, is good with people," Derek glanced down at his phone to see the screen light up. "Be right
back. Stiles, try not to talk his ear off. Yeah Isaac, what is it?"

"I resent that!" He called out to Derek's retreating back. "So, since you're a wolf and obviously heard
all my ramblings, if you could just forget about them, that would be fantastic."

Casey quirked an eyebrow at him, but said nothing.

"What's your major?"

"Biology, but I hope to go to med school at UCSF."

"Cool. Any thoughts on specialty? Or are you thinking general medicine?"

"Pediatrics. I love kids. My sisters and bro..." His voice broke, and he took a second to regain his
composure. "We were very close. My little brother and I shared a room; he was fifteen. My sisters
were nine and seven. So I babysat them a lot. You? Are you in school?"

"I'm still in high school for another, hopefully short, semester. After that, I'm very anxiously awaiting
what I really hope is an acceptance letter from Stanford."

"You must be pretty smart then? I got in to USC, but we couldn't afford it."
"I try. I rocked the hell out of my SAT's and ACT's, but yeah I'm number three in the class, which is amazing considering my horrendous ADHD. It's so bad, I'm surprised I have actually managed to stay on topic." He stopped to think for a second. "Pretty sure I accidentally took one too many Adderall today. Fuck, I am not going to be able to sleep tonight."

Casey laughed. "What do you want to study?" He took another sip of his soda.

Unfortunately, Stiles couldn't avert his eyes quickly enough, and once again found himself staring at Casey's mouth, while all kinds of inappropriate imagery flooded his brain.

"Still with me?"

"I'm sorry." Stiles felt the blood rush to his face and covered his face in embarrassment. "I just find you ridiculously attractive, and now I'm making an even bigger ass of myself. But, uh, psychology, and eventually I want to get my doctorate. So it looks like we're both heading to medical school." He raised his glass. "To ridiculous amounts of student loan debt and eight years of college." They clinked glasses.

Casey shoulders shook with laughter. "You're telling me. Although I'm pretty sure I won't have much loan debt from undergrad because of my parents' life insurance. As for medical school... Enough of that though. Do you have siblings?"

"Yeah well...my dad just got remarried in November to my best friend, Scott's mom. Well he used to be my best-friend; we had a bit of a falling out. We're working on it though. So I have a step-brother, and we have an honorary big sister. I mean, she's not related to us at all, but my dad and step-mom told her she was part of the family. So there's that."

"How old is she?"

"Derek's age. I mean she had no family at all, and we love her to pieces. It's kind of cool actually. I had no siblings my whole life, and now over the course of the last two months, gained two of them."

"What do they do?"

"Cam is a bartender. Scott is still in high school with me. Same grade."

"What about your mom?"

Stiles sighed. "She died. Look, it gets easier. I still miss her like crazy. It's been ten years, but it gets easier. You'll get through this. Just talk to someone if you have to. Don't grieve alone."

"Thanks for the advice." The corners of Casey's mouth picked up in a small smile. "How old are you, Stiles? That's a nickname isn't it?"

"Very good college boy. My first name is a mess. I turned eighteen September 20th. You?"

"Nineteen. My birthday is March 15th."

"Ah an Ides of March baby. We'll just make sure to keep you out of the forum on your birthday."

Casey chuckled. "Well my name's not Caesar."

"Starts with the same two letters."

"Touché. So you said the pack has two other alphas so to speak?"
"Uh huh. " Stiles nodded. "Yeah, compared to my siblings...I'm really unremarkable."

"No, you're not, Stiles. I thought I told you to stop saying that." Derek returned to the table.

"But it's true. When put up against Mr. True Alpha Scott, and "Hi, for the last millennium, a member of my family has led our pack" Cam, I am not much."

"Well, you're lion-hearted to a fault. Despite your obvious human fragility, you insist on rushing in to fight the next big bad to help protect those you care about. That's like Captain America, man."

Stiles cackled. "Ha sure. Captain America was a serum enhanced super soldier. Plus, he was pretty Aryan looking. Me? Not so much. I'm a 170 pound high-school senior with no legitimate superpowers, though I do appreciate the analogy."

Derek turned to Casey. "I hope he didn't talk your ear off. He has this tendency to go off on tangents completely unrelated to the current conversation. Would you like to hear an abridged history of mustard?"

Casey stopped halfway through the process of moving his straw to his mouth and stared at him, mouth hanging open and brows furrowed in confusion. "'Why?"

"Hey, that is some seriously useful information, Derek."

"You were helping me study for a linguistics final."

Stiles clicked his tongue. "Yeah good point."

"No, actually he's been fine. We've just chatted about school and family. No narrative of dinner condiments here."

Drumming out a beat on the table, Stiles bounced in his seat. "I really hope the food comes out soon. We haven't even got our appetizers yet. Man, I am starving. I got half of my normal amount of lunch today because Blondie begged me for the rest of mine spouting something about being a growing wolf, which is total bullshit. I'm taller than he is. Pretty sure we weigh about the same now. He forgets I'm on a prescription Amphetamine. I'm hungry all the damn time."

Derek reached over and covered Stiles' hands to stop the tapping. "Stop doing that. It's annoying."

"Ah speak of the devil." He grinned when the server set the two pizzas and appetizers on the table. Both he and Casey waited for Derek to load up his plate before digging in.

"What are you in school for Derek?"

"I'm working on my MA in foreign language instruction."

"Oh yeah." He said between bites. "Which one?"

Derek gave him a snarky grin. "Italian."

He swallowed another bite, before grabbing his second slice. "Yeah sorry about earlier. Can I ask some questions about the pack? I'd like to say it's because I want to know if it's a good fit for me, but it's not like I have any other options. Pretty much if you'll take me, you got me."

Derek smirked. "Ask away."

"So, how many are in the pack?"
"Eleven, but we have three parents as honorary members because they're in the know."

"And how many wolves?"

Stiles slurped down the rest of his soda, slyly pushing it past Derek to the edge of the table. He hadn't seen the server in like forever... okay so it was like five minutes, but he could be impatient. So sue him.

"Six."

"And everyone else is a human?"

"No. We have a banshee, a Mutaforma, and a kahuna. We also have a hunter as part of our pack. She's an Argent, and her dad helps us keep the town safe. I feel you should probably know that up front."

Casey dropped his pizza in shock. "And they... they're not like Gerard Argent are they? My father told me to never get on that man's bad side, or hell even his good side. Cause if they are, I don't know if I can be a part of your pack."

"No, Chris is, he's a good guy. Follows the code to the letter. He's mostly retired anyway, but he is still very invested in protecting the town. That's why we work with him. He lets us know if other hunters are in the area and tries to keep them from entering the town at all. Allison, she's Scott's girlfriend. They've been together for two years now."

"Oh, by the way a Mutaforma is some kind of ancient Roman magical shapeshifter. Don't ask; it's a long story, and we don't have all the answers."

"Excuse me?" Derek asked. "I know all about her, but that's privileged information."

Stiles chose to ignore that comment.

"What's a kahuna?"

"Danny?" Stiles swallowed. "He's a shaman. With healing powers. Okay, that's not accurate. He's knowledgeable about healing plants and minerals. He's kind of new at it. Witches woke up that hidden talent back before Thanksgiving."

"And a banshee is like a death caller right? I mean she can sense death, right?"

"Yeah."

He took a long drink from his straw. Once again, Stiles found himself drawn to intently watching the man's lips. At this point it was almost a Pavlovian response. They were so enchanting, pink and full, like pillows. Stiles just wanted to sleep on them. He couldn't remember the last time he'd had such an intense and immediate attraction to someone.

"Stiles, you're staring again."

"Can't help it. He's just so...yeah I'll be right back." He climbed over Derek practically tripping to get out of the booth and made a bee-line for the restroom. All the while thinking the unsexiest thoughts possible, willing his damn dick to stand down. Think about vomit, yeah vomit. Coach in a Speedo. Dad and Melissa making out. Roadkill. Anything!

Derek laughed. "Sorry about him. He means well though. I'll tell him to tone down the staring when
he comes back. It might be a while. Try to ignore the way he smells when he does."

Casey gave Derek a shy smile and continued chowing down on the pizza, seemingly unruffled by the younger man's blatant ogling.

"So, do you have any other questions?"

He answered while still chewing. "These pack nights," realizing his poor table manners, covered his mouth and finished his bite before continuing, "are they a regular thing?"

"We have them at least once a month, but Stiles tries to plan two a month. You don't have to come to all of them or any of them, but they can be really fun, and they're a good way to get to know everyone. We all went ice skating before Christmas. Stiles' dad is the sheriff, so he got us a good deal on a trip to the firing range over the summer. Though usually it's a pack dinner and movie night. All the pack except me, my sister, Cora, Uncle Peter and girlfriend, Cam are all still in high school. My sister attends SDSU, so she makes it home like every other month. Peter, well he's trouble, but he's getting better."

"You're dating Stiles' sort of sister?"

"She was my girlfriend first."

"Can I ask you kind of a personal question?"

Derek cocked an eyebrow at him. "Depends."

"You guys just mentioned Scott was a True Alpha. How did you get your eyes? Inherit them after your family died?"

"No. My older sister Laura did. Then Peter killed her. After the fire, Peter was not really in his right mind, and it's a long story, but I sort of killed him in revenge. Then our banshee used me to resurrect the man. Why you ask? Because he tried to turn her, and it turns out, she's immune to the bite, but they shared a weird psychic connection, and he used that to get to me. Doesn't matter now, because he's a weakling wolf now."

"Is Scott a born wolf?"

"Nope. Peter turned him. Cora, Peter and I are our only born wolves. I turned Isaac, Jackson and two others, but they were killed by a rival pack. Jackson's bite kind of got corrupted, and for a while he was a kanima, which is a puppet lizard thing, but he's a wolf now. That is our pack in a nutshell."

Casey swallowed hard. "That's...convoluted."

"Tell me about it."

The server stopped by their table. "Will you be having any dessert tonight?"

"Casey?"

"No thanks."

"Can you box me up two pieces of your lava cake?" He gave her a winning smile."

"Sure thing. Do you need a couple of boxes?"

"That would be great. Three please."
"I'll leave this here then. Whenever you're ready. Be back with your boxes."

"So sorry about that, Casey. I swear I will stare at my plate for the rest of the night." Stiles said sitting back down.

"No worries. It's fine."

They finished their meal, and while Stiles and Casey looked like they wanted to keep talking, Derek interrupted them. "I hate to cut this short, but I have a paper due by 11:59, and I want to do a couple read throughs with Cam, make sure my tenses match up."

"You know, I could help you edit. Oh wait, it's your 20th Century Italian Lit class isn't it? So not in English?"

"Yeah." He took enough cash from his wallet to cover the bill and stood. "Come on. I'm sure you have homework." They stopped outside. "So, we have a pack night in a few weeks. Three Fridays from now. It's a sleepover. Stiles wanted a board game night, and a potluck. So bring something to share. I'll give you a call with the time and address. I haven't seen the Google truck go by the house yet, so I'll email you directions."

"That sounds like a plan. I would like to add, I have away matches on Feb 15, March 1st and 15th. Playoffs are after that. So Saturdays won't work for pack nights until late May. I won't be able to attend any pack nights those days. Also, I can't cook to save my life. Okay if I pick something up?"

"Totally fine. We have three other potential packmates coming for the first time that night. So don't worry about it."

"Is Scott still pushing for the Wonder Twins joining? I hate those guys."

"You and me both, but he was quite insistent. He gave the puppy dog eyes."

Stiles looked shocked. "He didn't! That's cheating. No one can say no to those things."

"It was nice to meet you." Derek waved and walked towards his car.

When Stiles turned to chase after him, Casey grabbed his wrist. "Derek, I'll be right there. Give me a minute." Casey looked at his feet. In the low light, Stiles could just make out the blush on the man's face.

"I didn't mind you staring."

"No, I understand. I'll try not to do it so much." Stiles nodded, but then stopped as if the words had finally made sense in his brain. "Wait, what?"

"I liked it." He looked up and grinned. "I just thought I should, um..." He rubbed the back of his neck. "You're cute."

Even in the little light the streetlamp cast onto the parking lot, Stiles could see a red blush creep across Casey's tan skin. He stared at him for a moment, mouth agape. Sweet Baby Jesus was not only into dudes, but thought he was cute? Into which gods good graces did he manage to get? "Me? Cute? What?"

"Yeah." Casey looked a bit taken aback. "You don't think so? Come on. You have gorgeous eyes." His eyebrow twitched, and he took a deep breath to steel his resolve, which he felt dangerously close to losing at that moment. "And yeah hands, really great hands. So now that we have it out in the
open that you want to fuck my mouth, and I can think of some highly inappropriate things I'd like you to do with your hands, I'm actually more interested in actually getting to know you...first. I'm not a hook-up kind of guy. So um, can I give you my number? Or you give me yours?"

Stiles' eyebrows shot up, and he began gesticulating wildly with his hands. "Absolutely. I am totally on board with that idea. I mean, so on board, I am on the ship of that idea. It's like I am at the wheel of that idea. I'm the helmsman, no the captain of that idea, and I have minions who are also down with that idea. I," he paused remembering Cambia's advice to take a deep breath and think about what he'd like to say, "yes, I would love your number."

"I see what Derek means about the rambling."

He handed his phone to Casey. "Just put your number in there, and send yourself a message."

With an impish grin, the man added his number to a new contact, and sent a message. When he felt his phone buzz in his pocket, he pulled it out and saved the number, sending a little reply message of his own.

Stiles took a look at the message and giggled. "You saved your name as Sweet Baby Jesus."

Casey shrugged. "Good first impression." He stuck his tongue out at him.

"Oh come on, that's not fair. What did you save me as?" Casey tried to hide his phone, but Stiles snatched it out of his hands. "Bambi?" He asked confused. "What the hell, man?"

The other man blushed. "Doe-eyes."

This seemed to be a good answer, but still, Stiles grimaced. "Could you actually not call me that, please?"

"I didn't mean it in a bad way." Confused, Casey stared at him.

"In Portuguese it's a derogatory term for a young gay man. So..."

Casey blushed even more. "I am so sorry. I really meant it in that 'you have these big beautiful eyes' way, but I will change it right now." He quickly edited the contact and showed Stiles.

"Guapo? That's okay." Stiles smirked. Derek honked the car horn at him. He groaned and began walking backwards towards the Camaro, catching his foot on a rock and stumbling in the process. "So yeah, um great, fantastic. I will talk to you...later. Definitely, like tonight, or right away or whatever."

"Don't hurt yourself, Stiles." He waved.

Stiles returned the wave. "Easier said than done with me." When he sat down in the seat, he looked over to see Derek laughing at him. "What?"

"Real smooth, Guapo."

"Shut up, Sourwolf."

"I can't believe all that staring worked in your favor."

"It's part of the Stilinski charm. Just drive. You have a paper to finish." Stiles laughed and turned the radio up. This night turned out to be awesome. Now, only if he'd been able to shave beforehand.
Love and Basketball

John walked by his son's open door to see the kid preening in the mirror, no wait, he was a man now. He had to keep reminding himself that. Where had the last eighteen years gone? It seemed like only yesterday he was teaching him how to ride his bike. Instead of continuing to his room, he backpedaled and watched him in silence.

"Stiles, you idiot. You can't wear that shirt. It's too small. You look like a douchebag. Douchebaggery will simply not do. That would be like drinking a fine wine out of a sippy cup, not that you're a fine wine or anything. Midrange at best, but certainly not a two buck chuck." He tugged the overly tight t-shirt over his head, chucking it in the corner. "Undershirt. Yeah you need one of those." Muttering to himself, he didn't even see his father standing in his doorway. "Okay, undershirt on. Shirt...need a purple shirt." The closet door squeaked as he opened it. "Too baggy." He flung the shirt over his head, hanger and all; it struck the wall behind him. "Wrong color." That shirt too, found its way across the room. "Not nice enough, look too much like a kid in that one, look like I'm trying to take a page from the Derek Hale boring book of fashion in that one." All three shirts met the same fate. "Seriously, what is it with that man and henleys? Especially black ones." Hangers clacked as he pushed them around on the rack. "No, no, no, no. Where are you you purple plaid fucker?" In the very back of his closet, he spied the item in question, and with a grunt, he freed it from it's hanging prison. "This will do perfectly." His fingers made quick work of the buttons, and he admired the way the shirt, a purple, black, and white plaid western shirt, which used to be too big, now fit his bulkier frame nicely. "Not bad, Stilinski. Not bad." On the bottom of his closet, he found his black leather Chuck Taylors. "Finally have an excuse to wear you." He tossed them on the bed, lost in his head as he walked right past his dad and into the bathroom smiling to himself.

He and Casey had texted back and forth Monday night and spent at least an hour on the phone Tuesday. On Wednesday, Stiles received a couple texts while in the middle of lacrosse training camp...

...From: Sweet Baby Jesus
15:35

Hope you're working hard at practice. NE-WAY...so 2 of my flatmates, the brothers, U know Mike & Andy? They have season tickets to the Kings. BBall not hockey.

From: Sweet Baby Jesus
15:36

They're good tickets too. Home team side, five rows from the court. Anyway, they can't make the game Friday. Would you like to go with me...as a date?

Stiles looked at his phone and felt a huge grin spreading across his face as he fired back his response.

To: Sweet Baby Jesus
17:05
Absolutely. I would love to go on a date with you.

He slipped the phone back into his locker, whistling all the way to the showers. Anticipation heavy in his gut, he'd never showered so fast in his life. When he returned to his locker, he smiled again upon seeing a response.

From: Sweet Baby Jesus
17:16

:) Great. Game starts at 7:30. I know I'm the one asking you, but I'm currently without wheels. Would you be able to drive?

To: Sweet Baby Jesus
17:20

You just want me for my ride. JK. Sure I can drive.

From: Sweet Baby Jesus
17:21

We'd need to leave by 5 to have enough time w/traffic. U can meet me out front. Do you know how to get to UV? It's on the corner of Nord Ave & W Sacramento Ave.

To: Sweet Baby Jesus
17:25

I have a GPS. See you then. Absolutely can't wait.

"What's wrong with your face, Stilinski?" Jackson walked by him.

"Ever the king of snide remarks, Jack-off. It's called smiling. You should try it some time. That permanent bitch face you sport isn't doing you any favors."

"Lydia doesn't mind." He tried to bait Stiles into an argument.

