### I Know Where Babies Come From, Derek

by DiscontentedWinter

**Summary**

Stiles finds a baby on the porch.

It looks exactly like him.

Well, this is awkward.

**Notes**

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How about a massive shout out to MonaLisa, who went through this after it was posted and helped find my typos?

MonaLisa, you are seriously the best!

Also, I keep forgetting to tell people I'm now on tumblr: thisdiscontentedwinter
Stiles wakes up on a Friday morning with a craving for Froot Loops, and an erection. These two things are not at all related. The most immediate concern, Stiles takes care of in the shower. The other one finds him on his hands and knees digging into the back of the cabinet under the sink because he’s sure that’s where he hid the cereal. He finds it right behind the cockroach baits and the rat poison, which is exactly where he left it, because his dad would never think to look for it there. Only an idiot would hide breakfast cereal behind the D-Con.

An idiot, or a genius.
What? He keeps it in a sealed Tupperware container. There’s almost no chance of cross contamination. Almost none.

Stiles leans on the kitchen counter while he eats his Froot Loops. And maybe gets his groove on to some classic seventies disco on his iPod. And maybe he doesn’t even care that he dances like an idiot, because there’s nobody here to see him. His dad’s at work but Stiles is meeting him for lunch later, it’s the end of the school week, and for once he’s not falling over shit because he’s frantic about running late. He’s still got half an hour before he needs to go and pick Scott up for school, and that’s just enough time to fuck around watching a few Youtube clips about fainting goats.

It’s a good morning.

Stiles is pretty sure nothing can spoil his mood, not even Harris and the pop quiz he’s going to spring on them today in chemistry. (Stiles has contacts in the teachers’ lounge.) He’s studied, he’s pumped, he’s on a sugar high and a disco high, and he’s ready for whatever the day is going to throw at him.

It’s Friday morning and it’s raining men.

A rumble of thunder makes itself known above Stiles’s one-man disco, and he pulls his earbuds out.

Well, it’s raining something.

Or trying its hardest. It’s dark outside—when did that happen? It was sunny when he got up, but the weather has definitely turned quickly. The sky has that weird greenish sort of tinge that Stiles thinks means hail. Hail, of all things. He wonders if he should check an actual weather report instead of just sticking his head out his bedroom window.

Stiles can’t actually hear any rain yet. Still, he grins at the aptness of his choice of song, because serendipity FTW.

He hunts through his bedroom for the keys to his Jeep.

There’s another brief rumble of thunder somewhere in the distance, then the wind picks up and chases the clouds away. When Stiles finally makes it downstairs again, keys in hand, the day looks bright and sunny again.

The whole thing probably only lasted ten minutes.

Weird.

Stiles heaves his backpack onto his shoulder. He heads out the front door, still humming The Weather Girls, and almost trips over something on the front porch. He flails, spins, barely manages to catch himself, and ends up balanced awkwardly on one foot, twisted like a pretzel as he looks down at what he almost fell over.

Holy shit.

That’s a baby.

Someone has left a baby on the front porch.

Stiles stares at it and silently demands it either make sense, or go away immediately.

It doesn’t do either.

Weirdly, this is not the first time this has happened.
Stiles was six that time. For a wonderful, magical hour he’d thought that all his prayers for a baby brother or sister had been answered, but instead of his parents welcoming the baby with open arms, they’d phoned the ambulance, the sheriff at the time, and Child Services. It turned out later that the baby belonged to a scared teenager who’d listened to Deputy Stilinski give a talk about internet safety at the high school and somehow extrapolated from that one hour lecture that he’d make a great dad for her as yet unborn infant. Which he would have--Stiles’s dad is the best--but not really the point.

When he’d been six, Stiles had felt cheated that they didn’t get to keep the baby. Clearly the baby was the best thing to ever happen in his entire life.

Now, ten years later, he’s not at all as excited by this turn of events.

“Oh, hey there,” he says, crouching down beside the baby. It’s in a cardboard box. Seriously. A cardboard box. And it’s not new. The baby, that is. The cardboard box looks pretty fresh. The baby is pretty big, and not red and squishy like the new ones. This one looks like it’d be big enough to crawl. Stiles has no idea how old that makes it. Pretty weird age to be abandoned though.

The baby smiles at him, and, okay, yeah, that’s pretty damn cute. Then it reaches out its fat starfish hands, and Stiles is lifting it up.

“Hey,” Stiles says again. “Are you a boy baby, or a girl baby?”

It’s in a green onesie, which doesn’t give much of a clue. And, unless he really has to, Stiles isn’t going to investigate any further. So far the baby’s not stinky. It’s not cold either, so it can’t have been out here for very long. Stiles’s dad only left for work about an hour ago too, so the baby definitely arrived after that. He wonders if whoever left it there even knocked. He wouldn’t have heard, over his iPod.

Stiles holds the baby up to his chest, one arm under its backside and one hand on the back of its downy hair. It has dark hair and dark eyes. It looks familiar somehow, except maybe all dark-haired, dark-eyed babies look the same, and it’s still totally smiling at him.

“You have the cutest smile in the world,” Stiles tells it. He’s not at all self-conscious about talking to a baby. He also talks to random dogs, stray cats, and, occasionally, garden gnomes. It’s not like he expects an answer. “Yes, you sure do.”

The baby beams at him.

As soon as Stiles is satisfied it’s big enough to hold its own head up, he slips a hand into the pocket of his jeans and pulls his phone out. It takes a little dexterity to unlock the screen and scroll through his contacts, particularly when he’s swaying his hips from side to side and humming because he’s pretty sure that’s what you should do with babies. Babies love to get their groove on.