"Nice try. I'm well over her. I don't care about your relationship. at. all." Even the rude comments couldn't dampen his spirits, and he spent the rest of the week practically blissed out, earning more than one, "Dude, are you high? Was it more witches?" from Scott...

...Stiles wrapped a towel around his neck and lathered up his face with shaving cream. After the first stroke down his cheek, he looked up and met his dad's eyes. "Hi?" He asked warily. "Why are you
staring at me?"

"Going somewhere tonight?"

"I told you about this on Wednesday. I am going to the Kings game with a couple people from my statistics class last at BHCC last semester." Okay, so a minor lie. He was not lying about the destination, just the company. To be fair though, he had tried now, three times to come out to his dad to no avail. The first time, outside the Jungle, his father was quite insistent that he couldn't be gay with the way he dressed. Stiles didn't even have a chance to correct the man, that no, he was not in fact gay but bi, before he chickened out and came up with that bullshit story about supporting Danny post-breakup. The second time, he'd actually managed to get, "Dad, there is something important I need to talk to you about," out of his mouth before John had replied with, "If this is about you being at the Jungle last weekend, you know I don't care that you go there with Danny sometimes. It's good that you accept him for who he is," The 'But what about accepting me?' never left Stiles' lips that night. After the debacle dinner with Melissa's family, he decided then to put off the conversation for as long as possible, perhaps forever..

"Oh that's right. I remember now. You're putting a lot of effort into your appearance tonight. Someone in this group you might be interested in?"

He didn't say anything, just cocked an eyebrow at him in the mirror and continued shaving.

"You've been hanging out with Derek too much. His mannerisms are wearing off on you."

"Why can't I look nice? Something wrong with that?" The razor made a splashing sound as he rinsed it off in the sink. He rinsed his face with cold water.

"No, of course not. Look, I just thought maybe you were finally interested in someone again. I mean, I know things didn't work out with that Alex girl, who I never met by the way."

For some reason, Stiles felt the need to growl, actually growl like a damn werewolf, but refrained. **Alex was a dude, Dad.** "Toxic relationship that was going nowhere. Saw no need. And please stop trying to set me up with daughters of your co-workers. I'm eighteen not thirty-eight. Not exactly desperate."

"No, I didn't say you were. Just want you to be happy, that's all."

"Here's a hypothetical dad, to settle my tangential mind. Say I was interested in someone, and this was actually a date. To clarify, in this scenario, when I say interested, I mean extremely so, like this might be the perfect someone for me. What would you say to that?"

"Then I would want to know when we'd get to meet her."

"And if I were to correct you and say him, not her, what would your response be then?"

John pinched the bridge of his nose. "This again? I thought we cleared this up last fall at that horrible family dinner with Carrie."

Stiles felt his gut twist. **Push it down. Tamp it down, Stiles.** "This is for research purposes, Dad. Please answer the question."

"I would want to know how badly you failed that English test then."

"It was an 83%. So not too bad." Just to be safe, he added a bit more product to his hair. Not bad, not bad at all. He patted his father on the shoulder. "Excuse me, Dad. I need to put on my shoes and belt.
Glad we had this talk." He sighed, walking into his room. "BTW, Cam is on her way over to trade cars with me for the night. I offered to drive, and she volunteered Apollo it because it's more reliable. She's got to run straight to work though, so she just needs to switch keys. Can you do that while I finish up, please?"

"So protective. Can't believe she's letting you drive her car. You better not crash it." John retreated back downstairs.

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**To: Amazon Queen**  
**16:05**

*BTW. I told my dad I am going to the game with friends from my stats class. Please don't blab. Leave my GPS with the keys if you would.*

---

**From: Amazon Queen**  
**16:10**

*No problem. Have fun and be safe. You crash my car, and I will make your life very difficult...but I'll still love you.*

---

**To: Amazon Queen:**  
**16:11**

*Wouldn't dream of it.*

---

**From: Amazon Queen**  
**16:20**

*You need to tell him eventually, you know.*

---

He spritzed cologne on his chest, and dabbed a little behind his ears. Not wanting to bathe in it, because that would be disastrous, he knew one spray and a dash were enough. Some of the other wolves in the pack hated it when the non-wolves wore perfume or cologne, but he figured that if Derek didn't mind Cambia's coconut body butter, Scott loved Allison and her Viva La...whatever the hell her perfume was called again (God knows Scott mentioned it more than once), and he knew for a fact that Jackson enjoyed the smell of Lydia's strawberry shampoo. Werewolf noses be damned; his cologne smelled amazing on him.

Once he'd donned his black studded belt, or his rock star belt as he preferred to call it, his watch, and shoes, he grabbed his leather jacket and bounded down the stairs. Cambia had already dropped off the keys. He was just about to head out the door, John stopped him once again. "So this date...she got a name?" Stiles remained stone-faced. "Okay fine. Just drive safe and call if you think you'll be home past midnight, so I don't worry. I know how sporting events can run over sometimes, and the traffic leaving them can be a nightmare. Regardless, text me when you get there and when you leave.
Yeah, yeah. I know you're not a kid anymore. I just-

"I will, Dad. Love you too." He hurried out of the house, practically giddy as he sat down in the classic muscle car. Even his fourth failed attempt at cluing his dad into his highly open-minded ideas when it came to attraction couldn't dampen his spirits. He punched in the address to Casey's dorm into his Garmin and grabbed his phone. After learning, Casey had similar music tastes as Derek (Or at least wouldn't mind listening to Derek's music), he queued up the playlist he had for whenever Derek went anywhere with him. *God I hope you like The White Stripes, Cage the Elephant, and Queens of the Stone Age.*

Though he was nervous as he drove over to the Chico State campus, he felt absolutely certain that the date would go well. How could it not when talking to him on the phone felt as natural as breathing? This must be how Scott felt when he first started dating Allison. "Don't get ahead of yourself, Stiles." He scolded. "Just be yourself. The guy is already interested in you."

"Turn right. Your destination will be on the left." The disembodied voice of his GPS echoed in the car.

He pulled the car to a stop in one of the guest spaces at University Village. With a ninety minute drive at least ahead of him, he got out to wait for him. "Hey, I'm downstairs. No, I'm standing beside the car. See you soon."

"Sweet car, man. What year is it?" A student walking by asked.

"No idea. It's my older sister's. She said it was a better date vehicle than the jeep I drive, 1970 something." He nodded as the guy kept walking. Soon, he looked up to see Casey's bright and smiling face exiting the front doors. If Stiles thought the man looked good when he was admittedly dressed like a slob, then 'Holy Heart Failure, Batman!' The werewolf looked downright delectable in a short black trench coat with a hint of a purple collar sticking out of the neck of the coat. The ripped and slightly baggy pants from Monday night had been traded in for a pair of black slim fit boot cut jeans. In stark contrast to the dark denim, white Puma sneakers completed the ensemble.

"I thought you drove a Jeep."

"It's Cam's." When Casey got closer, Stiles had to actually stop himself from drooling. Good Lord, the man was rocking the hell out of a messy modern pompadour. "You look, fantastic. Loving the James Dean hair."

"Thanks. You look good in a leather jacket."

Stiles waggled his eyebrows. "Look better out of it."

"I bet you do." Casey said as he took his place in the driver's seat while Stiles punched in the new destination.

Stiles had to force himself to quit smiling when his face began to hurt. Oh yeah, this was going to be a great night. Tonight was the night his life would change. He could feel it in his bones.

*   *   *   *   *

"Wow, these really are great seats." Stiles took the food from Casey as the man took off his jacket
and sat down.

"I told you."

He looked over at him, admiring the way his purple polo, ahem...fitted polo shirt, hugged his body, the sleeve cuffs almost too tight around his biceps. Not that he minded the sight at all. "I haven't been to a basketball game since I was thirteen I think. Derek is a Golden State fan, and we watch games together when we can."

"I go to around five a season. I love basketball even though I fucking suck at it."

"You and me both. You know what? We never got around to discussing sports this week. What's your favorite?"

Casey took a bite of his barbecued pork sandwich. "To watch or play?"

"Both?"

"Well I love watching basketball, especially college ball. My dad went to UCLA, so Bruins games were always on TV at my house as a teen. I watch rugby too, when I can catch it on TV. As for playing, that would be rugby. I'm on the school's team."

"No shit. You play rugby. I didn't even know college rugby was a thing."

"We're a Division One team. Well Div I-AA. It's not an NCAA sport, so there's no scholarship money in it. It's just a good thing I paid attention in school."

"That's so cool. You must be pretty good then. Not that I know a thing about rugby, but what position do you play?"

"I'm the number eight."

"What kind of position is that?"

"One so important it doesn't need a name." He smirked. "With my strength, I probably should play lock, but there are guys bigger than me. I don't use wolf strength if I can avoid it, so I leave the front line work to the really big guys. I'm not out to hurt anyone, but I'm speedy. Even without using wolf powers, I'm one of the fastest on the team especially for a tall guy. I mean I can't beat the team's fastest guy in a race, but he's like 5'6". It's like trying to catch a fly. Anyway, the number eight is like a midfielder in soccer in that they play both defense and offense. You have eight men that make up the scrum, which is the big pack of guys in what looks like a Roman Phalanx. Three men in the front two props and the hooker. Behind them are the locks. In the third row you have two flankers on the outsides, and I'm just behind them. I use my weight and strength to help push the scrum and allow us to gain possession. When we are on offense I can run the ball or recycle it to any of the backs or wingers. When I don't have the ball I can block or tackle. I tackle a lot actually." He deliberately took an extra long drink from the straw. After their nightly phone calls the past week, he wanted Stiles' attention on his lips. He couldn't help it; he already knew he wanted to kiss the man. Hell, after dinner on Monday, he couldn't stop thinking about him and had to jack-off twice before he could even fall asleep that night. "I'm kind of all over the place. If I weren't so fast, they'd probably have me in the lock position, and if I weren't so skilled at tackling, I'd probably play winger."

"Um... I'm sorry what were you saying?"

"Something got you distracted?"
Stiles gave him a playful shove as the game started.

"Hey what was that?"

"You know what that was for." He fought back the giggle as he remembered Derek saying those exact words to him after smashing his head into the steering wheel. *Wow, the man is really wearing off on me.* "How did you get into it?"

"Well my mother was Australian, and she grew up going to matches. In turn, she introduced the sport to my dad, and so on. I've always been tall, even as a kid. There was a youth rugby club near where I grew up, so my mum thought it would be a good fit for me."

Stiles crumpled up the paper from his burger. "You ever been?"

"To Australia? Oh yeah, lived there when I was a kid after my grandmother got sick. My mum helped her mother out; she had Alzheimer's, and they couldn't afford a live-in nurse. My mum also wanted to be there for her last years. Otherwise my grandmother would have been all alone in the end. She'd been a widow for almost fifteen years at that point. I was like six months old when we went down there. We had to move back when my dad's father died when I was almost eleven, like six months before my sister was born. If we didn't have to worry about losing our territory, we probably would have stayed. It was weird suddenly having alpha for a dad."

"Do you visit often?"

"It was once a year, but those plane tickets are like two grand...each. It just became too expensive once my youngest sister was born."

"What were their names, your siblings?"

"My brother was Declan, my oldest sister was named Bridget, and the baby was Aislin."

"ABCD. Well except C was born first. I mean if you were named Declan and your brother, Casey you guys would have been DCBA."

Casey chuckled. "Never noticed that actually. My middle name starts with a D"

"Yeah...CDC." Stiles giggled. "What is it?"

"Donovan."

"Mine's William."

Casey nodded. "Can I ask?"

"Ask what?"

"What's Stiles short for?"

"Oh. It's um... Joãozinho."

Casey stared at him for a little bit. "Correct me if I'm wrong, but isn't that just a diminutive of João?"

"Yep." Stiles huffed out. Casey chuckled. "What?"

"So, let me get this straight...your nickname is a nickname for your given name, which is in itself a nickname? How did that happen?"
Stiles grinned. Okay, so no one had ever asked that question about his first name before. "Well, when I was born, my parents weren't really sure what to name me. So anyway, my dad went down to the cafeteria to get some lunch. When he came back he heard my mom say something along the lines of 'My sweet, Joãozinho.' He'd always just assumed my grandfather's name João was short for something else. So when he filled out the application for my birth certificate, my dad wrote down Joãozinho. My mom teased him about it constantly, always joking that she was going to change it, but by then, it had stuck. There you have it."

"I'm named after an uncle that died when my mom was young. Allergic reaction to a jellyfish sting. Australia is filled with things that want to kill you."

An idea intrigued Stiles. "So..."

"Can I speak with an Aussie accent?"

"How'd you-"

"As soon as everyone figures out I used to live there, they ask, but yeah I can. My mother never lost hers or her slang, and even my dad picked a little one up. My brother was born there, but he outgrew his accent in like two years. Me though...um." His cheeks flushed like he was embarrassed to admit some great truth. "I fake my American one."

Stiles stared at him wide eyed in shock. "Whatever for?"

"Got made fun of a lot in school. You'd be surprised how being called a kangaroo so many times actually will start to piss you off. I thought if I could just start talking like an American one, then everything would be fine. Only problem though, no matter how much I fake it, I slip right back into my other one. Think I'm stuck with it. I gave up trying with most people."

Stiles raised an interested eyebrow. "You don't say. But Derek and I are...what? Worth hiding yourself around?"

He scratched an eyebrow. "Can you blame me? I lost my family two months ago, and I'm running short of people I really trust."

"You still feel that way?"

Casey stared at the chair in front of him, deep in thought. "No."

Stiles nodded. "Then can you do me a favor and not hide from the pack? If you're serious about us, you'll need to trust us just as much as we trust you."

"Okay."

"Plus, I imagine you sound hot as hell."

"Oh really?"

Stiles gave him a cocky grin. "Definitely. Do you miss it?"

"What, Oz? Sometimes, but here I don't have to worry about the snakes or spiders as much. My dad got bitten by an Eastern Brown Snake once. Could have killed him, you know if he weren't wolf. You should have seen my mom go after that thing with an axe. It was impressive."

"God, I'd love to travel more. I've never been out of the country. My mom used to talk about
Portugal with such enthusiasm."

"That would explain why you speak the language. Was she born there?"

"Yeah, her family came to America when she was twelve and settled in Boston. My dad was stationed at Presidio in Monterrey. She met my dad when he and his buddies took a trip up to San Fran. My mom went to Berkeley. My dad never learned Portuguese. I mean, I think he tried; it didn't work out too well for him I guess, but my mom and I, we would speak it all the time. It's been hard to retain since she died, but when I was in eighth grade, I found an online language exchange community. So, I practice with Andreia on there once a week. Sometimes it's other people, but she's like my study buddy, so I talk to her the most. She's learning English at University of Lisbon."

"That's cute, and I didn't know they had those kind of things online. I know Spanish, but I've found it's pretty easy to practice with people. My parent's met in college. Well...Mum was a Trojan. They met at a USC/UCLA basketball game."

"How'd that manage to happen?"

"Not before a lot of trying on my dad's part, for whatever reason, she gave him her number. It took him months to get a date with her; she kept blowing him off. I once asked my dad why he kept trying, and he said because he knew from the moment he caught her scent that she was his mate."

"They go through the whole process? You know the bite?"

"You learn about that from your research or from Derek?"

"Both. He used to be shit at communication, but he's better at it. Now if I come across new concepts or topics and have questions, he'll go over it with me so long as I promise to be the go to for any other packmates' questions."

"Ah. No, and when I asked why, he said he was worried about screwing it up. It's the same reason he never tried to turn her. He was too worried the bite wouldn't take, and he couldn't live without her. So, in a way I guess it's good they went together. Sure as hell sucks for me though."

Stiles reached over and intertwined their fingers. "It'll get a little easier every day."

"Thanks."

"So your teammates, do they know?"

"About my being gay? Oh yeah. I told them when I made the team. Initially, I was worried about it, because I had some trouble with a teammate in my under fifteen team. The kid quit the team and refused to play with me, spouting all kinds of homophobic rhetoric. Teammates need to trust each other though. So I made sure to ask if was going to be a problem. Besides, it's not like I try to hide my sexuality anyway even though I don't come across as gay either. But they said they had my back; that was the end of it."

"That's like Danny on our lacrosse team. Nobody cares at all that he likes dudes. Play any other sports?"

"I surf."

Stiles laughed. "Of course you do."

"Well I am a half Australian from SoCal. You're on the lacrosse team, you must be pretty good too."
"No, not really. I'm a lot better this year, but with Scott, Isaac, and Jackson being wolves, plus Danny is a really good goalie, first line is full of great players. Mostly I warm the bench. I have tryouts in a few weeks, the day of the pack party actually. You should come watch me get my ass handed to me. I'm better at it now that I have quit growing...I think. Actually, I'm not sure, because I grew two more inches last semester. I might actually look like a struggling fawn out there on the field. Coach makes us participate in cross country too."

Casey finished his sandwich. "How tall are you now?"

"Six two the last time I checked. So now, I am taller than Isaac who was the tallest. You?"

"Good news, you're back to second tallest. I'm a bit under 6'5". I know; it's like giant."

"Blonde, tall and presumably a very nice body under those clothes, who sometimes speaks in an Australian accent? Will you be the Thor to my Batman?"

"You and your superheroes. I'm gonna take a stab here and say big and blonde is your type."

"Unless you're a girl, and then I love petite redheads, natural redheads not from the bottle. I feel I should probably point out, since she's part of the pack, that I had a huge crush on Lydia, our banshee for like ten years. Whatever, I'm over her now. And your type..."

"I like musicians with a sense of humor and a swimmer's build."

"What does that mean?"

"Look in the mirror." He winked. "Long and lean, but not skinny."

"Funny you should say that... I actually play drums."

Casey fought back a laugh. "I know."

"Wait, how?"

"For one you kept spinning the extra straw on the table between your index and middle finger...like a drumstick, and you filled all the awkward silences with fills on the table."

"Well aren't you observant?"

"When I'm interested."

"Then I'm glad I am so intriguing." Stiles returned Casey's shy smile with a somewhat cocky one of his own. They continued trading lighthearted banter back and forth through the first quarter. Though they'd tackled music, movies and other hobbies during their phone conversations. "So why don't you have a car? How did you get home during holidays?"

"Train, but if I plan it correctly, I fly. I don't have a parking space at my building. I was going to get a car, but lost out in the lottery. I was going to get my own car then. Your Jeep, newish?"

"No, it's a 1980 CJ-5. It's beat to hell, but I will never get rid of that so long as I can help it." Stiles reached the bottom of his drink. "You want another one? My treat."

"How about ice cream? If we go now, it will be less busy than at halftime."

"Ice cream in January?"
"It is never too cold for ice cream. Come on." Casey stood up and pulled Stiles to his feet. Once they reached the concourse, he couldn't help himself and grabbed Stiles' hand interlacing their fingers. He couldn't help the face splitting grin he wore either. "What's your favorite ice cream flavor?"

Stiles glanced down at their joined hands, smirking. "Mint chocolate chip."

"I'm a big rocky road fan."

"Yeah?"

"Definitely. The more marshmallows the better." He pulled out his wallet as they approached the counter. "Hey can I get a two scoop waffle cone with chocolate ice cream and brownie pieces mixed in. Stiles what would you like?" He saw the look the younger man gave him. "Don't look at me like that. I asked you out, so I pay."

"Fine. I will have two scoops of the cheesecake ice cream in a dish, with hot fudge and raspberries."

Giving his spoon far more attention than he originally intended, he prolonged the bite, licking the spoon clean. See, I can play that game too. You and your straws. However, Stiles did not anticipate just how hot the man would look licking an ice cream cone and chose to avert his eyes until they returned to their seats, lest the brain to leg connection quit working and he fall over.

By the time they sat back down, the second quarter was over, and the seats around them had been vacated, presumably in a quest for more booze. The home team was losing by seventeen at the half, and that could make any hardcore fan miserable. Stiles looked over to see his date's tongue make one long swipe around his cone, finishing with a little slurp on the top of the frozen treat. At that moment, all his blood rushed south, and his brain short circuited. When he regained his ability to form words and coherent thought, to focus at all, he saw Casey smirk. "You knew what that would do to me. That's it, your name is being changed in my phone. Hot Lips is a more appropriate name."

"Call me whatever you want. I'm still calling you Guapo."

He adjusted his jeans as he waited for his erection to go away. "So here's a question. Biggest celebrity crush?"

"Ryan Gosling."

"Not a bad choice. Mine are Emma Watson and Chris Hemsworth."

"You weren't kidding when you asked me to be your Thor were you?" Casey laughed.

"Not at all."

His face flooded with heat. "So, guilty pleasure TV show?"

"Being Human."

"SyFy or BBC version?" He popped the last of his waffle cone into his mouth

Stiles rolled his eyes. "British obviously. Though I'm sad Mitchell's no longer on it. You? If you say Real Housewives of Anything, I will lose all respect for you."

"Ha, ha. No, for me it's American Ninja Warrior."

Stiles laughed. "Are you serious?"

"Oh yeah. Lots of well built muscular men without shirts on doing feats of athletic prowess. What's
not to like? And it's pretty crazy the stuff they do. Like I am in fantastic shape and there is no way I could do some of that stuff. For one thing I am probably way to tall and heavy for some of that stuff."

"Well that makes sense. What's you favorite show though?"

"Spartacus."

"That is Cam's favorite show. Never seen an episode, but she said something along the lines of hot muscular men in minimal clothing, gratuitous amounts of bare breasts, gore, violence, and fun all around. Totally sounds like her kind of show."

"All those things are in there too, well I mean, I didn't care about the naked chicks, but I enjoyed the writing and acting too. You end up caring about the characters and really love to hate the villains, especially Lucretia. Lucy Lawless is great. But yeah, lots of good looking men. A lot of them, like all over the place. It's awesome. Your sister, she ever try to get you to watch it?"

"Yeah, but I don't have Starz. She does; I've just never managed to start watching it at her place, not for her lack of trying. She kept saying something about a Gannicus, whoever that is."

"He's one of Spartacus' men, and a bit morally ambiguous. I have the DVD's. You should come over sometime and watch them."

"Was that asking me on a second date?"

"Do you want a second date?"

There it was again, that elfin gleam. I am in so much trouble. Stiles mused. "Oh absolutely."

"Then I guess we can make a date of it, or two, maybe three."

He slid his empty ice cream container under his seat for the time being. "When did you realize you were gay?"

"Are we trading coming out stories now? Here? In this homage to overt male heterosexuality?"

Casey stared at him a little shocked.

Stiles looked contrite. "I'm sorry. If you don't want to tell me..." He turned his attention back to the court where the second half had begun a couple minutes earlier. Way to fuck up, Stiles. "I just thought when you said you wanted to get to know me. I figured you meant beyond the superficial. My mistake. Just forget I asked."

He reached over and took Stiles' hand this time. "My first schoolboy crush was on another boy. I didn't say anything about it to anyone. I mean, I was seven, and I thought he was just the coolest kid. I would talk about him all the time; I'm pretty sure it came across as hero worship though." Fishing a pack of gum from his inside coat pocket, he offered a piece to Stiles before tossing one of his own into his mouth. "I wish I could say I was one of those boys who rejected all things boy, but nope. I liked sports and action figures, trucks...the outdoors and getting dirty. Although, I guess the last one could be more of a wolf thing. So it's not like I gave my parents the heads up when it came to stereotypes. I wasn't that kid whose parents you know knew when they were like five."

"It wasn't until one of my mother's friends brought over her daughters to play one day that I put things together. I was eleven, and we'd moved back to the States about eight months before. She wanted me to make friends, because I was having trouble with kids at school. Well they wanted to play castle. I mean I was eleven, and way past playing those kinds of games. I just wanted to kick around a ball, but whatever, my mum expected me to be nice. So I played along with the part of the
...A little girl in a pink princess dress, climbed up the later to the playhouse attached to Casey’s swingset. She stuck her head out the window. "Help! The evil witch has trapped me in this tower! I need a prince to come rescue me."

Casey grabbed his sword and shield, which in this case were a plastic trashcan lid and a pool noodle, but they served the purpose nonetheless. "Back you evil witch! I must save Princess Becky!"

He made a slashing motion with the pool toy while the witch, Kelly, brandished her tree branch wand at him. "Your spells are no match for me! I have a good heart, and magic can't stop me."

The noodle connected with the witches stomach, and the little girl made exaggerated dying noises. "You've killed me! How could I be stopped by a boy? No. Ugh." She flopped onto the ground and played dead.

Throwing his weapons to the ground, Casey scaled the castle tower. "I have killed the witch, Princess Becky. You can escape."

"My hero. My prince true love." Becky leaned over and kissed his lips.

Even though it was one of those innocent little kid kisses, Casey froze, everything in his brain telling him it felt wrong, that he didn't want Becky to kiss him, or any girl for that matter. Those little crushes he'd had on his male schoolmates back in Australia made sense, and he felt like throwing up. He pushed away from her. "Why did you kiss me?"

"Duh. You saved me, now we can get married."

"I don't want to kiss you, and I don't want to get married."

"It's pretend silly. It's what Princes do. They kiss girls and get married." She tried to kiss him again.

"Stop it!" He practically fell out of the lofted playhouse as he bolted for the house, tears welling up in and spilling from his eyes. His mother called after him, but he didn't stop until he found his secret hiding place in the laundry room. The wall in one of the cabinets had come loose, and it took no effort for him to push it out of the way when he wanted to hide. The space behind the washing machine was getting to be a little cramped, but whatever. He wanted to be alone to think about what happened and what it meant. When he buried his face in his knees, it muffled the sound of his wracked sobbing.

"Casey! What's the matter honey?" His mother called out to him.

Based on the sound of her voice, he could tell she was upstairs near his room. At that moment, he was glad neither his father nor aunt were home. They'd have found him by now for sure. Stupid werewolf ears and noses. Eventually, he heard his mother push open the laundry room door. It felt like he'd been hiding for hours; maybe he had. When he couldn't stop himself from sniffling, she knocked on the cabinet door.

"Casey? Can you please come out?"

Neglecting to think through his seclusion in the small space, he had nothing to wipe his nose on save the back of his hand. "No. I don't want to."

"I want to talk to you. What happened?"

"I don't want to talk about it, Mum."
She sat down on the floor. "Did you get hurt? I know you can heal, but that doesn't mean it won't be painful."

"I'm not hurt, but I don't feel good."

"Then can you please come out? I have a bickie and a glass of lemonade for you in the kitchen." She heard rustling and soon, the cabinet door swung open. "How can you even fit in there?"

"One of the boards is loose in the back. It's still a tight fit." When she opened her arms to him, he crawled into her lap, and, still crying, pressed his face to her chest.

"Oh sweetie, what's the matter?"

"Becky kissed me."

"Did you want her to?"

He looked up at her, wiping his eyes. "No. I didn't like it."

She smoothed his hair. "Is that why you're upset? Because you didn't like her kissing you? I will have a talk with her and her mother. We'll talk about boundaries. Son, if you don't want a girl to kiss you, tell her no. Just like if a girl tells you not to kiss her, you don't. Just because you're a boy, it doesn't mean she can kiss you if you say no."

"I did, but It's not that."

"Then I don't understand why you're upset."

"She said we have to get married now, because I'm the prince and she's the princess. She said princes kiss girls and get married."

"Casey, you don't have to marry Becky if you don't want to. You're eleven; it's only pretend, and I seem to remember a certain someone didn't even want to play with them when they got here. Besides, you should marry someone you love not just because you save her from a tower."

"I don't want to marry a princess."

"Then you don't have to. Would you rather marry the witch?" She joked, but her son clutched at her shirt and began crying again. This in turn made her cry. "Baby, what's the matter?"

"I don't want any girls to kiss me. Why does it have to be a girl? Why can't I marry a knight or a Prince?"

Her face softened and she took his face in her hands. "That's why you're upset, because you like boys?"

He nodded, looking up at her with wide, tear-filled grey eyes. "When she kissed me, it felt wrong...in my head. I don't know how to explain it, Mum, but just that it didn't feel right. Please don't be mad at me."

"Sweetie, why would I be mad at you?"

"I hear the kinds of things the older kids on the bus talk about. I guess there is a boy in eighth grade like me, and the things they call him. They say he's disgusting, sick, and how he will go to hell. Mum, am I disgusting? Will I go to hell, because I will fake liking girls. I will--" Tears sprung from his eyes again.
"Listen to me, Sweetie, you are not disgusting, you are not bad just because you like boys instead of girls."

"But Dad... he'll be disappointed. I can't be an alpha like-"

"Your father loves you, and nothing you do will change that. You are smart, kind, and patient. When the time comes, you will make a wonderful alpha, and whoever you fall in love with, a prince, wizard, werewolf, or human, like me he will be lucky to have you. Now, come on. Let's go have a snack, while I call your dad tell him to pick up pizza and come home early." She helped him up, and gave his shoulders a squeeze before they walked out of the room...

..."That was they of that conversation. When my dad came home, the three of us talked about it. They were great about it, supported me from the beginning. Everyone else found out in ninth grade."

Stiles grinned. "That's a cute story. So much better than mine."

"Oh yeah? How did you know?"

Stiles flagged down one of the concession workers nearby and purchased a Coke for himself and a water for Casey. "Always knew I liked girls, until and fuck, he is going to kill me for saying this, until I met Derek. I thought Holy Voltage, Batman, that man is hot. It was not like wow, that's a good lucking guy, the lucky bastard, I bet he gets a lot of girls. Oh no. It was a, 'I need to figure this out.' thing. I rushed out of there, went home and tried to um, take care of my problem... which apparently required gay porn. That was when I knew. I mean, I'm Stiles; I am an equal opportunity kind of guy. Guy, girl, anyone in between."

"You cracked a fat because of Derek?"

"Is that code?"

"What? Oh. No, it means exactly what you think it does." He winked.

"I see, but yep." He popped the 'p.' "Don't looked so shocked. You saw the man. He knows all about it too. One, he could smell it, and two, I told him. No big deal. However, in a morphine induced drug haze during Stiles Squirrel Fest, in which I broke my arm, I apparently volunteered to be his gay experiment."

Casey snorted and promptly choked on his drink. "What?"

"Yeah don't worry about it. If he really wanted to experiment, he'd pick someone up for a three way with him and Cam. I'm pretty sure they have that stipulation. Though for her it wouldn't be an experiment."

"I see."

"So are you out then, to people besides Derek?"

"The pack knows. That's it. I've tried to tell my dad, but it's been a disaster so far. He seems to think I can't be gay or any variation on straight because of the way I dress. Trust me, he actually said that when he got called to a disturbance at the gay club in town, the very same one I happened to be at that night. Told me it's not my kind of club, never mind that it is the only 18+ club in Beacon Hills. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I had a fake I.D. I tried to have that conversation, and he said I wasn't gay. I told him I could be, and then the whole 'not dressed like that' bit came out. I panicked and came up with a cover story about supporting Danny through a break-up. Now any time my dad hears about me being at that club, he just assumes I'm there being a good friend." Stiles quickly detailed the dinner
from a few months before.

"He actually agreed with her, about bisexuals?"

"Not exactly, but he didn't not agree with her. I mean how am I supposed to respond to that? 'Well sorry to burst your bubble, Dad, but I actually am one of those people you seem to think can't exist.' Yeah that would fail on an epic level. I'm talking Tolkein level epicness. I guess I worry that his straight-up denial...ha straight. I made a pun. I worry that it's just his way of being civil about not approving of the "lifestyle" or whatever bullshit they call it. If that's the case, hell I am going to have to hide all forms of PDA around town I guess. Perk of being the sheriff's son. Everyone tells him what his stupid son has been up to."

Casey threw an arm around Stiles' shoulders. "Well Chico has some nice places for dates. There are free outdoor concerts starting in May. They hold them in City Plaza. Bidwell Park is a favorite place of mine to go for a run. Oh, get this. There's a restaurant called The Banshee, has great burgers. There is this Spanish restaurant I like, Basque Norte. I've wanted to take a date there, but haven't. No one would know you, most likely, and you could hold my hand as much as you want without it getting back to your dad."

"You sound pretty sure about me."

"I am. You're interesting, and you make me laugh a lot. Being hot helps too. I like you... a lot, and it would be a crime for our next date to be in the boring confines of my dorm room without some kind of dinner first before we binge watch tv."

Stiles blushed. "You think I'm hot?"

"You did that the other night too. Don't tell me you can't see what I do."

"Well to be honest, I'm one hell of a late bloomer. I still don't actually have any friends outside the pack. I used to, but well, the life expectancy of Beacon Hills teenagers is surprisingly short. I spent most of my high school career awkward and skinny without a lot of friends. This," he gestured to himself, "is a recent development. When most of your friends are of the Lupine persuasion, it is surprisingly easy to feel self-conscious."

"You just gestured to all of you."

"Okay Hiccup, that's enough being adorable."

He grinned. "Trust me; it's true.. So why don't you look into some of the things to do in Chico? You can plan our second date if you want."

"That sounds like..." He glanced up at the Jumbotron. "Look it's Kiss Cam."

Casey grimaced. "I hate that thing."

"What? How can you hate Kiss Cam?"

He gave him a look that said, 'Can you not think of a reason?' When Stiles didn't respond, he broke his silence. "I come to about eight of these games a season. I've gone to countless Angels games; my brother was a huge baseball fan. I've been to several Ducks games, and they all have the same things in common: A bunch of straight couples kiss in varying degrees of appropriateness ranging from chaste to filthy. Sometimes girls will kiss, and people will wolf whistle. Two guys kiss? It's always a joke. Well actually I take that back. For some reason the hockey players just like to kiss each other. I suppose it's because so many of them are European. It just pisses me off."
Stiles shrugged. "Well then, how lucky for us we won't be seen on the Jumbotron then. I'd hate to be a joke."

"I didn't mean it like that," he winced.

"Yeah," Stiles squeezed Casey's hand, before intertwining their fingers, "I know." He looked up to see a young couple practically devour each other's faces, and he was sure if the camera lingered on them any longer clothes would start flying off. "Oh get a room," he grumbled.

"See, that's what I'm saying." Casey watched an elderly couple share a soft kiss. "Okay, now that's adorable."

Stiles agreed with him. Old people in love were a thing to aspire to. Hungry for a treat, he started looking around for a concession vendor nearby. He was so engrossed in his mission, he almost missed Casey's exasperated groan from the seat next to him. It wasn't until he heard booing and chants of 'kiss her' that he looked up to see Casey's obstinate face on the screen. His and the woman sitting next to him.

"Don't take this the wrong way, Miss, but..." Stiles tried to smooth things over, but she seemed to understand.

On the screen, Casey gestured to the seat next to him where Stiles sat as if to convey, that a) he had no intention of kissing some random woman...or any woman, and b) he was here with someone. Before the camera could pan to his right, Stiles leaned over the armrest and kissed his cheek.

Judging by the chorus of 'Aw shit,' people expected Casey to be angry, maybe throw a punch, and why not? A big, muscular guy like him had to be someone whose masculinity was threatened at the slightest thing. Yeah, Stiles should have thought that through better. Just when he started to panic that he'd fucked things up, the camera moved on to someone else. "I shouldn't have done that. That was inappropriate. I didn't ask you if I could ki-" His inevitable rambling was cut off by Casey's lips on his own. Large hands held his face, and good God, those lips were just as soft as he'd fantasized, the best mixture of smoothness and firm pressure. Stiles was sure, as a warm tongue slipped between his parted lips, that were he standing, he'd have gone weak in the knees. He couldn't help thinking, when Casey let out a quiet hum against his mouth, that this was how a kiss was supposed to feel, not just a brainless mess of lust like most, if not all, his other ones had been. Truly there was something to be said about involving emotion.

When Casey broke the kiss and pulled back, Stiles stared at him, blinking, his eyes the size of saucers. "That was...wow, I mean. When you were so reluctant, I just thought you were against obvious PDA or something."

"Not at all." He grinned at Stiles. "I just didn't want our first kiss showing up on that bloody screen."

Now that Stiles thought about it, he didn't either.
Lydia and Allison stared out at the guys on the lacrosse field as snowflakes flitted down from the sky. It had been an especially cold winter for Beacon Hills, snowed twice with measurable amounts even. The brisk weather obviously didn't bother the players; they were busy running around to keep them warm. However, the twenty people or so who sat in the stands to watch tryouts had no such benefit.

Lydia blew into her gloved hands and rubbed them together. "Remind me again. Why are we here?"

"To support our boyfriends."

"No need. It's not like either of them are in danger of not making the team."

"Fine...to support, Stiles?"