“So, I’m gonna call my dad, and he’s gonna come and give you a ride in a police car. How awesome is that?”

The baby blows a spit bubble. “Buh!”

“Nice one,” Stiles tells it. “High five!”

The baby sticks its arm up, and Stiles bursts out laughing because that’s totally something he’s planning to teach his hypothetical kids. Of which there will be four, because you need at least five people to form a raid group in WoW, and Stiles will be their leader. Stiles holds out his phone, and the baby smacks its hand against it.
“Of all the abandoned porch babies I’ve ever met, you are definitely my favourite.”

The baby beams again, and wriggles.

“Okay, so maybe you should go back in your box while I call my dad.” Stiles makes a face when he hears himself. “Wow, how terrible does that sound? But hey, it looks fairly cozy in there.”

The baby grabs his t-shirt in a spitty fist.

Stiles squats back down, and unpeels the baby’s fingers from his shirt. He sets the baby back down inside the box. “What’ve you got in here, hey? No note? That’s a pretty awesome teddy bear though. And hey, a blanky.” He tugs it out, and for the first time notices the smell. Smoke? Overlaid with the sharp, fresh smell of ozone. “I had a yellow blanky like this when I was a baby, except mine had a…”

A duck with a crooked leg.

Stiles freezes as a fold of the blanket falls open and reveals the embroidered duck in the corner. The blood roars in his skull, but he’s not going to freak out, because this is a prank, obviously. Scott is punking him, or the universe fucking is, because this is Stiles’s baby blanket. This is the one his mom bought when she was pregnant, and embroidered the duck on herself. His dad has told him the story a million times, because his mom was terrible at sewing, and she had all these plans when she was pregnant to make everything for the baby’s room herself, but she only got as far as the duck embroidery before she gave up and ordered the rest of the stuff from Walmart.

This is Stiles’s blanket, and it smells like smoke, and he can see now that the edges are charred, and it came in a box with a baby who looks familiar. More than familiar.

“Oh, fuck,” Stiles whispers.

The baby blows another spit bubble.

The baby looks familiar because it’s him. It’s him.

He grabs the baby and the box and rushes back inside the house.

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“Scott? Pick up. Fucking pick up.”

Of all the weird shit Stiles has had to come to terms with since discovering werewolves were a thing, an actual thing and not just a movie thing, this is probably the weirdest. Okay, because werewolves make a kind of sense, if only historically. There’s hundreds of years of legends about them, so it stands to reason that there has to be some basis in fact, even if once upon a time there was just this really angry hairy guy that the other pitchfork-wielding villagers hated. Which, frankly, is the theory Stiles would have gone for before seeing Scott actually wolf out that first terrifying time.

But this? This is new. Stiles’s background in classic horror movies and Buffy the Vampire Slayer marathons won’t help him with this. This is a baby. A baby him. This is time travel, and Stiles isn’t
ready for time travel. All he can think is he has to stop the baby from squashing any bugs. Because there’s a ripple effect, right? Or butterflies causing hurricanes.

Shit, no, that’s chaos theory. Or is it?

Oh god. Now is not the time to be concentrating on that. There is a baby. A baby, and Scott is still not answering his phone.

The baby sits on Stiles’s bedroom floor, fiddling with its fingers, which it apparently finds fascinating.

“Pick up, pick up, pick—”

“Hey, Stiles.”

“Scott! You need to get over here now. It’s an emergency! A full on crazy super-fucking-natural emergency!”

“Are you okay?”

“Um…” Stiles doesn’t know how to answer that. He pinches the bridge of his nose and stares down at the baby. “I don’t think I’m in physical danger, but I’m freaking out!”

“I’m on my way, dude! Just hang in there, okay?”

“Okay.” Stiles ends the call and concentrates on his breathing. Because it’s going to be hard enough to explain to Scott exactly what’s happening without having to filter it though a panic attack. He can do this.

Of course he can.

“Oh, holy fuck,” he whispers to the baby, and the baby regards him with those dark Stilinski eyes and blows what is apparently the latest in a sequence of never-ending spit bubbles. “Holy fucking fuckstick.”

The baby squeals.

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Stiles wouldn’t call Scott stupid or anything, mostly because they’re best bros, but he’s pretty sure that Scott’s calm acceptance of Magical Appearing Baby Stiles isn’t zen-like or anything, it’s because Scott literally doesn’t understand the situation enough to panic. Smart people would panic, just saying.

Stiles is panicking. He’s pacing his bedroom, pinching the bridge of his nose, and saying “fuck fuck fuck” under his breath.

“Dude, it’s so cute,” Scott says, giving the baby his best puppy-dog eyes. “So cute.”
Stiles stops pacing for a second. “You mean *I’m* so cute.”

Scott looks uncertain. “I don’t know. He doesn’t exactly smell like you. Well, he smells kind of like you, but kind of not.”

“Like a different version of me,” Stiles says. “From an alternate timeline!”

Scott makes his dubious face. It’s the one he usually saves for chemistry. “I don’t know what alternate timeline versions of people smell like.”

“Exactly. So you can’t discount it!” Stiles shakes his head. “Dude, it’s not like I want to be right about this. It’s just that I know I am.”

And he’s about to prove it.

They head for his dad’s bedroom. Scott sits down on the floor, holding the baby by the hands as it pulls itself up, then drops down onto its backside, then bounces up again. If only Stiles had kept that sort of activity up, he could have the thighs of the Hulk by now. The baby makes sounds of spitty delight whenever it stands, and Scott looks just as fucking delighted. Stiles is pretty sure that fantasies of tiny little McCall-Argents are dancing through Scott’s head right now.