"He might legitimately need our support." Allison pulled a thermos from her backpack. "I ran out to get this from Sally's before tryouts started. Hot chocolate?" She shook the canister at her friend.

"Absolutely."

She poured some into one of the paper cups she'd grabbed when she bought the drink. "Now see, isn't that better?"

Lydia didn't answer her as she took another sip. Her attention was focused on the young man who had just taken a seat on the bleachers several rows down from them. He stretched his legs out on the empty bleacher space next to him. Wow.

Allison followed her gaze. "New student?"

"God I hope so."

"You have a boyfriend, remember?"

"I can enjoy the view though, right? Plus we have an agreement."

"Which is?"

"We have both agreed to participate in a threesome of the other's choosing, should we have the opportunity." She took another drink, studying his attire. He was dressed sharply, in a charcoal colored wool peacoat, similarly colored convertible mittens with the flap buttoned up exposing his fingers, and a forest green and gold striped scarf. "The boy can dress; I'll give him that, and he has great hair. Lord knows this school needs more boys with fashion sense that extends past jeans and t-shirts. Yeah, I'm really liking the view. Let's go make friends."

"Maybe after we're done with the chocolate."

Lydia watched him pull out a text book from his backpack along with a notebook and a blue highlighter. "Hmm."

"What?"
"That's way too thick to be any of the textbooks we have here, must be a college book. Another smart one. Well he will not be challenging me for Valedictorian that's for sure, and I'm fairly certain Salutatorian is locked down. Stiles should watch his back for number three."

Allison rolled her eyes. "Or he's just getting a head start on college."

The new guy slipped earbuds into his ears, and soon his head began bobbing along to music while he read, his hand taking notes and highlighting as needed.

"I wonder what he's listening to." Lydia mused aloud while she reapplied her lipstick. "Okay. I'm done with my hot chocolate." She looked up to see her boyfriend score a goal. "Good shot, Jackson! There Allison, I have played the part of supportive girlfriend. Now come on. I want to figure out who the mystery new guy is and see if he's as good looking close up."

They packed up their things and slowly made the trek down the bleachers, settling behind him. Before either of the girls could introduce themselves, he took out his earbuds. "You know, you could have just waited a couple hours and introduced yourselves at the meeting," he said without turning around.

Lydia was a little flustered. One, this guy had heard her talking about him, two, he was just as nice to look at up close, and three, the timbre of his voice, not to mention the slight accent...hello, hot as hell. "It's not nice to eavesdrop."

"I wasn't." He smirked. "You both have the scent of several wolves all over you, and you," he pointed to Lydia, "smell a lot like Stiles. So you must by Lydia. Hi, I'm Casey." He extended his hand, which both the girls shook.

Allison smiled. "You're one of the new guys we're supposed to meet tonight. Scott mentioned you. I'm Allison."

"Nice to meet you, ladies."

"What are you working on?" Lydia asked.

Casey was about to answer her when he heard "heads up" from the field. He turned in time to see the lacrosse ball hurtling towards them. One of the perks of being a werewolf, was the fast reflexes. He caught the ball one handed, no problem.

"Nice catch! Throw it back!" Coach Finstock said. When Casey stood and flung it back at him, the man made the mistake of catching it, shaking out his stinging hand afterwards. "Quite the arm you have there!" He signalled for the players to take a couple laps and walked over to the sidelines. "Ever think about playing lacrosse?" Casey joined him on the field, standing a good five inches taller than him. "Because with those reflexes and your size, you'd kill out on that field."

"Yeah, no."

"Think about it at least."

"My coach would have my hide if I absconded to play high school lacrosse leaving them without a number eight. And I don't know, I think adjusting to playing a sport with protective gear other than a mouth guard might be tough. So thanks for your offer."

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

"I'm pretty sure you have to actually be a high school student to play high school sports." He
rejoined Allison and Lydia on the bench. "To answer your question, Lydia," he closed his textbook and handed it to her.

"Human Biology?"

"Yep, have a test in my Childhood Biology class on Monday, and about seventy more pages of reading left. So, I while I would love to chat, I really need to get this done before the party tonight, because I have other homework to work on before tomorrow. Won't actually have time this weekend."

She gave him back his book. "Biology major?"

"Yep, then to med school."

"Looks, fashion sense, and brains too? Too bad I'm not single; intelligence is so sexy."

"Um, thanks, but you're not my type."

"Oh I could be."

He laughed uncomfortably. "Pretty sure you can't. Anyway, I'm sure we will talk later." He turned his music back on and resumed studying, completely lost in his head.

Down on the field, Scott ran next to Stiles. "There's another wolf here."

Stiles looked over at the stands, smiling when he saw Casey. "Yep, that would be Casey. He's our new beta. Derek and I met him a few weeks ago. He's in college. Lost his pack last semester."

"Derek took you to a meeting?"

Stiles rolled his eyes. "Don't sound so shocked. I am his second, Scott. He took me to meet both of the new betas. You didn't want that responsibility, though it didn't stop you from practically twisting his arm to let in Thing One and Thing Two."

"They have names you know."

"Yes, and they hate me. Why should I dignify them with using their names?"

"So where is he?" Scott looked over at the stands.

"The pretty one."

Scott furrowed his brows. "I thought you said the new beta was a guy."

"Oh he is, and he's pretty, so pretty...so very pretty." Stiles dreamy voice drifted off. "I just... want to... run my hands through that hair, and pet him, and put my mouth all over-"

"I'm sorry, I can't tell which guy you mean."

"There! Right there!" He emphatically gestured to where Casey sat in the stands. "How can you not objectively notice he's good looking?"

He didn't have time to wait for an answer, because Coach blew his whistle calling the players in for one on ones, which Stiles admitted, were not even close to his strong suit...if there was a strong suit to his lacrosse skills, which there really wasn't. Instead of worrying about it this year, like he had the previous three, he decided to just wing it. The line in front of him slowly began to shrink as one by
one the ten or so players in front of him began to take their shots. That group just so happened to include all three wolves on the team.

Isaac and Jackson moved up the field with their usual flash (Lots of spinning moves), the latter sending a shot past Danny, but Isaac gave a valiant effort. Two players separated Scott from the other wolves. When it came to Scott, he progressed with his usual tactic of just overpowering people. Oh joy, Alpha strength. Stiles had momentarily zoned out, when he heard Coach's infernal whistle again.

"Bilinski! Quit your day dreaming and take your damn turn!"

"Sure thing." He winked, and pointed at the man. Since Casey had told him he played rugby, Stiles had taken to watching matches on Youtube to familiarize himself with the game, and he found a lot of the best wingers (were they the guys?) Anyway, he found the smaller and lighter ones tended to side-step a lot. Sounded like a good plan, but holy hell, Bradley was defending him? The guy was like the damn Berlin Wall...that is to say, a brick wall. Wait, and Jake? Significantly littler, but quicker. Doomed, yep doomed. Well so much for getting off the bench this year.

He cradled the ball and ran towards them. As he expected, the linemates decided to let Jake make the first move, presumably because he was more mobile. He moved to body check Stiles, but a side step, and duck saw him past the defender. Can't believe that worked. Stiles ran on a bit of a slant route, running to Bradley's off-hand side. The guy took the bait and lunged at him, closing the distance like it was nothing. Stiles was nothing if not a quick thinker, and used Bradley's back like a gymnastics vaulting table as the kid fell down. Both players out of the play, meant no one stood between him and Danny. Stiles took a bounce shot at the goalie's five hole. Oh my God! That was awesome. I am awesome. Don't count your chickens, Stiles. Could be a one and done lucky shot. Yeah, yeah, yeah. He blinked and shook himself out of his internal argument.

"Looks like Balinski ate his Wheaties today! Nice moves there, and here I thought you were never going to get off the bench."

"Thanks for the vote of confidence Coach."

Scott clapped him on the back. "Where did that come from?"

"Several places. One, I'm a lot bigger and stronger this year. Two, I've been watching a lot of video."

Unbeknownst to Stiles, Casey had actually looked up to see him make his shot. He wanted to watch the rest of the tryouts, but if he was going to have any fun tonight, he had to finish his homework. Fifty-seven pages of reading, eight pages of notes and countless flashcards later he felt a light tap on his shoulder. About to groan and ask that everyone please leave him alone, he looked up to see Stiles standing in front of him.

"Hey Casey, you're killing me with the pompadour again. You look good, really good."

He blushed. "You haven't even seen what I'm wearing under the coat."

"Yeah, but the coat matches your eyes almost. Anyway, I need to shower, which shouldn't take me more than twenty minutes. Did you want to wait in my Jeep? It's warmer in there? The student lot is that way, and I have space 52. Allison or Lydia could show you. Of course, you're welcome to wait for me in the hall."

"That was a lot of options you just through at me." He pointed to the lacrosse stick in Stiles' hands. "How'd you do?"
"Better than I thought I would. I'm going to call you my lucky charm. I don't want to jinx myself, but I think I have first line in the bag this year."

"I saw your fancy moves."

"You did, eh? I confess, I've been trying to learn the rules of rugby. That requires watching a lot of Youtube videos. I might have learned a thing or two from Bryan Habana."

"Aw, I'm flattered." He felt a blush creep across his face. "And fantastic choice for video inspiration. He can accelerate like no one I've ever seen, great footwork."

"You know what? Screw the shower. I hate showering here...uncomfortable in the locker room. I'll shower at home. Let me go grab my stuff." They walked towards the school, and Stiles made it in and out of the locker room in record time. Once in the car, he noticed the extra bag his boyfriend brought...yes he could actually call him that. After a very successful third date (Not that successful. Keep your head out of the gutter, Stiles), they decided they liked each other enough for a relationship. "You sure brought a lot of stuff for one night."

"Actually, can I ask you a favor? Could I have a ride to the airport tomorrow morning? We have a tournament in Vegas this weekend, and I was able to sweet talk my Coach into letting me meet the team at the airport instead of campus. I know it's early for you on the weekends, but I need to be there by seven. Our game is at three tomorrow. I was going to borrow my roommate's car tonight, but it's in the shop. I'll buy you coffee."

"You sure know how to treat a guy. Sure, it's no problem. How'd you get here then?"

"Bus. Took forever too. Thanks." He leaned over and kissed Stiles' cheek.

"Oh you'll need to do better than that. I need to swing by my house to pick up my stuff and shower. Scott takes a notoriously long shower. We should have the house to ourselves." He winked.

"Well then. Please drive."

* * * * *

The drive back to his house took less time than usual. Because the universe seemed to be in Stiles' favor today, he caught every green light, and pulled into the driveway. "Well, this is my house." He gave Casey the quick tour. "I'm going to go shower really quick. Help yourself to anything in the fridge. Let me show you my room." He opened the bedroom door, thrilled he spent the extra time last night to clean it, knowing that he'd need to kill a little time before the pack night and wanted to show Casey where he lived.

Thursdays were laundry day. So that meant, the room didn't smell overwhelmingly like teenage boy and jizz, though he knew Casey's werewolf nose would still pick up on it. "Here we are." Rifling through his drawers until he found something suitable to wear, he excused himself for the bathroom.

Casey took in the room. Everything about it screamed Stiles. There was absolutely no design plan in place. Instead, band posters and all kinds of random decor littered the room in a haphazard fashion. He smiled when he realized his boyfriend had actually cleaned up for him.
Sitting on the dresser, a single framed photograph stared back at him. Upon further inspection, he saw it was a Fourth of July picnic. He recognized a much younger version of Stiles, one who looked to be about six years old, missing several teeth as he smiled at the camera from in between what Casey knew were his parents. He instantly recognized his mother. Stiles looked so much like her that he imagined it was probably hard for his dad sometimes, right down to the same mole dotted complexion, even though Mrs. Stilinski's was more tan than her son's fairer skin. Stiles' father, well he knew him from several televised police statements. They really didn't look a like at all. A small chuckle escaped his lips, because Casey also looked a lot like his mother, but he knew his size was all his father, though he guessed neither of them would have imagined their tiny infant would wind up so tall...or big for that matter.

Above his desk, a photo collage of Stiles and his friends made him smile. He could see Derek, Lydia and Allison in a couple of the pictures and realized that it was probably the pack. He studied the photos, trying to familiarize himself with their faces. Allison stood in an embrace with a guy with a tan complexion, and Casey recognized him from the family portrait at the Sheriff and Melissa's wedding he passed on the way up. So that was Scott. In the photo adjacent to that one, Derek was kissing a dark haired woman; he figured that to be Cambia. Next to the collage was a framed picture of Stiles, Scott and Cambia at Christmas. The two boys had captured her in a hug, one of them on each side of her. The bottom of the frame read: Family, and Stiles had a Post-It on the bottom corner, the words I finally have siblings scrawled onto the yellow paper...even if not blood. A sudden pang of grief and loss hit him in the gut. Fuck, he missed his brother and sisters, and his parents...the whole family really.

Unable to continue looking at the photo, he slipped his shoes off and flopped onto the bed with his textbook, but he could not concentrate at all. It smelled too much like Stiles. Allowing himself only the briefest moment to relax into the man's pillow, where he flooded his senses with the alluring scent, he sat on the floor in front of the closet door. It was nowhere near as comfortable.

"Why are you sitting on the floor?" Stiles asked coming back into the room less than ten minutes later. "I changed the bedding last night. It's clean."

"Um...it smell-"

"Too much like me?"

He nodded. "Made it hard to concentrate."

When Stiles grabbed the bottle of face moisturizer off his dresser, Casey stopped him. "What?"

"Just hold off on that. I," he backed him against the wall and nuzzled at his neck, "want to know what you smell like without anything to change your scent."

Stiles blushed. He'd never been scented quite like this and did not mind it one bit. Actually, he finally had the courage to ask a question that had plagued him since he first learned about werewolves. "What do I smell like?"

Casey's knees felt weak, and he leaned into him, pressing several kisses to the other man's neck as his wolf pawed inside him begging to be let out. "Trascendent, sublime, delectible" he muttered against his skin, "like absolute heaven."

"That good?"

"Better. Like pears, fresh grass, honeydew and rain." He inhaled deeply. "Oh my god. I wish you could bottle it. Fuck, I'd never function properly again. It's like...catnip. Stiles, you're driving me
Something about hearing those words, knowing that he, one Stiles Stilinski, had that effect on not just anyone, but a freaking gorgeous werewolf, had him hornier than he'd ever been in his life. He pushed back against him to get enough space to move the man's head out from the crook of his neck and meeting Casey's lips with his own. Since he'd first kissed them, that mouth had made an appearance in his dreams every night. The kiss quickly became heated, leaving the pair rutting frantically against each other. Fuck he couldn't take it; standing up was quickly becoming impossible. He broke the kiss. "Bed. Now."

Not one to go against a commanding tone like that, Casey let him guide them both towards the mattress. They tumbled, ungracefully onto Stiles' bed. He carded his fingers through Stiles' still wet hair.

Stiles didn't want to ruin the perfectly coiffed hair, and instead chose to wrap a hand around his neck to cup the back of his head, bringing their lips even closer together (If that were even possible). Teeth clashed together; tongues performing a delicate and hungry dance in perfect harmony.

Stiles had taken to caressing Casey's cheek with his other hand as he kissed a hickey into his neck (One that of course faded too fast for his liking), when his thumb errantly brushed against the man's lower lip. Casey snapped at the digit with blunt teeth, before he turned his head slightly to pull Stiles' index finger into his mouth, sucking on it long and slowly.

"Jesus." He groaned.

Casey moved his hand between their bodies to palm at his boyfriend's crotch. "I could take care of that for you."

Stiles tore his gaze from the skin of Casey's neck and blinked at him. "Uh...uh..." His brain had once again short circuited at the delicious thought. Unable to form any words, he nodded emphatically. Soon, he found himself flipped over onto his back.

"Wolf got your tongue?" Casey flashed him an impish grin as his fingers made short work of his boyfriend's belt, ridding him of his pants almost as quickly before capturing Stiles' mouth. Just under the collar of his shirt, Casey sucked a mark onto Stiles' collarbone and then licked a broad stripe up his stomach, nipping once more on his collarbone.

"Well now, let's just add a biting kink to the hair-pulling one, shall we. He winced as Casey took a nipple into his mouth, treating it with the same courtesy shown to his collarbone.

"Sorry, bit of a biter."

He licked his lips. "Totally not a problem so long as those fangs do not come out." He opened his eyes in time to see his boyfriend kiss a line down his stomach until he met the waistband of his boxers.

"These need to go."

"Uh huh." Stiles nodded. "Definitely." He lifted his hips and pushed his underwear to his thighs, and fuck if Casey didn't begin devouring him, bobbing his head up and down Stiles' length. "Fuck, you are good at this." Was the man humming with his dick in his mouth? Whatever he was doing, the vibration made him see stars.

Casey pulled off him with a pop, before pulling Stiles into his mouth in one agonizingly slow motion until his nose brushed against Stiles' body. Just to drive him wild, he swallowed a few times and had
the other man practically writhing on the bed.

Screw it! Stiles thought, and he raked his hands through the man's blonde hair.

Downstairs, Scott pushed open the front door, a small pile of mail in one hand, his backpack in the other. The living room was empty, so Stiles was most likely upstairs. "Stiles, you got a crapton of mail today. There's a letter from Stanford, another one from the Desidério Laranjeiro Scholarship Fund--pretty sure I butchered that name, and the Kerry Ellison Foundation!" He waited for a response only to come up empty. The Jeep was in the driveway, and since he didn't hear the shower running, he assumed his step-brother had his headphones on.

"Fucking...oh my god!"

Scott craned his head towards the ceiling, deciding to ignore it as one of Stiles' unique quirks.

"Sweet merciful-- oh shit!"

Scott's plan to ignore it came to an end when he heard a loud crash that had him rushing up the stairs. "You okay?" Still no response. Convinced Stiles had knocked himself unconscious, he opened the door, and just as quickly shut it. Expecting him to be alone, Scott saw their new packmate with a mouthful of Stiles' dick. Yes, certainly a situation he never wanted to see his friend and step-brother...like ever.

"Oh fuck! Ffffuck!" Stiles threw back his head as he came down the back of Casey's throat.

After a few seconds, Casey looked up Stiles' body. "Someone is standing in the hallway. Pretty sure by the heartbeat, he just walked in on us." When he saw Stiles' panicked expression, he pressed a calming hand to his stomach. "Smells like a wolf."

Stiles pulled the sheet over his waist. "What do you need, Scott?"

"You should have locked your door!"

"I did!"

Scott appeared in the doorway. "What you do you mean you did?"

Stiles pointed to the broken doorknob in Scott's hand. "That's not where the handle to my door usually is."

"Oh my god, I am so sorry." Scott, even with his tanned skin, turned crimson. "How did you manage this? You've met him like once! I mean, I still don't understand how you pulled off your birthday weekend, and now....Finally losing your virginity has created a monster."

"Turn around, Scott."

"Yeah okay." He obliged.

Stiles pulled his boxers up before tugging on his jeans. "Remember our conversation when playing Call of Duty last week?"

"What does that have to....oh. I take it Casey is the guy you've been seeing."

"Bingo, Scotty boy."

"But that was like three weeks. How did you get him to blow you in three weeks? It took like six
"Because you and Allison were worried about being caught by your parents. Casey is a grown ass
man; he can do what and who he wants. Incidentally enough, Casey, this is Scott, my step-brother
and the other pack Alpha. Scott, this is one of the new betas, Casey, who is also my boyfriend. So be
nice."

"Nice to meet you."

"Yeah, you too."

"Now what did you need?" Stiles felt terrible about being unable to return the favor, but judging by
the pink tinge of his boyfriend's ears, being walked in on had not only embarrassed him but killed the
mood for him.

Scott handed Stiles his mail. "Open the bottom one last."

"Here we are, the two big scholarships writing to me informing me that I did not win." He opened
the first one, his eyes quickly scanning the letter until he saw the words 'We are pleased to award
you.' "Fuck yeah. Fifteen grand!" He gave both men a high five. "First, I aced that AP Psych test,
then I rocked tryouts. I got an amazing blowjob, and now I'm rolling in the education dough. God,
today just keeps getting better and better."

Scott winced. "How about we refrain from talking about sex for the moment?"

"Oh no, Scotty. I have been subjected to way too many uncomfortable conversations about what
Allison is like in bed. I owe you so many awkward sex chats. Just be glad I didn't go into detail
about that birthday tryst. One word Scott should you ever go down that route, logistics."

He quickly changed the subject. "I've only managed a wimpy two grand in aid."

He clapped Scott on the back. "You'll get more. I can feel it. And anyway, I am number three in the
class, and when I manage to stay on topic, I apparently can write one hell of an essay in Portuguese."

Scott grinned. "Open the next one."

Brimming with his prior good news, he tore into the next envelope. "Two for two."

Casey grinned. "How much is this one?"

"Another ten. That's like a whole year of tuition to my number two choice."

Scott smirked. "Well then maybe you should open the next one."

When Stiles flipped over the last envelope, and his hands started shaking. "I can't. What if it's a no? I
don't care how nice San Diego is; I don't really want to be eight hours from home. You open it,
Scott."

"No, way. I don't want to be the one who breaks the bad news."

"Oh for crying out loud! Give it here." Casey took the envelope from him. He opened the letter
carefully, and maintained his poker face until he reached the end of the letter.

"What? That's bad news isn't it? Well, fuck."

Casey tried to hand Stiles the letter, but he wouldn't take it. "You really want to read the letter." He
held it in front of his face, an index finger pointing to one word.

"I got in! Oh my god! I got in!" He jumped on his bed several times, waving the acceptance letter around like a madman, until one poorly planned jump sent him falling off the bed. Luckily, he crashed into his boyfriend who kept him from hitting the ground.

Casey wrapped his arms around Stiles' waist, holding him tightly against his chest. From where he rested his chin, he tried to read the letter over Stiles' shoulder. "You need to read the rest of the letter, Stiles. Trust me; you want to read it."

"Why?"

"It tells you how much aid they're giving you." He kissed his cheek.

"What?" His voice squeaked. He read the rest of the letter, and his eyebrows raised in shock. "That's per year?"

"Yep."

He spun around and faced his boyfriend. "Forty-five grand a year! That means I only need to come up with like fifteen for the rest of the tuition, room and board?"

"Your two scholarships would cover almost two years of tuition."

Stiles felt the room begin to spin. "I need to sit down."


Stiles took his face in his hands. "Did you just..."

"I hope I said that right. I looked it up when you mentioned you were waiting for your acceptance letter. Wanted to surprise you. I know google translate can get things wrong, but I reverse translated it-"

"Close enough." Stiles cut him off with a kiss, which quickly progressed past innocent.

"You could at least wait for me to leave the room before you start making out."

Stiles flipped him off, continuing with his current actions.

"I'll just wait in my room...please don't start having sex."

Once Scott left, Casey broke the kiss. "Feeling better? No longer lightheaded?"

"Oh I'm lightheaded, but for a different reason. You're amazing, you know that?" He smiled.

Casey kissed down Stiles' neck, once more taking in his scent and how arousal had changed it. "No I didn't; please tell me more."

"Well, you are smart, sexy, and very thoughtful." When his boyfriend began nuzzling at his neck like an overeager house cat, he chuckled.

"Don't laugh at me. If you had a supernatural nose, you'd understand. Trust me."

"As nice as this is, I need to go tell my dad I got in. You don't mind a detour do you?"
"Course not." He let go of him and packed up his books, finally catching sight of his hair. "Eesh."

"You want to fix it? You're welcome to use any of my product."

Casey set his bag on Stiles' bed and pulled a grey knit beanie from the front pouch of his backpack, securing it over his sex hair. "Problem solved. The bathroom is across the hall, yeah?" He grabbed his toothbrush and a bottle of mouthwash from his bag.

After he left the room, Stiles had a wicked, but delicious idea. The t-shirt he currently wore was now a little damp with sweat, and to be fair, probably smelled like sex. He pulled it off over his head, scribbled out a little note on a post-it, and pinned it to the collar before folding it up and burying it underneath Casey's clothes for the weekend. He noticed right away that the man had a method to his packing. Presumably his pajamas were on top, and then tomorrow's clothes underneath that. On the right side of the bag sat his rugby uniform. No wait, that wasn't the proper term. What was it called again? Oh yeah, his kit. Quickly, he zipped the bag back up and finished gathering his things for the night. A quick glance in the mirror told him that he needed to add more product. There. Now he was ready to go.

"Hey Scotty boy!" He rapped on Scott's door. "You ready to go?"

Scott opened his door just as Casey opened the bathroom door. "Dude, what are you doing?"

Casey finished gargling and spit out mouthwash. "What? I can't exactly show up to a pack meeting with spunk breath. Yeah, that would go over well with that many wolves in the room." He popped a piece of gum into his mouth and smirked, then ducked into Stiles' room to retrieve his bags. He walked past him with his bags and continued downstairs.

Stiles walked into the kitchen and unplugged the crockpot with his meal for the potluck. Once it was safely stored in the insulated carrier bag, he opened the fridge and pulled out a Red Bull. He'd been up early this morning putting all the ingredients into the slow cooker. If he was going to make it past midnight tonight, he'd need some caffeine.

"That smells delicious. What did you make?" Casey kissed the back of his neck.

"It's one of my mom's recipes. It's called Alcatra. Essentially, it's pot roast."

"I cut up a bunch of fruit. Yep, I'm that talented." He joked. "I wasn't kidding when I said I couldn't cook. I eat most of my meals in the dining halls."

"Don't worry. Scott is bringing chips and salsa, which he also bought."

"Let's go guys." Scott had already headed to the front door.

"We're stopping at the station. I need to talk to my dad, and make copies of my letter so I can rub it in Jackson's face." He grinned like the cheeky monkey he was, and they were out the door.
Portuguese used in this chapter:
Parabéns. Eu estou orgulhoso de você: Congrats. I'm proud of you.

Also, I am aware that Stanford recently switched to free tuition for students with household income of less than $125k, and it would be unlikely that with John as Sheriff and Melissa as an RN that they would make less than that- I wrote this before the change and did not want to change Stiles' financial aid award amount.

Plus I don't actually think Chico State has a Rugby 15's team (which is the team Casey's position of Number 8 would play on), only Sevens, but for the sake of the fic, it does.
What's With the Meathead Twins?

Chapter Notes

This was going to be one long chapter, but I decided to split it in two. I will post the second part of this chapter next week.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Stiles, Scott and Casey stepped out of the jeep at the Hale house, duffel bags over their shoulders and bags of food in their hands.

Casey whistled. "Jesus, that is one massive house."

"Yeah, Derek's family was loaded. It's been entirely rebuilt about a year ago actually. Now, there is space for all of us. Before, we had meetings in his loft, which was not really big enough for everyone, and it sort of had massive hole in the wall...not to mention people had died there."

Casey's eyebrows rose high on his forehead. "Oh my god, really?"

Stiles gave him a solemn nod. "Really, really. Come on, I'll give you the tour." He used his key to open the door.

"You got a key?" Scott's jaw hung open. "I have one, but he said everyone else that doesn't live here has to use the key locker."

Stiles laughed. "He meant everyone besides me. I'm special remember. Strategic Second remember? Cam has one too."

"Well of course she does. They're sleeping together."

Stiles rolled his eyes and gave a subtle shake of his head. His step-brother could be so naive sometimes. If only he'd read up on his werewolf history. "I think it's a little more than that, Scotty Boy." He pushed past them as they stepped inside. "I just need to...there we go." In the middle of the 'College Letters' bulletin board (which, he was proud to say was his idea), he pinned his letter from Stanford.

Casey clicked his tongue on the roof of his mouth. "Little ostentatious, don't you think?"

"What? You think the fluorescent orange is bright enough? I want to make sure everyone can see it, especially Jackson. You know what? This is not nearly as spectacular as it could be. I'll...be right back." He bolted out of the room and up the stairs, cackling like a maniac when he returned a couple minutes later.

"Lydia is going to MIT?"

Stiles beamed with pride. He remembered the days when Lydia pretended to be far less intelligent than she was. He was glad, no...scratch that, he was thrilled to pieces that she'd abandoned her desire to play dumb for popularity's sake. A brain of that magnificence deserved to have the whole world know about it. Nay, the whole universe, every universe and galaxies far, far away deserved to know her brilliance. "Oh yeah. She's all kinds of smart. She'll probably win the Field's Medal before she's
thirty." Stiles put a sticky note right above his letter, one that read 'Suck it, Jackhole!' in bold red lettering. "How's that look?"

Scott shook his head and walked upstairs.

"Too much?" Instead of waiting for an answer, he plugged in his crock-pot in the kitchen, setting it to warm. He took Casey's hand and gave a quick tour of the first floor before he led him to the room tucked behind the stairs. "This is your personal favorite, the laundry room."

"You're a menace, you know that?" Casey laughed, ducking his head to plant a quick peck on Stiles' cheek.

Stiles smiled and chased the contact, eager for more. "Well, I do what I can. If you would kindly follow me up the stairs. So, here we are. This door here leads to Scott's suite. Each alpha has their own, well except Cam, but she sleeps in Derek's room, so really... not necessary. Here's another bathroom. And my favorite room in the house..." He opened the door to the library.

"Wow, that is a lot of books!" Casey walked into the room and looked up, spinning around like Belle discovering the Beast's library. "I'm not huge into recreational reading during the school year. College has a way of burning you out when it comes to reading, but it's hard not to appreciate when someone owns this many books."

Stiles placed a hand on his shoulder and gave it a little squeeze. "Yeah, but they are really varied. Like this bookcase here, is for Derek's personal collection. The man is a serious bookworm. All the cases on the left are reserved for books on lore, mythology, and research volumes. We have our bestiary on a secure cloud server, which we share with friendly packs in California. Yours truly convinced Derek to form an alliance with over a hundred of them. We call it the CWPA, or California Werewolf Pack Association. It's actually been very helpful with all the SuperN's going missing in the state over the last two years. Danny and I built a spreadsheet that gets updated every time another goes missing. When that happens, the pack alerts us, and I add the information into the macro. We're trying to find a pattern, but so far no luck." He folded his arms across his chest like a proud parent. Who could blame him? That pack database was his baby.

"That's impressive. Was...was my pack part of the alliance?"

He furrowed his brows and scratched his chin. "I don't think so, but not every pack that abstained was hostile to us. Some, like yours were just small and peaceful and wanted to be kept out of things. We respect that thinking and don't force anyone to join." He reached down and grabbed Casey's hand. "Up to the third floor. Top of the stairs to the right is the game room. You like pool?"

"A little."

"Well, I think," he said with a wink, "that I could convince you to love pool."

Casey pulled him into a hug, wrapping both arms around Stiles' waist. "Is that so?"

"Mhm. I can be rather persuasive with the proper inspiration," he said, licking his lips. "I think you are going to be very inspirational."

"Challenge," Casey nuzzled his neck, kissing along his pulse point, "accepted."

"Right," he swallowed hard, "and over here, this is my room."

With reluctance, Casey followed him. "I would figure Scott would get the room on the same floor as Derek's."
"He didn't want it. This way Scott got his own en-suite bathroom. Not that anyone ever comes up to use this one. So it's essentially my own private bathroom. See, I have a door in my room to it."

Casey looked over the room. "It's almost the same color blue as the one in your house."

"I know."

"Are the other rooms claimed?"

"No, not really. Jackson likes the closest one to the living room. He tends to drink too much on pack nights."

Casey's jaw hit the floor. "Derek lets you guys drink?"

"Only if we hand over our keys." Stiles smirked at his boyfriend's shock. "Yeah, yeah... not the best example to set. Take up your grievances with him."

Casey picked up a Darth Vader bobblehead off the dresser and smiled. "Okay, so why does Isaac get his own room then?"

Stiles smacked himself in the forehead. How could he forget to go over the pack in detail so Casey wouldn't feel as lost. *Smooth move, Stilinski.* "Oh yeah. He's lived with Derek since he got turned. Well, once Cora came back, he lived with Scott, until he and my step-mom moved in with us. So since junior year, he's lived with Derek. He's emancipated, but was orphaned sophomore year and didn't want to stay in the house he grew up in."

"But you don't live here and you have your own room."

"What can I say? I'm special."

Casey wrapped his arms around Stiles' waist once more and pulled him into a hug. "You certainly are."

"Was, was that a line?"

He grinned, a deep flush spreading across his cheeks. "Yes, but it was also true."

Stiles smiled and kissed his forehead. "And you're adorable. The last room on this floor is Derek's, but I can't show you. He only lets certain people in there, which includes Cora, Cam, Isaac and me. So yeah obviously, Lydia stays in the room with Jackson. Just like Allison with Scott. I imagine tonight the Wonder Twins will take one of the rooms. Danny when he stays over, takes the room next to Jackson. The other bedroom on the second floor will probably be for the new girl. So I guess that means you'll be sleeping with me." He winked.

"I'm outraged. I'll have you know, I require intense commitment before sharing a bed." He burst out laughing, the full body kind of laughter that Stiles imagined could be felt down in one's toes. "I can't even finish." Casey pulled Stiles down onto the bed with him.

"Impatient are we?" Stiles didn't give him time to answer, and instead, rolled him onto his back so he could straddle his waist. With admiration for the gorgeous man beneath him, he leaned forward and threaded their fingers together, pushing Casey's hands into the bed as he kissed him. "I think I'm developing an addiction to your mouth." That was a lie. There was no developing; he was already addicted. His boyfriend had a beautiful mouth. It would be impossible not to hang on every word, every kiss and smile.
"I would say, there are far worse things to get obsessed over." Stiles shivered when he slipped both hands up his shirt. "Sorry. Are my hands cold?"

He shook his head. "No. They're per-
His ringing phone interrupted them, and Stiles scrambled to get it out of his pants pocket, answering it without looking at the call I.D. "Alô?"

Isaac's voice came through the other end of the line. "Can you come pick me up at Safeway?"

He groaned. They were never going to have sex at this rate. Look, he just wanted to give his boyfriend the blowjob of his life. Was that too much to ask? "What? Why? You have a car, or did Cherry break down... again?"

"Someone jacked my car."

Seriously? The world was against him today. It was the only explanation. "Who the hell would want a piece of shit 1997 Honda Civic?"

"I don't know, but I'm standing here with a fuckton of ice cream, and I don't want it to melt." He could practically imagine the look of sass on Isaac's face. Sass with a ridiculous scarf to match.

"Isaac it's January and it's like forty degrees outside. Ice cream is probably going to keep outside for quite a while."

"Don't be a dick, Stiles. Can you just come get me?"

"Couldn't you call someone else? I'm kinda in the middle of something important." Writing silent odes to Casey's mouth was an extremely important task, and he took the job seriously.

"Dude, research can wait. Please? Derek's still at work, and Cora is like an hour out."

Fuck the universe and its plan to kill him with sexual frustration. "Fine. Be there in twenty." He hung up and stood. "So, I take it you heard all that. Why does everyone think the only thing I do is research? Although..."

Casey lifted his head off the bed, closing the distance to his boyfriend's mouth. "I will be happy to let you do as much extra-curricular research on my body as you want later." He muttered against Stiles' lips.

"I am so.taking.you.up.on.that.offer," he punctuated each word with a kiss. "I owe you a blowjob anyway. God damn you, Scott." Stiles straightened his shirt, moving to grab his jacket when Casey caught his hand.

He tugged Stiles back towards the bed and kissed his knuckles. "You don't owe me anything."

Stiles bent down and kissed his forehead. "You're wonderful. I hope you know that," he grinned and was out the door.

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After his erection flagged (for the second time that day), Casey grabbed his organic chemistry textbook and notebook, retreating downstairs in search of a room with overhead lighting. The "mood lighting" Stiles chose for his room was nice, but far from conducive for homework. The dining room
table made the perfect place to work.

By the time Derek came home, Casey was pretty sure carboxylic acids and alkyl halides were oozing from his pores. God, OCHEM made his brain hurt. He understood it; that was not the problem. It was just so incredibly boring. It was, in his mind, cruel and unusual punishment, but sadly a necessary one.

"Hey, Casey. You the only one here?" Derek hung his keys up and divested his pockets of his phone and wallet.

"Huh?" He looked up bleary eyed and rubbed his temples.

"You um....have ink all over your hand."

He looked first at his hand and then down at his homework. Ink was smeared across the entire page. "Damn it. Problems of being a lefty." He licked his thumb, trying to get the offending blue stain off his skin. "Um no. I don't think so. I know Scott is here, but I don't know about anyone else. No one's car was in the driveway when we got here."

Derek stared at him for a while, brows knit in confusion. "You sound different."