Stiles rolls his eyes and starts to pull shit out of the bottom drawer of his dad’s dresser. He’s really, really hoping that he doesn’t find anything he’ll need brain bleach for—yes, fine, okay, his dad is a single man with needs, but Stiles doesn’t want to know what those needs are—the fear of which would usually preclude him from rummaging around in his dad’s bedroom, but this is an emergency.

He finds his baby album first, and flips it open.

It hits him like a punch to the guts: his mom. She looks so young, and so pretty, like she’s been lit up from within by happiness. She’s holding a baby in her arms: a squishy little weird red thing, mouth twisted up in a yawn or a cry or something.

Tears prick Stiles’s eyes. It’s been years since he looked at his baby album, and this is the reason why. It hurts. It’s supposed to hurt less and less, but Stiles isn’t sure that’s true. It just hurts in a different way as he gets older.

He turns over a few pages, until he finds a photograph of himself at about six months old. He’s sitting in the backyard, wearing nothing but a diaper, and grinning at the camera.

He looks up at the baby, then back to the photograph, then up to the baby again.

Holy. Crap.

He slides the album over toward Scott.

“Oh wow,” Scott says, breathless with wonder. “It *is* you.”

Stiles would have said that all babies looked alike, but not all of them come wrapped up in his yellow blanky. Speaking of which…Stiles pulls his yellow blanket out from the drawer. He balls it up and flings it at Scott. Scott deflects it by using the baby as a human shield, which, bad babysitter. Bad.

Stiles shifts over toward him and reaches out to take the baby so that Scott can inspect the blankets. “Every comic book I’ve ever read tells me that the universe should begin collapsing in on itself the moment we touch.”
The baby gums its fist.

“But since I already picked you up, I think we’re okay.”

“Dude, you also shouldn’t sleep with some hot woman because she’ll turn out to be your grandmother,” Scott says helpfully.

“Not exactly the same scenario,” Stiles points out.

Scott shrugs, and spreads the baby blankets out on the floor. “Okay, these are totally the same, except this one smells like smoke. And also like the smell in the sky before a thunderstorm.” He runs his fingers along the discoloured edge of the baby’s blanket. “This has been burned. How do you think that happened?”

Stiles smooths the baby’s downy hair into an interesting whirl. “Let’s just add it to the metric fuckton of shit that does not at all make sense.”

Scott tilts his head suddenly.

Moments later, Stiles hears a knock on the door.

“Derek’s here,” Scott announces.

“Derek?”

Scott is at least decent enough to look shamefaced. “You said you had a supernatural emergency. I figured he might be able to help.”

“Great,” Stiles says. “Well, this day just keeps getting better and better.”

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Halfway down the stairs, Stiles becomes aware of the smell.

“Oh, oh shit.”

“Yep,” Scott says, his nose wrinkling. “That’s shit all right.”

He takes the rest of the steps at a leap, leaving Stiles holding the baby.

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In theory, Stiles would much rather change a baby’s stinky diaper than spend several excruciating minutes in the company of Derek Hale. Because ugh, Derek Hale. Derek has a stupid perfect face and a stupid hot body, and he mostly communicates with Stiles by growling, scowling, or pushing
him into hard surfaces like walls, lockers and, that one time, his steering wheel.

Derek is a total dick, actually, and Stiles prefers to avoid him wherever possible.

In practice though... oh god, this is going to be too disgusting for words. Stiles has the baby lying on a towel on his bedroom floor while he goes through his drawers looking for something, anything, he can sacrifice as a diaper.

That’s how Scott and Derek find him: a wet washcloth in one hand, a threadbare Beacon Hills Sherriff’s Department Family Fun Day 2011 t-shirt in the other, and a look of grim determination on his face.

Derek strides forward into the room, glowering.

“Dude, you’ll scare it,” Stiles exclaims. “This is probably why I’m so intimidated by you now, isn’t it? You gave me this childhood trauma!”

Derek actually growls.

“Holy shit! What is wrong with you? You’ll terrify it!” Stiles is prepared to bundle the baby into his arms and protect it from the big scary werewolf, but the baby proves him wrong by squealing with what is either unrestrained delight or wind, and holds its grabby hands up toward Derek. Stiles wonders if his responses to terrifying werewolves have always been this fucked up. From babyish giggles all the way through to inappropriate fear boners. “Holy shit, what’s wrong with me?”

“That is not you,” Derek says, forcing the words through his clenched teeth. His eyes flash, and then he reaches down and grabs Stiles by his t-shirt. He pulls him to his feet and drags him close. “Just how much of a spark are you, Stiles?”

“What?” Stiles flaps a wet washcloth at him. “What the hell are you talking about?”


“Clearly not at all, or you’d be too scared to manhandle me!”

Derek looks down at where his fist is twisted in Stiles’s shirt, as though surprised to see it there. He loosens his grip and pushes Stiles back slightly. His face is pale, and he looks even more constipated than usual. Which is saying something. He jabs his finger against Stiles’s chest. “You did this.”

“Dude, I didn’t do anything! I know how to sprinkle mountain ash around, barely. I don’t know how to time travel!”

Derek looks like he’s about to pop a vein in his temple. “You didn’t time travel.”

“Look, I don’t want to interrupt,” Scott interrupts, “but mini Stiles really does stink.”

Derek glares at him. “Then change it!”

Derek looks like he’s about to pop a vein in his temple. “You didn’t time travel.”

“Look, I don’t want to interrupt,” Scott interrupts, “but mini Stiles really does stink.”

Derek glares at him. “Then change it!”

Scott throws Stiles a sympathetic Sorry-dude-I-tied-to-distract-him look, and takes the washcloth and the old shirt from Stiles so that Derek can continue to molest him. And not in a fun way. “Fine!”

“Tell me what you did,” Derek says, and there’s an actual note of desperation in his voice, and Stiles gets the feeling that something is very, very wrong here. More wrong than appearing on his own doorstep as an infant time traveller.

“Derek.” He shows Derek his palms. “I didn’t do anything, okay? I swear. I just stepped outside and
almost tripped over it. But that baby looks exactly like me, and it came wrapped in my blanky, and Scott says it smells the same as me, and—”

“Similar to you,” Scott interjects from the floor. “Not exactly the same. It kind of smells like something else too.”

“Like pack,” Derek growls out.

“No….” Scott sniffs, then makes a face. “Okay, so that was mostly poo. But before… it was something else before. Something familiar.” Scott has the onesie unbuttoned and peeled up. He grips the tab of the diaper and visibly braces himself for the hell he’s about to unleash.

Stiles looks back to Derek. “Yes, but I smell like me, so maybe I smell like pack too! Like, retroactively!”

“That makes no sense,” Derek growls. “It’s not you, Stiles.”

“Prove it!” Stiles snaps back, because seriously, what the hell other explanation is there?

Derek glares at him, all muscle and sinew and barely-contained rage.

“Um…” Scott says from the floor. “Um. Stiles!” His voice comes out like a strangled squeak.

Stiles looks down.

And omifuckingod. It’s not him.

Scott’s got the diaper off.

The baby’s a girl.

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Fifteen minutes later, Stiles has double bagged the dirty diaper and crossed the street to dispose of it in a neighbour’s trash can. Because gross. Now he’s sitting slumped on his bed with Scott beside him and Derek slouching against the wall, while the baby plays with a plush Yoda which is a collectable, by the way, and shouldn’t really be getting baby drool all over it. But he’s being a generous host, or babysitter, or whatever.

So the baby isn’t him. But she looks just like him and she has his blanket. Well, her slightly singed version of his blanket. And clearly whatever’s going on, Derek is blaming him.

Scott scoots off the bed and sits down on the floor next to the baby. He smiles when she burbles at him, and leans down to inhale her scent. Then frowns. “It’s weird. It’s kind of like pack, but kind of not pack too.”

Stiles loves Scott like a brother, but eloquence is not his forte.

“It’s kind of like… kind of like you, Stiles, but also kind of like…” He jerks back like he’s been stung, and looks frantically from Derek to Stiles and back again. “Holy shit! She’s yours!”
“What?” Stiles almost chokes. “Mine?”

“No.” Scott shakes his head. “Yours.”

Stiles points at Derek. “His?”

“Yours,” Scott breathes, eyes wide.

“Mine? What?”

“Oh, for fuck’s sake,” Derek snaps out. “Ours. She’s ours, Stiles.”

“Ah,” Stiles says over the buzzing noise in his skull, while he waits for the universe to stop punching him repeatedly in the face and balls. “Can we go back to when time travel was an option, please?”
No no no no no.

No.

Stiles cannot be a father.

Well, he can. He has all the necessary parts. And so does Derek. Hence the problem. They can’t possibly both be the biological parents of this baby. Their bits are not compatible when it comes to reproduction. But according to what Derek told him before he raced into the bathroom to splash water in his face in a vain attempt to wake the fuck up from this crazy dream—and Scott confirmed with frantic nods—is that this baby who turned up on his porch this morning is half Stiles Stilinski and half Derek Hale. The werewolf sense of smell does not lie, apparently.

Well, fuck that.

Fuck that sideways.

“I know where babies come from, Derek!” He glowers at Derek, who’s glowering at him in the mirror.

Derek’s eyebrows do something complicated and nuanced that Stiles doesn’t even have the energy to begin attempting to figure out, because, hello, baby. Baby with two daddies, which, okay, not unusual. Baby with two biological daddies… yeah, that’s not what biology does. There are requirements, prerequisites. There are necessities. Egg necessities. And womb necessities. These are not optional extras.

“Breathe, Stiles,” Derek says in a low voice.

Stiles sucks in a breath and holds it until his lungs burn.

“No,” he decides, because this is ridiculous. “No, I am not the father of that baby. Because firstly I am sixteen. And secondly we are both guys. And thirdly, I’d remember if I had a baby. And fourthly, we are both guys. I know I’ve said that one twice, but I think it bears repeating, don’t you?”

Derek leans over and turns the tap off, and catches Stiles by the wrist. “Stiles, how magic are you?”

Stiles waggles his fingers in Derek’s face. “Um, not that magic. I don’t think anyone’s that magic.”

“Oh, that’s your evidence, is it?” He tries to snort, and it comes out more like a squeak. “Here’s a baby that smells like both of us, ergo it’s ours. That’s not how ergo works, Derek! Ergo needs proof!”

Derek doesn’t say anything. Just looks inscrutable and unimpressed.

“A DNA test,” Stiles says. “We’ll go to the hospital and get a DNA test!”

“A DNA test?” Derek’s eyebrows launch upward. “On a baby that’s half werewolf?”

Good point. But also moot, because the baby probably isn’t even Derek’s. And certainly not Derek’s and Stiles’s together. Because science.
“Deaton can do it,” Stiles says. “I saw a poster up at the animal clinic. You can order DNA tests on your puppy to see what it is. Not like, you know, it’s related to Charlemagne or anything, but what breed. What its parents were.”

Derek makes a bitchface.

“Not that I’m calling the baby a puppy,” Stiles amends. “Also, everyone’s related to Charlemagne.”

“What?”