"Oh. Yeah. This is- I tend to downplay my accent, especially when I meet new people. Stiles told me to stop it, said I shouldn't be ashamed of it."

"So...this is how-"

"I normally sound? Yep."

Derek seemed pleased with his answer and changed subject. "Everyone is pretty behind schedule tonight. How'd you get here?"

"Stiles drove us."

Just then the door to the garage opened, and Cambia walked in like a hurricane. "Fuck me, I hate the day shift!" She kissed the corner of Derek's mouth. "Mmm ti amo tanto, caro. How was your day?"

"Broke two of my fingers working on a front end suspension for a Cadillac STS. Yeah, that was fun. Just got home about five minutes ago. You?"

She hung up her bag on the hooks by the door. "Day drunks are the fucking worst. One decided that it was a wise idea to grab my ass. Oh, and the next time I try to convince myself that skinny leathers are great for work, talk me out of it. I'm gonna have to drop them off at the dry cleaners. Spilled beer all over them." Derek growled, but she silenced him with a finger to his lips. "Mio eroe. Don't worry about him; I clocked him pretty hard and cut up my knuckles doing so. Actually heard his jaw break. So, I think it's safe to say he's having a pretty bad day."

Derek inspected her hand and kissed the broken skin of her knuckles. "Does it hurt?"

"No. I'm good. I know how to throw a punch. Then some other jackass spilled his Long Island all over my cardigan." She took off the charcoal colored sweater and inhaled. "Ugh! I smell like the
Derek nuzzled her neck, and nodded in agreement. He loved that cardigan and the way it skimmed the tops of her knees. "You look nice though." His comment earned a small giggle from her.

"By the way, Gary wants to make me the daytime bar manager. He seems to think I want more money, which is hilarious because I don't even need the money. I just like being a bartender. Being able to wear whatever the fuck I want to work is another plus. Could you imagine me in a polo? Yeah, me neither."

He hummed in approval, "At least he recognizes your experience."

"I guess. But something pretty cool happened today, actually. The vocalist for the regular Thursday act blew out his voice and is under strict no singing orders for the next four months. So, I have a weekly gig for the time being, which I guess means I should take the promotion so I have time to actually do the gig."

He kissed her forehead. "Good job, dolcezza. Did you have to audition or something?"

"No, I sing at work all the time. They heard me. I mean, it's a southern rock band, but whatever. I can swing the rockabilly look if needed. My 'brother's' here yet?" He tried hard not to chuckle at her use of air quotes. He got the impression she did it to be ironic, as though not using them would offend people who'd known Scott and Stiles their whole lives.

"Scott is. Don't know about Stiles."

Without looking up from his homework, or missing a beat, Casey interrupted. "He was, apparently someone nicked Isaac's car from the Safeway. Had to go pick him up. Said something about a fuckton of ice cream. I'm not really sure how much a fuckton entails, but I reckon it's quite a bit."

"Who the hell would want a piece of shit '97 Civic?"

Casey finished drawing out oxalacetic acid on his worksheet. "That's what Stiles said, verbatim."

Cambia walked into the dining room to size the man up. She could just pick out the hint of a navy and white plaid shirt sticking out from underneath a red sweater. Rolled up sleeves? The boy means business. Around his right wrist was a watch. She smirked at that. See Stiles, I told you men wear watches. "Good lord, you are adorable. His description absolutely did not do you justice."

"Um...thanks." His face flamed.

She pulled out the chair across from him, clasped her hands in front of her, and leaned forward. "Hi." Her tone was practically predatory. "You better be good to him."

"Is the 'You hurt him I hurt you.' speech?"
"Oh no. Stiles is quite clumsy, and well, you're a werewolf. There are bound to be some minor injuries due to the strength differential. So long as you don't wolf out and attack him, I'm sure he'll be okay in that respect. This is the 'You break his heart, and I'm going to rip your balls off.' speech. You do that, and you'll never see me coming. A fine pre-med student such as yourself, has to have a brain in you. So I know you understand me. Am I right?" He nodded, and she dropped the threatening glance, smiling broadly. "Good. Nice you meet you, Casey. I'm Cambia, Stiles and Scott's older sister, well, sort of. It's complicated. You can call me Cam if you want, but Cambia works too."

"Hi. Nice to meet you."

She leaned back in the chair. "I'm sure you would like to know that Stiles hasn't stopped talking about you since you met."

"Really?"

"Oh yeah." She sniffed, "Ah. There's Febreeze in the laundry room if you want to hide your exploits this afternoon from the rest of the pack."

Once again, he flushed. "Thanks for the heads up." He hurried out of the room.

Derek laughed and shook his head. "Wow, way to terrify the kid, Cam."

"I know. My father once said that if I chose to become an Italian stereotype, I'd make one hell of a terrifying La Bella Don, said I'd be absolutely ruthless if someone threatened the family. It's the grizzly in me."

When Casey returned he gave them an imploring look, and she took a deep breath. Febreeze was a miracle product. "Much better. Now it's only an undertone, the kind you'd get from riding in his car or a casual hug." She smiled.

"Thanks heaps. It's not that I mind so much, everyone knowing, but Stiles said I'd probably feel better being introduced to the pack as the new beta first, instead of Stiles' boyfriend who is also a new beta. He said this way they'd see me as a packmate first and not an extra. Not really sure if I believe them, but 'evs." He looked at her shirt. "My mum loved AC/DC."

A small smirk lit up her face. "Don't take this the wrong way, but which country did you spend most of your childhood" She asked as she poured herself a glass of Scotch, delighting in a sip. "Fuck that tastes good today."

Casey cast a suspicious glance in her direction. "Why do you need to know that?"

"Your accent keeps slipping through. Pretty sure Americans wouldn't really say nicked instead of stole, you said mum, and you say beta funny. Doesn't bother me, just curious. I'm from Italy originally."

"Oh, and yeah I did."

"I grew up in Minnesota, which has a pretty strong accent. So I lost mine really quickly, but sometimes I have tiny bits that still come through. For example-" She inhaled sharply. "Get out of the Tiramisu, Derek! Sweets are not acceptable dinner replacements."
Derek froze mid-bite behind her, looking a bit like a deer in the headlights before swallowing guiltily. "I'm the alpha. I'll eat whatever I want."

She walked over to him, and when she tried to take his plate, he flashed his red eyes at her. "Oh tesoro, those don't work on me." She patted his cheek and pulled harder.

"No, this is mine." Wow, that sounded a lot whinier than he intended. "Get your own!" That was better, lots more authoritative, good alpha voice. He bared his fangs.

She did the same, revealing recurved fangs, hissing at him when she finally managed to pry the plate from his hand, placing it in the fridge. "Don't make me envenomate you. Although I can think of all kinds of fun things I could do to a temporarily paralyzed wolf, not really what I had in mind for the evening." Turning, she headed for the stairs.

As soon as she was out of sight, Derek went for his dessert.

"You going to join me?"

"No, I'm good." He smiled, enjoying another bite hoping the open fridge door could hide him from the x-ray vision she probably had. God, he loved sweets.

"Derek, you have chassis grease on your forehead, and you smell like transmission fluid!"

"But-"

"You need a shower! If you're a good werewolf and put away the tiramisu, I'll let you eat it off me later!"

Casey laughed as he heard the fridge close almost immediately and watched Derek bolt out of the room.

"Help yourself to anything to drink while you wait, Casey," Derek called from the second floor. 
"Lobo Lager's in the fridge. I have connections. It's the one with the green label."

Stepping away from his book, he pulled out a beer and cracked the top. After studying so hard, he deserved it, and the beer went down way too easy. He liked the taste of beer enough, but wolfsbane beer was hard to come by. Usually he just infused a bottle of tequila.

He'd just started packing up his homework when the front door opened. Allison and Lydia walked in followed by two guys he thought he recognized from lacrosse tryouts earlier. They all set down their bags in the living room.

"Hi again, Casey." Lydia unloaded multiple bags from KFC onto the counter.

Allison set down her casserole dish next to the bags of fried chicken before crossing into the living room and fiddling with a tablet mounted onto the wall. Moments later music began playing, filling
the house with the sound of country music. The other two men scowled, and Casey felt certain they shared his hatred of the genre.

"Don't hog the playlist, Allison!" The darker of the two men said.

"I only picked two songs. By all means, throw some of your own on there." She raised her hands in defeat.

He perused the music library. "Bullshit, Allison. There are already ten songs on here."

"I swear it was just those two." She sighed and looked at it with him. "Oh, I didn't know Scott was here."

"He's in his room I think." Casey walked past her and up the stairs to put his things away.

Jackson turned to his girlfriend. "Who was that guy?"

"New beta. That's Casey. He goes to Chico State."

"How do you know all that?"

"He came to the lacrosse tryouts; we chatted."

Jackson rolled his eyes. "You mean you flirted with him."

"Relax, Jackson. You know you get veto power on that, just like I do."

"Yeah I know, but you lead people on. Look how long Stilinski pined."

Her jaw went slack. "I resent that, Jacks. I rarely talked to him for ten years. He's just determined. Besides, the new guy already shot me down with the standard, 'You're not my type' response."

"Like I've told you before, Lydia, we are everyone's type."

"And like I keep telling you Jackson, no you're not!" Danny scratched his head. "Where are all these songs coming from?" He asked as the song switched from Taylor Swift to Jason Aldean. How did he know that? He read the screen, otherwise, he'd have no idea who the hell sang these two songs.

"Sonos allows you to pick music from any device linked to the system. My parents have it."

"Yeah, Scott's room has a tablet like this one." Allison read the list. "And although, I've never seen it, given these song choices, I would say Derek's room does too. Yeah, these are definitely Cam's songs."
Upstairs, Casey set down his book on the desk. The wall in Stiles' room had a tablet on it similar to the one downstairs. Curiosity got the better of him, and he played around on it to find music to add to the playlist. He remembered Stiles telling him that Derek had similar music tastes, and that was the only reason Stiles had any music on his phone that he liked. However, there were other artists in the library, he was sure Derek would not like. He'd spent over an hour discussing music in depth with Stiles before their first date, and he could only assume, his boyfriend had some of his favorites added. Since someone had already added The White Stripes, Redlight King, and Cage the Elephant on the list, he rejoined everyone else downstairs where he found the four he left in the living room arguing over music.

"God damn it, Cambia. Quit adding the metal shit. Nobody likes it, but you!"

"Jackson, stop being a dick." Scott said finally joining everyone else downstairs

Casey looked over their shoulders at the screen, new beer in hand. "Pretty sure only two songs on there count as metal. That one and that one there. My roomie is a big time metalhead; trust me. The rest are either punk, alternative, or rock. Well that one is a specific genre of punk. Great song choices from whichever of you is the Irish punk fan."

Scott's eyes brightened like he had found a new lifelong friend. "You know Flogging Molly and Dropkick Murphys? That is awesome. No one else in this pack likes punk at all. Don't take this the wrong way, but you don't really look like a punker."

"I'm not, but with a name like Casey O'Callaghan? Come on, I've been to an Irish fair or two. 'Float' is an awesome song." He extended a hand to the other two men. "I'm Casey. New beta."

"Danny." Casey was fairly certain that smile was meant to be flirtatious, probably, but then again, he had never been a good judge of whether or not someone was flirting with him.

"Nice to meet you. And I take it, you're Jackson." He proffered his hand, but Jackson waved him off, obviously too focused on the playlist.

"Don't mind him. He's been my best friend since kindergarten, and even I can admit he's kind of an asshole."

Jackson scowled and walked away. "So what did everyone bring to eat?"

"Cam and I made polenta and panzanella." Derek pulled a long sleeved shirt over his head as he walked into the kitchen, his hair still wet from his shower.

"They're Italian side dishes. The polenta is made with cornmeal. It's kind of like grits I guess. It's got four cheeses and bacon in it. Panzanella is a salad." The irritation in Derek's voice was practically palpable.

Danny shrugged. "My mom made Hawaiian sweet bread on Wednesday. So I brought a couple loaves."

Casey walked into the kitchen and grabbed a grape from his expertly dressed platter, and then gestured to the platter. "Look what I made. I cut up fruit... actually the pineapple came from a can, presliced. Yeah I know; alert the food blogs, master chef in the house."
The door into the house from the garage opened and the sound of clanking glass soon met everyone's ears. "Sorry it took so long. Cora's flight was late. Special delivery courtesy of Alpha Monroe's pack." Peter set two cases of beer on the counter. "They only had an IPA and a red ready to drink. And for those of us who appreciate it, namely you and me, Cambia, 16 year Glenlivet without any wolf additives."

Cambia's eyes grew with delight. "Excellent. I just emptied my bottle of Glenmorangie and was crushed to find only bourbon and Jack in the cabinet. Lifesaver, Peter."

Derek wrapped his little sister in a hug. "Good flight?"

"No, too many crying babies."

"You need to come home more than once every six weeks." He muttered against her temple. "I miss you."

"You too, Der. Why did I choose a school so far away?" Cora's eyes finally fell on Casey. "And good lord, who are you?" She cooed.

Derek chuckled when he rubbed the back of his neck. "I'm Casey."

"So nice to meet you, handsome. I'm Cora."

He smiled, but wondered if he was going to be subjected to this all night. He knew what he looked like, but come on. Give a guy a break. "Thanks, I guess."

"Oh don't be shy. I'm not hitting on you." She walked down the hall and opened Isaac's door. "Hey Der, where's Isaac? Haven't really spoken to him since our naughty Skype conversation on Tuesday." She was practically pouting when she returned to the kitchen/dining room.

"Way more information about you and Isaac's relationship than I wanted to know."

"Like you and Cam are any better."

He rolled his eyes. "Stiles went to pick him up. His car got stolen."

"Aww, someone stole Cherry. What the fuck for?"

"They'll be back, and then the two of you can get busy doing all kinds of things I do not want to know about in one of your rooms."

She tousled his hair. "Such a good big brother."

When the front door opened again, Casey watched three more people walk in.
"Hi Kira, find the place easy enough?" Derek asked.

The young woman shrugged shyly. "I guess. Where should I put this? My dad helped me make sushi."

Derek grabbed a hotel pan from a cabinet and filled it with ice. "You can set it in here. Should stay cold enough." He scooped his polenta into a saucepan to reheat and pulled the salad from the fridge.

**What's with the meathead twins? Why do they look like they want to decapitate everyone?** Cambia asked through their mate link.

*That's just how they look. I was hoping they wouldn't show up.*

**Looks like you and Cora both hoped the same thing.**

*I know. She promised not to kill them, but I told her I wouldn't fault her if she did.* Derek smirked.

"We have chips and dip. Aiden brought venison jerky." Ethan said. "Thanks for taking us in, Derek."

He shot daggers in their direction. "I didn't. That's all Scott. Not gonna lie; I don't want you here, either of you. I lost two betas because of you and your old pack. Don't for a second think I've forgotten that or forgiven you. Erica and Boyd were good kids. And don't give me that bullshit answer that you were following orders. I don't care. Casey and Kira this is Ethan and Aiden. They're wolves too."

Cambia furrowed her brows and stared at the two for a long time before she asked, "Which one is which?"

"Aiden's taller than me."

Derek ignored them and turned his attention to the rest of the pack. "Everyone else. This is Kira. She's a kitsune. Kira, that's Danny with the dark hair; Jackson is next to him. Lydia is the one with red hair, and Allison is next to her. To be honest, you may already know some of them from school. This is my Uncle Peter and my sister, Cora."

"Who is she?" Aiden gave Cambia the once over, staring a little too long for Derek's liking. Would anyone really mind if he ripped that asshole's throat out?

"So far out of your league, asshole." He snaked a protective arm around her waist, flashing his red eyes. "Moving on, this is Casey. He's also a wolf."

Peter nodded, eyes the size of saucers. "He's huge. Glad to see we're bringing in more muscle. You look like you could take on an alpha by yourself."

"Um, thanks," Casey said as he rubbed the back of his neck, clearly uncomfortable with Peter's assessment..

Aiden passed around his bag of venison jerky, which everyone partook in, except Cambia. "What's the matter? Don't like venison?"

He could smell her irritation and gave her hip a little squeeze. "Yeah, I don't eat any animal I can shift into. Feels too much like cannibalism."

"And those would be?"
"Wouldn't you like to know?"

After the introductions, everyone dug into the food, making sure to save enough of each dish for Stiles and Isaac, who had texted from the police station twenty minutes ago to say they were on their way. When Cambia chose to sit next to him, Casey struck up a lively conversation, and they discussed just about anything. Though as the minutes ticked away, and his second beer turned into three, he could hear his accent coming through nice and strong.

Jackson put his empty plate into the sink and went to the living room to check out the game selection. It was then his eyes fell on an obnoxious piece of orange paper. "Stilinski got into Stanford?!"

His shock startled everyone in the dining room...everyone except Casey. He smirked in amusement, but otherwise kept his mouth shut.

"No fucking fair!"

"What?" Cora apparently didn't believe it either, and he tried not to feel insulted on Stiles' behalf. Why couldn't they see his boyfriend was brilliant?

Jackson pulled the paper down from the board and carried it in to show the others. As soon as Danny saw the post-it, he burst out laughing. "It's not funny, Danny."

"Suck it, Jackhole? No, it's not funny; that's hilarious. Call it karma, for all those years of you being an asshole to him. He's third in the class remember?"

"May I remind you, he kidnapped me and chained me up in a police transport van?"

Danny deadpanned. "And I will remind you that you attacked me at The Jungle? I say, good for him."

"I had no control over that. I would never attack you on purpose, and you know that." Though he didn't know him well, Casey thought Jackson actually looked sincere.

Aiden raised his brows in disbelief. "Stiles kidnapped you? Little, shrimpy Stiles? Isn't he like 150 pounds soaking wet?"

"Yeah...not so much anymore." Scott told him with a chuckle. "I'm pretty sure he'll surprise you if he ever gets here."

He loaded up his plate with seconds, couldn't wait to see the look on his face when Stiles showed up. Okay, so Casey was not one to judge people by first impressions. He really did try to get to know a person first, but this guy...what a smug asshole. Part of him wanted to say something, but a much larger part of him wanted to sit back, perhaps with popcorn, and watch Aiden's jaw hit the floor.