“There’s this famous story about everyone with European ancestry being related to Charlemagne,” Stiles tells him. “But it’s actually crazier than that. Everyone with European ancestry is actually related not only to Charlemagne, but also to everyone who was alive at the time of Charlemagne. Because, if you extrapolate it, going back that far, you’d need a trillion ancestors, which was more people than were actually alive at the time, ergo a lot of interbreeding.”

“Stiles.” Derek narrows his eyes. “What the hell are you even talking about?”

“Shut up.” Stiles turns the tap back on and splashes his face again. “Talking helps me not freak out!”

“Wow. You must almost freak out a lot,” Derek says. “Since you never shut up.”

“Ooh, burn, snarkywolf.” Stiles rolls his eyes. “Oh wait, it would have been, apart from your total logic fail, since I didn’t say it’s the only reason I talk.”

“And yet you’re still talking,” Derek grits out through his clenched teeth.

Stiles rolls his eyes and turns the tap off.

“So we’ll take the baby to Deaton,” he says, straightening up again.

Derek folds his arms over his chest. “Fine. And when he says it’s ours?”

A drop of water chases down Stiles’s nose, and he sniffles. “He’s not going to say that. Because science.”

“Because magic,” Derek counters.

And, okay, that’s more valid that Stiles wants to admit. Because he’s seen a lot of shit, okay? A lot. He knows that magic is totally a thing. He knows that. But at the moment he’d rather stick doggedly to science, thanks, since he really doesn’t want to face up to the fact that maybe, just maybe, Derek is right about the baby’s origins. I mean, it looks just like Stiles, and it has his blanky. But those things aren’t evidence. Not in the face of science. And if science is going to help him stick with his denial a little longer, then yay for science. Stiles loves science right now. He wants to marry it. He wants to do hot dirty things to it.

Oh JesusfuckingChrist.

Did he do hot dirty things to Derek Hale to make a baby?

“Oh, okay,” he says, holding up his hand. “Okay, even if you’re right, then I haven’t done any magic, because, hello, I couldn’t, and we haven’t done any, um, anything that could lead to the entire baby situation, have we? Unless I used the toilet after you or we shared a straw or something, and I’m pretty sure those things have nothing to do with conception anyway. Not that either of us has anywhere to concept anyway.”
“Conceive.”

“What?”

“Conceive, not concept. Concept is not a verb.”

“Then why isn’t it called conceive-shon?” Stiles scrubs his knuckles over his buzz cut. “Also, that’s what you’re focusing on?”

Derek shrugs.

Stiles glares at him. “You’ve calmed down a lot. What’s your secret?”

“My secret is I no longer want to rip your throat out,” Derek says, with what might be the start of a smile tugging at the corner of his mouth.

“Oh, reassuring.”

“Because,” Derek continues, “you didn’t do this.”

“You said I did!”

“I thought you did,” Derek counters. “Because I sure as hell didn’t. But you obviously know nothing about it.”

“Obviously!” Stiles wishes he could summon up some righteous anger but, really, he’s still freaking out too much for that. “So where does that leave us? In terms of culpability?”

“I have a few theories.”

“Such as?”

Derek shrugs again. “Such as a different version of us.”

“The multiverse!” Stiles exclaims. He resists the urge to victory punch the air. “I told Scott it was an alternative me, but that’s not because of a branching timeline, is it? It’s a legit fucking alternate reality!”

“I don’t think ‘legit alternative reality’ is a phrase your precious science is ready for.”

“Oh, fuck off, seriously,” Stiles says, because what is Derek on? And, okay, a part of him recognizes that maybe, just maybe, Derek is humoring him, since he now knows all this jibber jabber is a total defense mechanism, and pretty much the only thing stopping Stiles from having a panic attack right now. But, on balance, Derek is still overwhelmingly a douchecanoe. Overwhelmingly. “I don’t think science is precious. I mostly like it because it makes sense, and it says boys and boys can’t make beautiful babies together.”

“You’re impossible,” Derek says.

“Yeah? I’m not the most impossible thing that’s happened today.”

He’d thought Derek might even crack a smile—this is the closest they’ve come to actual banter, and it’s not as terrible as Stiles had imagined—but Derek doesn’t smile. He only nods, his face grave.

“No,” he says, his voice quiet. “No, you’re not.”
Scott and the baby are in the kitchen when Stiles and Derek eventually go looking. The baby is wearing her makeshift diaper, which Scott obviously has total confidence in given that he’s holding the baby on his hip. The baby is waving a spoon around.

“Is that… cream cheese?”

“It was all I could find in the fridge.”

“Scott! Cream cheese isn’t for babies!” Stiles doesn’t actually know that for sure, he guesses. But what if it’s not? I mean, you never see babies on television eating spoonfuls of cream cheese, and television is pretty much where Stiles has gotten all his knowledge of babies.

What? He’s a sixteen-year-old boy with no younger brothers or sisters. Babies do not impact on his life at all. Until this morning, anyway.

“So, anyway,” Scott says, looking at the clock above the refrigerator. “Dude, I really need to get to school. We’ve got that pop quiz in chemistry, and if Harris fails me I’ll be off the lacrosse team!”

“Oh, sure,” Stiles says. “Because that’s what we should be focusing on right now.”

There’s not real venom behind the words though since, really, it is what they should be focusing on. Not magically appearing babies. And being a co-parent with Derek Hale. Yeah no. Stiles’s brain goes offline every time it even ventures near that idea. It’s probably trying to save him some trauma or something.

“Sorry, dude,” Scott says with a shrug and hands the baby over.

“I have chemistry too, you know!” Stiles groused, but he’s not in imminent danger of failing, like Scott. It’ll take a lot more than one skipped pop quiz to sink Stiles’s GPA.

“Sorry, dude!” And Scott’s out the door.

Leaving Stiles holding the baby.

And Derek Hale lurking in his kitchen.

Awkward.

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Alan Deaton runs the Beacon Hills Animal Clinic. He patches up dogs, cats, and werewolves. He keeps the werewolf stuff to himself, of course. Deaton, Stiles suspects, knows more about the supernatural goings-on in town than anyone else. Unfortunately, he’s not a sharer. He’s enigmatic. Read: fucking annoying. But if anyone will be able to sort out this baby thing, it’s Deaton.

Except…
“So how are we gonna do this?” Stiles asks.

“Do what?” Derek glowers.

“We can’t just put the baby in the back of my Jeep! It’s not safe. Also, there are laws!”

“Fine.” Derek glowers at him some more. “Wait here. I’ll be back soon.”

The baby jumps as the front door slams. Her eyes fill with tears.

“Hey, it’s okay,” Stiles tells her. “The scary werewolf’s just gone to get the vet so he can come and look at you, Magically Appearing Baby. Just another fucked up day in Beacon Hills, am I right?”

“Buh,” the baby agrees.

Still, at least it gets him out of chemistry.

***

It’s weird, to be alone in the house with the baby. First Stiles kills close to twenty minutes getting her back into her onesie, while she wriggles like an octopus. Then he takes her for a tour of the house. He discovers he likes the weight of her on his hip. He likes her wide-eyed gaze and her smile. He likes the way her face lights up when he talks to her, or makes a face at her, or shows her around the living room.

He decides it must be awesome to be a baby. Everything is fascinating to her. Everything is exciting. Stiles’s shirt, the TV guide, the picture of his dad in his army days.

“Buh!” she says, pointing at it.

“Yeah, that’s, um, your grandad?” Oh sweet zombie Jesus. There’s a phrase he shouldn’t be saying for at least another fifteen years. Or closer to twenty. “Not that you’re mine, though, are you?”

The baby dribbles.

“No, you’re not mine,” Stiles tells her. “You just look exactly like me, and you came with my baby blanket. I mean, if this is a multiverse thing, we’re just going to send you right back home, aren’t we? To your dad and… and your other dad?”

Maybe he’s having an aneurism or something.

Or he has a brain tumor.

Because that would actually make a lot more sense. A lot. It’s a hallucination, not a baby. There is no such thing as Magically Appearing Baby. In fact, there’s probably no such thing as werewolves. He’ll probably find out later, once the surgeons remove the tumor, that it’s all been a crazy, crazy dream.

He sends several angry one-handed texts to Scott about his desertion, but doesn’t hear back. He checks the clock and realizes Scott would be in chemistry right now. Stiles hopes he doesn’t fail. Okay, another part of him kind of hopes he does, and then, when he’s walking home, he falls into an uncovered sewer, but that’s not the point. Scott is his bro and it would suck if he had to go to
summer school or, worse, get held back a year.

He and the baby are discovering morning television when Derek knocks on the door.

“Dude,” Stiles says when he wrenches the door open, “where’s Deaton?”

Derek frowns. “I didn’t get Deaton.”

“Ugh.” Stiles adjusts the wriggly baby. “Then where the hell did you go?”

“I got a car seat,” Derek says, blinking. “For the baby.”

Stiles isn’t sure how that makes him feel. On one hand it’s a good idea. On the other hand, it feels uncomfortably long-term. He stands there dumbly for a moment, in a big pool of ambiguity, until the baby starts digging her heels in and trying to climb him like a jungle gym. She’s reaching out for Derek. “Oh, you want him? Here you go.”

He shoves the baby at Derek, who reaches out for her like he’s afraid she’s poisonous. The baby squeals, delighted, and immediately grabs a fistful of Derek’s hair and gleefully pulls. Stiles smirks. Derek looks… shit, Derek looks totally enamored.


Stiles’s smirk vanishes in a heartbeat. He wishes he could actually make fun of that, but he can’t. Because, watching Derek actually smile might be the most heartbreaking thing he's ever seen. It’s easy to forget Derek’s supposed to be part of a real pack, instead of just hanging around with a bunch of snarky teenagers he turned, trying to pretend it's the same as the family he lost.

But the baby is family.

Or the closest thing he’s got.

“Okay,” he says, not meeting Derek’s gaze. “Let’s get her to Deaton and get this sorted out.”

***

Stiles doesn’t know what he expected.

Okay, he does.

He expected Deaton to go, “Oh, a Magically Appearing Baby. Let’s just shazam that thing straight back to where it belongs. Bibbidi-bobbidi-boo.” What happens instead is first they have to wait for Deaton to finish spaying a cat, and then, after Stiles makes him wash his hands in front of him —twice—Deaton takes a look at the baby.

“Hmm,” he says, raising his eyebrows at the makeshift diaper poking out from the clip-fastenings in the crotch of her green onesie. “Well, this is certainly interesting.”

“You pronounced ‘nightmarish’ wrong,” Stiles mutters.

Deaton just smiles slightly at that. “Well, she’s the result of magic, certainly. Even I can smell that.”
Derek nods.

Stiles sniffs, but all he can smell is antiseptic. “What does magic smell like?”

“Ozone.”

“So that thunder this morning…”

“What thunder?”

“The thunder,” Stiles says. “With the weird green clouds.”

Deaton and Derek exchange a glance.

“Great,” Stiles says. “So apparently I’m the only person who noticed it.”

“I think it’s very likely that it was incredibly localized,” Deaton tells him.

“Like just at my house?”