Yeah, that sounded like a much better plan.
Translation:
Alô- Hello (how to answer the phone in Portuguese)
ti amo tanto, caro- I love you lots (so much), dear
mio eroe- my hero
Rack 'Em Up

The pack, still minus Stiles and Isaac, finished eating. They had been trading stories ranging from most embarrassing moment, to biggest regret, and so on, with more than one spit take happening over Scott's retelling of his encounter with Mrs. Argent and the electric pencil sharpener. From his location by the dishwasher, Derek smiled. The group really seemed to like his two new betas. The verdict was still out on Scott's. Cambia had already decided she didn't trust them, but he figured it had more to do with Aiden's cocky, lingering gazes, even after Derek had shot him a warning glare complete with red eyes and fangs. Maybe next time, he'll step aside and let his mate lay into the guy. Not only would that be hot as hell, Derek though, it would be wildly cathartic. Yes. That was a fantastic plan.

Stiles finally pulled into the driveway and groaned at the sight of all the cars in the driveway, "Oh great, everyone's here already. I bet all the food's gone."

"I'm sorry. It's not like I wanted my car to get stolen." Isaac's protests did little to cheer him up at the thought of missing out on the fruits of his crockpot labor.

He watched Isaac remove the ice cream from the back seat. Apparently, his idea of a fuckton turned out to be only three, gallon-sized tubs. Someone should really supply the kid with a dictionary. Three gallons does not a fuckton make.

Both of them ran towards the awning above the front door. The chilly weather had taken a more miserable turn an hour ago. Freezing rain had slowed traffic to a crawl, as the citizens of Beacon Hills had little experience driving in the conditions. Icy raindrops pelted them on their short trip from the car. "Yeah I know." Stiles walked in the front door and towards the kitchen to find his boyfriend in the middle of telling a very animated story.

Casey gesticulated wildly with his hands. "So there's my buddy Devon, and he's fucking loaded. I mean, he was off his face by like seven o'clock. So anyway, he tries to tell the cop that he's not in fact trashed, that he just has an inner-ear problem that affects his balance. Not that an inner-ear problem could explain his hiccups and slurred speech, but yeah good on the bloke for trying. The cop just continues writing on his Public Intox ticket. Then, Devon takes a step forward and falls flat on his face. We all lost it. I mean I actually had to sit down I was laughing so hard. I was crying from laughing. Apparently, the cop thought public humiliation at the hands of his friends was punishment enough and ripped up the ticket. Dev had to play the match the next day hungover with two black eyes and a scraped up face. Best part of that, it had rained the night before, and Dev is one of our Props. Whined like a baby when he got mud in his face. And that kiddos, is why coach doesn't like us drinking during the season, but coach ain't here. However, since I do have a tournament tomorrow, I won't be drinking anymore wolf booze."

Lydia looked up to see Stiles standing watching them with an amused look on his face. "Careful there, Casey, your Oz is showing." He smirked at his boyfriend.

Both Ethan and Aiden stared at him, mouths agape in matching expressions. "You sure this is,
Stiles?"

"Very funny, asshole." He spied his college letter on the counter. "Did you like my present, Jackson?" He pinned the letter back to the board. "I copied it onto that orange paper, just for you."

"Did he take the bite?" Aiden apparently couldn't wrap his head around the fact that Stiles was not only taller than him, but definitely no longer scrawny. *Suck it, you dickwad.*

"Late bloomer." He squealed in delight to find plenty of food left.

Casey smiled at him, and Stiles hoped he never got used the flutter in his stomach that happened every time his boyfriend grinned at him. "We made sure to save you some. Oh by the way, your Alcatra was excellent."

"Just so I know, for future use, how many drinks does it take to get you this...cheeky?" He poked his boyfriend in the chest.

Casey cocked his head to the side, his expression more than a little wary. "Why?"

"Because you sound hot as hell, and not gonna lie, it kinda makes want to drag you upstairs and have my way with you."

"Does it now?"

Stiles watched Casey's face flame, the blush reaching all the way to the tops of his ears.

Aiden tapped Danny on the shoulder and asked, "Is Stiles flirting with him?"

"Yeah. He does that now."

"Flirts with guys? Told you, Ethan. Pay up."

Danny laughed. "Flirts with anyone he feels like. Guy, girl, or in degree in between. Has a fairly high success rate too. Ask him about his bisexual birthday foursome if you don't believe me."

Aiden choked on his drink, spilling beer down his shirt in the process. "You're joking. You have to be."

"Did my heart sound like I was lying?" Danny rose an eyebrow at him in question.

"I know I said before, but I mean it. You don't need to hide your accent here."

"Wait," Jackson cut in, "so this Hugh Jackman thing you have going on right now...that's fake?"

"No," Casey said as he scratched his eyebrow, "When I've been drinking wolf approved booze, it becomes almost impossible to continue faking an American accent."
This concept seemed lost on Jackson. "Why in the world would you do that?"

Casey straightened his posture and crossed his arms over his chest. "Ever hear the stories about Southern actors who practice a Northern one just to sound more marketable? I'm not the only person who does this kind of thing. Anyway, kids are cruel." He turned and grabbed another grape from the fruit tray and popped it into his mouth. "When we first moved back to the States... I was a shy kid, which is bad enough when you're new, but I was also the foreign kid who talked funny."

Stiles wanted to wrap him in a hug...not that his arms would make it all the way around Casey's chest. Did he mention his boyfriend was built like Thor?

"I swear they called me kangaroo all the way up to freshman year. I would come home every day and immerse myself in American television, practicing how to sound like my classmates. I'd leave the house and switch accents. I'd step in the door at home and change back. I never lost my accent, because at home, I'd sound just like my mom. I couldn't actually get rid of it, and really I don't want to. Even my dad after ten years in Australia, had a little bit of one. Up here, I talk to my mom..." He faltered, and face twisted in sadness, took a moment to collect himself. "Talked to her all the time. We were very much alike. I'd go home for holiday and come back. My flatmates would say I sound just like the Croc Hunter for the next day, and they're my friends. I still sound American around them most of the time. So, yeah, bullies suck," he sighed. "I hate bullies." He and Isaac both said at the same time. "You have problems at school too?"

Isaac played with the fringe at the end of his scarf and didn't meet anyone's gaze. "No, at home. My dad...was not a nice guy, especially after my mom and brother died."

"So like, did you take the bite to fix your bully problem?" Jackson asked.

"Bite?" Casey scoffed, "I wasn't bitten. I'm a born wolf. Come on, I was eleven. I hadn't shifted yet."

"Well, I mean at least being a werewolf, they couldn't actually hurt you."

Casey took off his beanie and scratched his head. "If only. Funny thing, this kid I had a problem with on one of my teams was buddies with a kid I went to school with. Marcus was the one who started the whole kangaroo mess. Fucking hated that kid," he said with an exaggerated eye roll. God, how he hated Marcus. "So like one day in the beginning of sophomore year, it was gym class, and we had to run the mile. I was in the locker room, changing into my gym kit. I left to take a piss before class started. Now I swore I shut my locker door, but I guess I didn't, because Marcus and bunch of his buddies got a hold of my water bottle, and replaced the water with some of their own.

"Before I go for a run, I try to drink at least a cup of water, and I did that this time too. As I was running, I started to feel like I'm about to yak up my lunch, and everything got hazy. I managed to finish with a decent time...I think. I managed to finish with a decent time...I think. I can't actually remember, but I drank the rest of my water. I'm pretty sure I thought I was dehydrated. After that, it's all blank. I lost three days. I mean I was told what happened, but I don't remember it, which in this case is a godsend." He looked around at the pack. A few of them nodded their heads like they could see where the story was going."

"Apparently, Marcus got a hold of some Rohypnol tablets. And I know what you're thinking," he held up a finger to silence any potential protests. "I'm a werewolf, so a roofie should have had no
effect. Well, it turned out, Marcus' uncle was a hunter who kept bottles of wolf water in the garage. Now, I'm sure the idiot thought they were regular waters, because I knew of his uncle, and he followed the code. The guy actually met with my dad afterwards to say he had no knowledge of his nephew’s actions, nor was the kid in the know. There was no reason for Marcus to know about wolfsbane, let alone what variety infused in water, would make a werewolf human, more or less.” He curled his hands into fists and relaxed them, repeating the action several times. He could feel his blood pressure rising, and falling apart like a scared kid was just not something he felt like dealing with tonight.

"He'd grabbed some bats from his garage, and passed them out to seven of his buddies. Those bats had come from his uncle's personal collection. So, of course, they were all coated in wolfsbane wood stain.” He winced, recalling the bruises and broken bones he’d received. "Every time they hit me, it just got worse. The little splinters left behind in my skin, kept the wolfsbane in my system until they worked themselves out. I guess a teacher found me unconscious an hour later."

There was an audible gasp, and he looked over to see Stiles worrying his bottom lip between his teeth. "Well, I came to in the I.C.U three days later with a skull fracture, two broken arms, four broken ribs, broken tibia, jaw broken in two places, and a concussion. Because I'd ingested so much wolfsbane, I healed at slightly faster than human rate. The doctors didn't actually expect me to wake up at all. Spent six weeks in the hospital. The idiots, actually got themselves caught, because they attacked me in front of the security camera in the car park. The only reason there was any physical evidence of the attack, was because the kid's uncle was a hunter. Talk about ironic.

"Anyway, the alpha of the Malibu pack, his mate is a lawyer, and she took my case. Not only were the kids stupid enough to assault me in front of a camera, they grabbed me from the showers. So I was naked, and they wrote a bunch of slurs on me in magic marker. The cops were able to charge them with a hate crime, aggravatated battery, and I guess sexual assault because, hello, they left me naked outside school which apparently is like forced exposure. I mean thankfully, that's all they did, leaving me naked. That would have been a less than enjoyable way to have lost my virginity. Anyway, they get out of Juvie in a year and a half. Part of me hopes I run into them, because I look nothing like I did. I'm over a foot taller, a hundred pounds heavier, and they'll all be registered sex offenders. Karma is a great thing sometimes." He shrugged, and looked at the group's stunned faces. "So, should you ingest wolf water, don't get injured." There, that wasn't so bad. Kudos to holding yourself together, Case.

Scott squinted. "Hate crime? Because you're a werewolf?"

"What? How the hell would that work? They didn't know I was a wolf. No, because I'm gay. I just could have done without the shit written across my forehead in black magic marker. It didn’t come off for like two weeks. You should have seen the looks of pity the nurses gave me. Moral of the story...bullies suck. Now enough of this depressing shit. I was told there would be games. Who's ready for fun?" He asked in a more chipper voice and went to add a few songs.

Scott picked up Apples to Apples and started a game with Danny, Jackson, Aiden, and Allison. Cora, Peter, and Lydia chose Monopoly. Kira and Isaac grabbed Uno. Stiles opened up Would You Rather just as Cambia and Casey turned on the dart board.
"Cam, I was hoping we could play a game."

"Don't whine. It makes you sound like a baby." She kissed the top of his head. "We can play darts and answer your questions too. I mean we could just answer questions between turns."

"Yeah okay."

"Anyone else want to play darts? Cutthroat Cricket?"

"You know I'm in." Derek smirked. "One of these days I will actually beat you." He groaned when he saw Ethan coming towards them, though in all fairness, of the two twins, he was the more tolerable one. He grabbed the two sets of darts, handing one to his mate. "Ladies first."

She closed down her 18's with the first throw. "Triple 18." Second dart, was a double bulls-eye. Third dart, seventeen.

"Nice throw. My turn." Derek took the three darts from her.

Stiles flopped onto the couch, draping his legs over the arm. "Cam, first question. Would you rather be stranded on a deserted island alone or with someone you hate?"

"Someone I hate. If they get too bad, I can kill them. It could be a source of entertainment." She watched Derek only hit a fifteen. "Ouch."

He gave her shoulder a playful shove. "Shut up. It's not like I'm letting you win." Really. He wasn't. Though he'd never admit it to anyone--okay, he might bring it up to Stiles if the subject arose--her competitiveness was a huge turn-on.

"Wait," Casey paused before throwing, "what's the difference between regular cricket and cutthroat?"

"You want the least points after closing bulls-eye, and fifteen through twenty."

"Right." Casey did much better than he had, closing off fifteen with a triple, and sixteen with a double and single.

He watched Stiles give Casey a high-five. "Derek, your question," he stopped to read it, "what a terrible question for werewolves!" He tossed it over his shoulder muttering to himself something about poor attempts at question writing. "What kind of question about lying and forced to tell the truth is that?" Stiles' eyes lit upon reading the next question. "Okay, here's another one. Would you rather kiss a crab or step on a jellyfish?"

Derek scratched his chin. Man, he needed to trim his scruff. He wondered, albeit briefly, if he was starting to look unkempt. "Kiss a crab. I might be fast enough not to get pinched, but I doubt I can avoid all the tentacles."

Across the room, a spat broke out between Jackson and Scott. "No, McCall, I'm telling you; gravity is hilarious! Like seriously, think about it. How can you not laugh when someone falls down?"
Stiles popped his head up from the throw pillow where he'd lain down upon. "Actually you guys, I am with Jackson on that. Gravity is fucking funny." He looked into the dining room to see Scott leaning his chair back on two legs and smirked. History was about to repeat itself for probably the hundredth time. "I dare every one of you not to laugh when Scott inevitably falls over backwards in his chair."

"What?"

He grinned at his stepbrother. This annoying habit started in first grade, and whenever he made it to the two chair legs, Scott would try balancing on the two legs. At that point, he had about fifteen seconds before falling over backwards...it never failed. Even after he turned wolfy. Stiles held up three fingers for them all to see, and counted them down silently. Once he put down the last finger, as predicted, Scott lost his balance, crashing backwards into the floor. Raucous laughter broke out amongst them. "And that ladies and gentlemen, is why you should vote for Jackson's description of gravity."

Half an hour later, Cambia closed off her fifteens, thus ending the game. "A ho, the streak continues. Take that, Tesoro."

Derek gave her a fist bump as Stiles asked his last question. "So Casey, would you rather write the worst book in history or record the worst song in history?"

"Worst book. Songs just become earworms. Imagine walking through a department store and hearing your abysmal song? Right, and you wouldn't be able to hide your embarrassment. So, you'd be standing there in the middle of Macy's, face red as a fucking tomato, because you had to hear that thing one more time. Rage would boil up in your body, and you'd probably snap. Lives could be lost."

"Thought about all of that did you?" Stiles looked at him, lips pressed together in a feeble attempt to stifle laughter.

"Yep. Sometimes, I have moments of creative brilliance. You should see the doodles I make on my OCHEM notes sometimes. It's usually the molecules and carbon chains squaring of in combat. If I'm really bored, I'll throw in amino acid reinforcements... Anyway. Books well, at least you could use a pen name and a different author picture, and so long as no one knows your actual name, you won't be bombarded with it." He ventured off into the kitchen returning with a bottle of water.

"Done drinking already, you do not know how to party, at all," Jackson laughed.

He loaded a bowl with a bunch of fruit, avoiding the pieces of watermelon. Yuck. "Like I said earlier, I have a match tomorrow at three, and I have to be at the airport by seven. So sue me, if I am being a responsible college athlete. You'll also call me a party-pooer when I go to bed in three hours, but I don't fucking care." He turned back to the fridge and grabbed a Cherry Coke, tossing it to Stiles when he came back into the living room.

"Thanks."

"No problem. Another game? Around the clo-" He stopped when the song changed, and started to whistle along with the opening bars to "Tighten Up."
Peter groaned, and Stiles wasn't quite sure, at first if it was from the game or the music, until his smarmy voice (seriously, the sound of that man's voice could set Stiles' teeth on edge on the best of days) asked, "Really? Who the hell added this song?"

Casey grinned at him, "I fucking love The Black Keys; this is my favorite song." He leaned over the back of the couch and into Stiles' space. "Do you want to dance with me?" Fucking hell, yes. Rather than sound overeager, Stiles played it cool. "Yeah, why not?"

He accepted Casey's help off the couch, relishing in the way his heartbeat sped up as his boyfriend pulled him tight against his body. Good God, I can't wait to get you naked. They began to sway in time to the music. When the lyrics started, Stiles found himself surprised to hear Casey singing along. Well, quietly singing along, anyway. Stiles was sure it was for his benefit alone.

"Someone said true love was dead. And I'm bound to fall," Casey's breath ghosted over his skin and sent shivers down his spine. It drew a deep red blush to the surface of his cheeks, "bound to fall for you."

"Excellent!" Scott cheered. "Someone else to bring along to karokee!" Everyone in the group turned to glare at him. "Fine, but the more people we have in the group that can sing, means the less you all get dragged along."

Fucking werewolves.

Stiles turned around to level his stepbrother with a pointed glare, one that said 'those words were not meant for you'. Though it wasn't a fantastic singing voice, Casey could more than carry a tune. And yeah, maybe there were other people in the room who sang better--he was sure both Scott and Cambia did--but the way the baritone of his timbre vibrated through Casey's chest as it was pressed against Stiles' body, went straight to his groin. Think unsexy thoughts. Think unsexy-screw that. Get your head back in the gutter.

The song was drawing to a close, and Casey brushed his lips against the shell of Stiles' ear, "I don't need to get steady. I know just how I feel. Telling you to be ready, my dear."

Thousands of butterflies chose that moment to emerge from their cocoons in his stomach. I am so fucking screwed, he mused as he found himself surprised at just how quickly he was falling for him.

The realization didn't bother him.

As the song ended, Cambia and Derek retreated to their room to change into pajamas. When they returned, Derek leveled another red-eyed stare at Aiden when he caught him staring at her. He knew his mate, having grown up with Minnesota's insane winters, didn't find the ones in California very cold, and didn't seem to actually own a pair of pajama pants, preferring shorts. She said something about them all being too short. Knowing people would be staying over tonight, she chose her Wonder Woman pajamas she got for Christmas, because the shorts were her longest pair.

Now, when he said longer, he meant still fairly short, but whatever, she had great legs. He loved when she wrapped them arou- Anyway, the whole pack knew she was off limits. Except,
apparently, for the hetero half of the Meathead Twins who didn't seem to get the picture.

"Nice slippers." Lydia pointed out.

Cambia looked down at her black and white, knee-high mukluks. "Thanks. They're really warm."

"Screw the slippers. You're wearing the pajamas you got for Christmas. Just...wait a second." Stiles grinned, and bolted upstairs to his room as several other packmates decided it was a good time to change as well.

Casey found Stiles pulling a black Batman t-shirt over his head when he joined him in the room. He chuckled. "They are going to think you planned it." He grabbed his hoodie off the bed and zipped it up.

"Well, hey what can I say?"