“Quite possibly. It would certainly take powerful magic, but given the very existence of this child, I have no reason to doubt the power of the mage involved.” Deaton looks at Stiles with his head on an angle.

Stiles shows him his palms. “I didn’t do anything! I couldn’t!”

“Not in this reality,” Deaton says mildly, and turns his attention back to the baby. “In this reality you’re a spark, you’re untapped potential. In some other reality, you must be incredibly powerful.”

“Multiverse,” Stiles says to Derek. “Told you so.”

“I told you so.”

“Whatever, crankywolf.” That’s not how Stiles is choosing to remember it.

“Boys,” Deaton says mildly, and runs his hand over the baby’s downy hair. “Well, she seems perfectly healthy. She’s probably about nine months old. I’m not sure there’s anything else I can tell you.”

“Um, yeah, you can tell us that it’s impossible for both of us to be her parents,” Stiles says.

Deaton looks almost sympathetic. “Actually, Stiles, if both Derek and Scott say they can smell it, I’m afraid no test I can do will likely refute it.”

“Do a test anyway,” Stiles says.

Deaton looks to Derek, who nods. “Alright. I’ll take a swab, and send it away to the lab. Fortunately I know a trustworthy lab tech.”

“And you also need to tell us how to send her back,” Stiles says. He picks her up almost reluctantly. He’s only known her a few hours, but he already knows he’ll miss her. Stupid.

“Send her back?”

“Yes, back to her parents! Back to her reality!”

Deaton is silent. He looks suddenly grave.
“What?” he asks, and repeats it when he doesn’t get an answer. “What?”

“Stiles,” Deaton says at last. “They tore a hole in the universe to send her here. You said her blanket was burned. What do you think was going on in her reality?”

Oh.

Shit. He hadn’t thought of that.

In some alternate dimension, some other Stiles is a bad ass motherfucker mage. A rebel. A rulebreaker. Laws of nature? Fuck em. If Awesome Mage Stiles wants a baby with Derek Hale, he bends all the rules of the universe until he gets one. And then…

Stiles strokes the baby’s cheek.

And then he sends her here.

Stiles doesn’t even want to imagine what could be so terrible, so dangerous to a mage with that kind of power that he packed his baby off in a metaphorical basket in the rushes.

Is—was—Awesome Mage Stiles his age? Stiles imagines him older. Probably with cool tatts and piercings. Stiles imagines him as the sort of guy that Derek Hale could throw against a hundred different walls, and it would just lead to a hundred different instances of aggressive sex. Instead of flinching, which is what Stiles does now. It’s inconceivable to him that Awesome Mage Stiles might only be sixteen.

But he doesn’t know how different their world is. How much darker and how much more dangerous. He doesn’t know why they would have chosen to bring a child into it. He doesn’t know that they did choose it. Maybe she’s nothing more than an unexpected side effect of a spell.

Stiles smooths the baby’s fine hair under his fingers and decides that he’s not going to believe that. He’s going to believe that she’s a miracle, and that a different version of him fought incredibly hard to make her happen.

He thinks it must have been heartbreaking to send her away. A last resort. Something that only happened when her parents’ backs were against the wall.

He doesn’t want to, but suddenly he’s imagining it. He’s imagining himself, frantic, desperate, retreating with the baby in his arms. He’s imagining Derek, fighting a fight he can’t possibly win, just to buy them some time. He’s imagining blood and fire.

His breath hitches.

He doesn’t even realize Derek’s crowding into his space until he’s already there, a wall of warmth and muscle. Stiles raises his free hand and scrubs his face quickly. He looks around the room, grateful that Deaton has his back to them and is pretending to be doing something else.

“Are you okay?” Derek asks in a low voice.

“Just, um… I don’t know.” He scrubs his knuckles over his bristly head. “Just…fuck. What do you think happened to them? To the other us?”

Derek’s gaze is wary. “I don’t know.” He gestures at the baby. “Can I?”

“Yeah.” Stiles bundles her over. “She’s as much yours as mine, apparently. Which is a whole other
“thing I can’t get my head around.”

“She’s not,” Derek says, holding her awkwardly. “I mean, genetically, sure, but…”

“But you said she smelled like pack,” Stiles says, before he realizes that Derek never finished the sentence. He suddenly realizes why: because Derek couldn’t. Because every instinct in him is screaming that the baby is pack, that she’s his daughter. Stiles can see it written all over his face. Derek’s expression, caught somewhere between total wonder and total devastation, transforms into a reluctant grin when the baby thrusts her spitty fists in his face. Stiles elbows him. “Hey, she likes you.”

Derek gives him the side eye. “Of course she does. I look like her dad.”

“Dude, you are her dad.”

The baby gurgles and drools.

“I’m not,” Derek says quietly. He sighs. “Listen, she’s not actually ours. Genetics aside, she belongs to another version of us, not us. Maybe they’ll come looking for her.”

“They won’t,” Stiles says, feeling more certain of this than anything in the world. He runs his fingers over the baby’s dark, wispy hair. “It’s like the doc said, Derek. Some version of me that’s powerful enough to make a baby with another dude sent her here. I don’t even want to know what the fuck was coming after him if he thought that was his only choice, but I’ll bet he didn’t survive it.”

Derek’s gaze is somber. “Just…don’t get too attached.”

“Don’t get too attached? She’s not a lost puppy. Although…” He can’t stop his cheeky grin. “She kind of is.”

Derek grunts, and makes a bitchface, and Stiles feels a little bit better.

Derek looking at him like he’s actually debating whether or not to murder him?

Yeah, that’s the reality Stiles knows and loves.