He hooked his finger in the neck of Stiles' sweatshirt. "Don't wear this."

"I don't usually sleep with a shirt on at all, but I really hate those twins. They picked on me a lot the last time they were around. I'll just keep the hoodie on until we go to bed."

Casey's fingers pulled down the zipper, and he stepped back to admire the view. "Mmm. I like it much better this way. I'd like it a lot better with no shirt at all."

He batted away his hand. "I'm sure you would. You should hurry and change."

Instead of hurrying, Casey went deliberately slow. Neatly, he folded the clothes he'd worn that day and placed them on top of his kit in his bag. He stood there in only his black boxer briefs, knowing full well Stiles' jaw was hanging open, while he pretended to rummage through his bag for pajamas, muttering total bullshit about how he knew he put them in here somewhere.

"Can you... just-" Stiles turned him around so they were face to face. "Yeah. Definitely better than I imagined." Casey shivered when he ran his chilly fingers slowly down his chest and stomach, pausing at every muscle. "Not gonna lie, I really don't want to go back down there."

He pulled Stiles tightly up against him, his hands resting on his ass. "Well," he said as he kissed him, "how about," another kiss, "this?" Stiles whimpered as he nipped at his earlobe. "I get dressed, and we go back downstairs. Then you ask if I want to play pool? If you don't ask anyone else, maybe they'll leave us alone."

Stiles nodded as Casey trailed kisses down his neck. "Uh huh. Yep. That sounds like a fantastic, wonderful idea."

"And," he slipped his hands beneath the waistbands of both Stiles' pants and boxers, grabbing his bare ass this time, "if they happen to walk in on us...who cares?"

"Uh huh. I am all for that plan. Wouldn't have picked you as having a getting caught kink."

"I don't." He pulled away and winked, "I'm beginning to realize that I have a you kink." Sensing he'd turned him on enough with nine werewolves in the house, he adjusted himself and pulled his pajamas out of his duffle. Finally dressed, he grabbed the hood of Stiles' sweatshirt. "You should
leave this up here. Don't hide just because two wankers used to make fun of you. Rub it in their smug ass, Cro Magnon faces."

Stiles kissed his forehead. "I am going to be in so much trouble with you."

"Oh yeah?" He lifted an eyebrow at him.

"Yeah. Come on Eight Man." Stiles snickered, using the words on Casey's shirt to lighten the mood. Downstairs, Cambia burst out laughing when she saw Stiles' pajamas. "No way."

"I know, great coincidence right?"

She held up her index finger. "You have no idea how much. Go find Scott in the kitchen."

Stiles hurried into the other room, and soon, the rest of the pack heard his enthusiastic shout. "Dude! You too?" The pair of them came back into the living room. "You mean to tell me all three of us are wearing the superhero pajamas we got for Christmas from Melissa?" He high fived both of them. "Sibling power for the win!"

Aiden and Ethan exchanged befuddled looks. "Wha-"

"The sheriff and Scott's mom got married in November, and Cambia is now an unofficial member of their family," Lydia said putting them out of their misery.

"Dude! You're dating a minor?" Aiden seemed genuinely shocked. "You're like thirty!"

Derek's brows drew inward, his features schooling themselves into, what Casey decided, was quite the impressive scowl. *I must get him to teach me that.* "What? No. What the fuck is wrong with you? I'm twenty-five, and she's like ten days older than I am. They didn't really adopt her. She just has no actual family anymore, and Melissa has a soft spot for her. They go shopping together." Casey watched as he pointed a finger in Aiden's direction. "And don't call me dude again, like ever again."

Kira held up another board game. "Anyone want to play Clue?" When more people than available tokens raised their hands, she frowned. "Maybe teams? I mean not everyone has to be on a team. There's ten people that want to play."

Derek looked at Cambia. The unspoken 'teammates' passed between them.

**You can do all the reading for me.**

He laughed at her telepathic joke. "Sure."

"Aiden and I can be on a team," his brother volunteered. "It's no problem."

"Great. Anyone else?"

"I'll be on Jackson's team. If he wouldn't mind."

"Sounds good to me, Danny."
Kira set the board up at the dining room table. "It's going to be a long reach for some of you."

"Want to be on my team?" Isaac asked her, earning him a small smile in return.

As soon as the pieces had been placed on the table, Cambia snagged the purple token. "We're Professor Plum, and if anyone else wants to lay claim to the esteemed Purple Professor, you'll have to fight me."

Derek laughed into his beer.

"You sure you don't want to play guys?" Danny asked Casey.

"I was kind of thinking that I would challenge Stiles to a game of pool. I saw the table on the house tour, and it sounds like fun. You Sir, are going down." He winked at his double entendre.

"Speak for yourself. I'm surprisingly good at pool. You want to rack up? I'll be up in a second." He turned down the hall and walked towards the bathroom.

Jackson twirled the green token between his fingers. "I'd watch out if I were you. Stilinski should not be allowed around sports equipment of any kind. He's clumsy. You might lose an eye."

Casey mimed shooting a pool cue, contorting his arms into odd angles as he tried to figure out how in the hell that could possibly happen. Then, he measured the distance of his eyes from the top of his head, pulling his thumb and index finger away to estimate. "Might be hard. My eyes are about six feet off the ground."

"Well, he'd manage it."

Ethan pointed to Casey's chest. "I don't get it. What does Eight Man mean?"

He looked down at his chest and back up at the group of people at the table. "Oh it's my rugby position. Coach got us all position shirts last year."

"Yeah, I got that from the words Nike Rugby on the back of your shirt. What does that even mean though?"

Oh. He adjusted his beanie. "On a union team, you have two props, a hooker," he pointed at Scott, "stop giggling. Not that kind of hooker. He hooks the ball back with his foot. Then there are two locks, two flankers, me- the number eight, scrum half, fly half, two centres, two wingers, and a fullback. Um without going into too much detail, the number eight is kind of...like...a," he paused to come up with a good comparison, "point guard in basketball, on the perimeter of the defense, jump starts the offense. Now, if you'll excuse me. I have to go rack up. Have fun finding out who killed Mr. Body." He bounded up the stairs, and after a really quick rack, he sat on the edge of the table to wait.

"Wow," Stiles shut the door behind him when he came upstairs a minute later, "I can't believe that worked." Unbeknownst to him the door did not latch.
Casey didn't bother to tell him.

To keep up their ruse, Casey quickly broke, making sure to hit the cue ball hard enough to send it crashing into the other sixteen balls. It created so much noise that the rest of the pack two floors down had to have heard it. Then he beckoned him closer, grabbed his hand and yanked Stiles towards him. Stiles slotted between his legs, and he wrapped his arms around Stiles' waist, hands splaying on the small of his back. "Earlier, when you said you were going to be in trouble with me, did you mean that in a good way?"

"A very good way." Stiles said in earnest, licking his lips. "So much trouble."

Casey pressed his lips against Stiles'. "Good. Me too." While their encounter that afternoon had been fueled by lust and pressing need to finish before Scott came home, he wanted to take his time right then to savor the moment. Sure sex was great, or presumably would be in their case when they crossed that bridge the rest of the way, but a lot could be said for a passionate make-out session. He lifted Stiles' arms, hooking them around his neck and cupped the back of his neck as he coaxed open his mouth with his tongue. The faint flavor of cherry cola and coffee from dessert remained on his lips.

"Your hands are surprisingly cold for a werewolf." Shivering, Stiles broke the kiss and took Casey's hands in his. "Seriously, I am so much warmer than you right now. Let me warm them up."

"What do you expect? I'm from SoCal." He ducked his head and nuzzled at Stiles' neck.

"Or you could just do that. As much fun as stubble burn can be, gotta say, so glad you are pretty much incapable of growing facial hair."

"Shut up," he said pressing a kiss to the hinge of his jaw. "I'm blonde. I manage to grow it just fine. It just takes a while to be able to see it." His lips still attached to Stiles' neck, Casey reached behind him on the table, feeling for the nearest ball, which he rolled towards the other side of the table. Luckily, it collided with a couple balls along the way."

"What-"

"Keeping up appearances."

When he lightly took a bit of skin between his teeth, Stiles tilted his head back. "You weren't kidding about being a biter."

He chuckled against his skin, "S'that a problem?"

Stiles shook his head, dropping his hand down to the front of Casey's pants where he fumbled with the fly. "God damn drawstrings." After a bit of work, requiring Casey to stand up fully, Stiles managed to free the his dick, and dropping to his knees, swallowed him down.

"Unph." Casey's body lurched backward at the sensation, but luckily the edge of the pool table was directly behind him for him to lean against. Totally good thing too, because when Stiles reached and raked nails down his chest and stomach, his knees almost buckled. Looking down at the way Stiles was practically worshiping his dick just about undid him.

So, he craned his head towards the ceiling, willing himself to last longer. His choice seemed to work for a while, until he heard a filthy moan from Stiles and made the mistake of looking down at the same time the other man looked up at him from beneath those ridiculous eyelashes. That was it; he lost it. "Oh...Sti...shit...I'm..." He came with an embarrassing stream of half words and broken syllables. In fact, he almost fell over in the process. Only Stiles' quick thought to place a hand on his
stomach, pushing him against the table saved him from collapsing onto the floor.

After he regained control of his senses, he looked down again to see Stiles' smirk. "What?"

Stiles wiped the corners of his mouth (like that would conceal what he'd just done from any other wolf in the house) and stood. "Your eyes. They're pretty when they're gold." When Casey laughed, Stiles tapped one of his fangs with his finger. "Not as sharp as I thought they'd be. Always wondered, and never had the courage to ask any of the pack if I could feel one." He tried not to feel all kinds of giddy when an intense blush broke out on Casey's face.

Casey tucked himself back into his boxer briefs. "I've never shifted during sex before," he said. "I imagine it's a bit weird."

Stiles ran his fingers over the newly formed ridges in his boyfriend's face and the spot on his beanie where his pointed ears tried to escape the confines of fabric. "It's not weird." He smiled when Casey leaned into the touch. "You're beautiful." He kissed him on the forehead.

Downstairs, Scott and Allison took their turn, and Derek watched her read through her sheet. "I think it was Colonel Mustard, in the library, with the revolver." To her frustration, Jackson revealed the revolver card. "Damn it." As she stood up to get another drink, the lights flickered.

Isaac moved the curtains to peer outside where the freezing rain had turned to snow. "It's really starting to come down out there. I hope we don't lose power." No sooner had the words left his mouth, than the lights went out.

"Oh great, Isaac. You jinxed it." Danny gave him a playful shove.

Derek walked into the living room and set up a couple logs in the fireplace, complete with some fatwood. Soon, small flames began to work their way up the kindling. "There is only one other fireplace in the house, and you guys are not sleeping in my room. So, I guess most of you will be spending the night out here. I'm not really sure how long the power will be out, but I'm going to get the air mattresses set up in the living room anyway." A nice perk of wolfvision, seeing in the dark was a piece of cake.
"I'll help you." Cambia followed along after him. When they returned, each with a rolled up mattress and battery operated pump, they moved the coffee table off to the side. Once those were inflated, she hurried up to Derek's room to light the fireplace in the room. Thank goodness for battery operated back up pilot light ignition. On her way out of the room, she thought about checking the game room, but thought better of it when she caught the unmistakable scent of cum wafting out of the room. She smirked at a delicious opportunity for a prank and retreated back to the living room.

Peter returned from the basement with a box of battery candles and began to set them up throughout the living room. "Oh, isn't this cozy?"

"Hey Cora, can you grab a set of king sized and a set of queen sized sheets from the linen closet. The king size ones are on the third shelf, the others on the second. Everyone else, you might want to duck into the bedrooms for a pillow. Isaac, grab some blankets from the laundry room. Okay, so depending on who it is, you could fit four people on the big mattress, and three on the smaller one. Help me wedge them between chair and the loveseat. Keeping them together should fit one more person. Someone can fit on the loveseat, and you can fit a couple on the sofa, either one pillow at each end, or snuggled up against each other."

Jackson scoffed. "Doubt you could actually fit that way."

"Cam and I watch movies like that all time. Trust me, if we can do it, you and Lydia can fit just fine. Given how tall they are, we probably should let Stiles and Casey sleep on one of the mattresses." A crash from upstairs seemed to remind him that the pair were upstairs playing pool, and he smacked himself in the forehead. "Could someone go check on them?"

Closest to the stairs, Allison grabbed one of the candles and climbed the stairs up to the third floor. "Hey guys are-" She stopped mid-sentence at the sight of the pair of them making out, Stiles pinned up against the bookcase, several movie cases strewn in a pile on the floor. Stiles had lost his shirt, and they were obviously too engrossed in their actions to even notice her. "Oh god." She turned an about face, beating a hasty retreat out of the room.

"Everything okay up there?" Derek asked when he caught sight of her face.

She pointed up the stairs. "How certain are we that Stiles is human? And that he's not an incubus, a siren, or something?"

Scott stifled a giggle. "Did you walk in on them too? Yeah, I did that this afternoon. Walked in on them post blowjob. Although in their defense, I heard a noise and thought Stiles had injured himself. Accidentally broke the door without realizing it. They weren't all that happy."

"No, Casey was fully dressed, and Stiles still had his pants on, but they were certainly headed in that direction."

Jackson groaned. "Another one? That's it; I've died and this is hell. Him punching that V-card has created a monster. That's how many now?"

Scott counted on his fingers. "At least six, in the last year or so. Before you ask the next question,
don't ask me the male/female breakdown or their names."

"I still can't figure out how Stilinski ended up with enough game to manage hook-ups." Aiden shook his head in disbelief.

Derek pinched the bridge of his nose. "It's not a hook-up; they're dating. Stiles wanted the pack to meet Casey first as a new beta instead of as his boyfriend. That's the end of the discussion on that topic." He walked over to the stairs and called out, "Hey Stiles and Casey, in case you were not aware, the power's out! It's gonna get cold up there soon!"

Stiles' shout of 'Where the fuck did you throw my shirt?' carried down two floors, and soon the pair rejoined the group, a couple of pillows, conveniently held in front of them and a blanket in hand.

"How did you manage to snag this one, Stilinski?" Jackson laughed. "You are nowhere near attractive enough for him."

"Gee thanks, Dickhole."

Casey eyed up his boyfriend. "What are you talking about? I think he's gorgeous."

"If skinny is your type. I really don't see it."

"He's actually quite fit and as you can see was hiding a nice six-pack under his shirt. He's funny, great hands, and I happen to have a thing for brown eyes." He leaned towards Jackson, grinning.

"I figured you two should probably sleep on the mattresses, because you're taller."

"Aw Derek, so nice to know you care." Stiles patted him on the back, tossing his pillow next to Casey's at the far end of the larger mattress.

Cambia had brought down a few more electric candles from Derek's room. "So here are some more candles. There's not enough light to play games, but I don't know, we could tell stories or something until everyone's tired."

Casey looked down at his watch and clicked the button on the side to light up the face. Ten thirty. "You are all going to hate me, but I have to be up super early. I will try to be as quiet as possible, but my alarm is going to go off at five." A collective groan broke out amongst the group.

"Don't worry about it. Derek is a morning person. He'll be up not long after that," Cambia said.

"Sorry anyway, and I'd love to stay up and tell stories, but I have to crash." He flopped face down on the far edge of the mattress, and to his surprise, Stiles lay down on his back snuggling in next to him. Then, he pulled Casey's arm out from under the pillow to drape it across his chest. When he turned his head towards his boyfriend, he couldn't hide the grin on his face if he tried. "Comfy?"

"Yeah, I'm good." Stiles' gave him a light peck on the lips and cocooned them in the comforter off his bed as he softly stroked Casey's arm. "Boa noite."
"You too." From the pocket of his pajama pants, he pulled out his phone, earbuds, and external phone battery. If everyone was going to be up talking, he'd need music, not that it helped when Stiles would speak, because he could feel the vibrations through his arm. He'd only had his eyes closed for about five minutes when he felt someone tap him on the top of the head. He opened his eyes to see Scott leaning over the edge of the couch. "Yeah?"

"Whatcha listening to?"

"Muddy Waters."

"Muddy who?"

"Classic blues musician."

"You have very unusual music tastes for a gay guy. I expected Lady Gaga, you know the whole 'Born This Way' being like a gay anthem or something."

Casey groaned into his pillow. "Yes, because every homosexual man in the world is a walking gay stereotype. You do know that we don't all love brunch and glitter, right? We're not all flamboyant fans of drag who sing showtunes and worship Cher. Gotta tell you, the only things I have in common with that guy are that we both suck cock and have extensive wardrobes. Is there like a rule or something that says I can't be a fan of Irish Punk and blues music, sports, and beer just because I like men? Just want to be me, Scott. Let's leave it at that."

"Oh I don't know," Lydia nodded, "you are awfully pretty. I bet you could rock the hell out of drag. Got a great mouth for lipstick."

He sighed. "Lydia, I'm a six foot five, two hundred and thirty pound, heavily muscled guy. While I am very low on the body hair scale, there is no amount of work you could do to me to make me into a convincing woman, and good luck finding a pair of women's shoes in my size. I have a hard enough time finding men's shoes. I don't even know where you'd find a pair of heels in a seventeen. Now can I please go to sleep?"

"Those are really big feet. You know what they say-"

"That...that doesn't correlate, Lydia."

"Are you sure?"

He groaned into his pillow. "Yes, I assure you, I am perfectly average in that department. I'm going to sleep now."

"I bet Stiles' ass thanks you for that," Jackson snickered into his beer.

"We've been over this, Jackson. Boundaries." Danny scolded him. "I thought I made it perfectly clear that it's not the kind of thing you can just assume about us. I mean, I know being a dick, is kind of your thing, but come on."

Once more Casey groaned into his pillow, "not his ass anyone should be worried about," but this time, his words were soft and muffled enough, only Stiles could understand him.
Stiles chuckled and turned to kiss his boyfriend.

"Get a room."

Stiles flipped Jackson off. "You four," he pointed to him, Scott, Allison, and Lydia, "can't keep your hands off each other on a daily basis. You almost do not understand the limits of acceptable PDA. So I don't want to hear it."

Casey offered him one of his earbuds. "You want to listen in?"

"You have no idea how much I do right now." He took the proffered item and smiled as Casey kissed him on the forehead. It was probably safe to say they were both in deep already, and if he fell asleep with his hand resting on Casey's ass as if to say, 'This is mine,' well no one said anything about it.

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