***

They leave the clinic, and Stiles watches as Derek wrestles the baby into the car seat in the back of the Camaro. It’d almost be amusingly domestic, except Derek looks like he’s ready to tear the straps out and beat the seat to death with them. The baby just makes happy squealing sounds at him while he struggles.

His phone buzzes, and he fishes it out of his pocket. It’s a text message from his dad: Are we still on for lunch?

Shit.

Shit.
What the ever-living-fuck is he going to tell his dad? His dad doesn’t even know about werewolves. Stiles can’t suddenly spring a Magically Appearing Baby on him. *Surprise, Grandpa!*

No.

Just no.

“Derek,” he croaks.

Derek spins around, eyes flashing red. “What?” he snarls.

“Derek, what am I gonna tell my dad? I’m pretty sure he figured the one thing he’d never have to worry about was me being a teen mom!”

He texts back: *Raincheck? Scott’s having a relationship crisis.*

It’s not even a lie, really. Scott’s always having a relationship crisis. That what he gets for being madly in love with Allison Argent, who comes from a long line of werewolf hunters. Seriously, the word “madly” has never been more apt. But hey, enough about Scott’s problems. Stiles’s problems make Scott’s problems look like the fucking Care Bears in comparison. Right now, Stiles would kill to have Scott’s problems.

“We’ll figure it out,” Derek says, finally getting the baby secured.

“How?”

Derek moves around to the driver’s door. “I don’t know, Stiles!”

“Oh, wow, I can see why an alternate version of me made a baby with an alternate version of you,” Stiles says. “You’re so calm in a crisis!”

“I’m calmer than you!”

“That’s not saying much!”

Derek rolls his eyes. “Get in the car, Stiles.”

*“Get in the car, Stiles,”* Stiles mutters, but he does anyway.

What?

It’s a long walk home.
“So here’s what we’re going to do,” Derek says as he drives, and Stiles is in no way distracted by his hands curled around the steering wheel (Derek has nice hands) and imagining what they’d feel like curled around his—“Stiles?”

Stiles flails. “What?”

Derek glares at him. “Are you even listening?”


What? He’s sixteen and he’s been aware for a few years that when it comes to sexual attraction he’s an equal opportunities kind of guy. And Derek Hale is incredibly hot, as long as you don’t take his personality into account. And that’s the great thing about fantasies; you don’t have to. But now Stiles knows that some other version of himself not only got down and dirty with some other version of Derek, but that they actually had a baby together—hello, lifetime commitment!—he can’t help imagining it. In detail. Because either Alternate Stiles is a lot more badass than regular Stiles to even dare approach Derek, which yeah, given the whole universe-bending magic thing must definitely be the case, but also he can’t help thinking that alternate Derek must have had a personality transplant as well. Because he doesn’t actually give off a welcoming vibe in this reality.

And extreme hotness might be a great reason to want to have drag down filthy dirty sex with someone, but it’s not exactly a reason for having a baby together.

“I was just thinking,” he says, “that in the alternate reality, you probably have a much nicer personality.”

“Funny,” Derek says, “because I was just thinking that in the alternate reality you must not be such a child.”

Crankywolf.

Stiles slumps down in his seat and stares out the window. Then he frowns, because this is not the way to his place. “Hey, I thought you were taking me home.”

“No,” Derek says, his jaw clenching. “We’re going to go to the store to get supplies first. Diapers and food and—” He takes his right hand off the wheel to wave it in a vague gesture. “And whatever else babies need.”

“That is actually a really good idea.”

Derek gives him the side eye. “Don’t sound so surprised. Anyway, I’ll take you home after that.”

“Okay.” Stiles chews his bottom lip for a second and frowns out the window. “With the baby?”

Derek’s expression softens. “Do you want to try and explain this to your dad?”

“Hell no!”

“Then I’ll keep her with me,” Derek says.

Wow. Stiles has been a father for a matter of hours now, and he’s already lost custody. He wishes that was amusing as it sounds, but it actually… it actually kind of hurts. It makes perfect sense, but,
“You really think a derelict train depot is the right place to raise a baby?”

“I’ve got another place now.”

“Oh. An abandoned trailer with no wheels? A shipping container under a bridge? A rusted-out car body in the woods? Dazzle me.”

“I have a loft now,” Derek growls. “Above a warehouse in Miller Street.”

How disappointingly normal. Okay, it’s hardly a tiny little house with a picket fence and a Labrador, but it’s incredibly human. The whole area around Miller Street had a pretty bad reputation a few years back, but now people are moving in and snapping up the properties, and it has a whole urban gentrification thing going on now. There’s even an organic grocery store in the neighborhood that sells polenta and quinoa, apparently. Honestly, Stiles can’t actually be sure of that, since it’s not the sort of place he feels any burning need to check out.

“Oh,” Stiles says, because it seems like Derek is waiting for some sort of response and, really, Stiles has got nothing. He makes his awkward face and stares out the window again.

In the back seat, the baby is burbling to herself. It sounds like a happy noise, but is it? How is he supposed to know? Does Derek know? Is Derek going to be any more capable of looking after this baby than Stiles?

Stiles chews his thumbnail worriedly all the way to the mall.

When they head inside, Stiles is suddenly grateful it’s a school day. Because he and Derek are walking close together, and Stiles is holding the baby, and they look like a *couple*, okay? A couple with a baby. Stiles isn’t sure he could handle running into anyone he knows.

God, he hopes his dad or any of the deputies don't have any reason to be in the mall in the next however-the-hell-long-this'll-take.

It takes over an hour.

Turns out that babies need a lot of stuff.

够 enough stuff to sink the Bismarck.


A stroller.

A diaper bag with six gazillion pockets and flaps.

Towels. A special baby bath. Special baby bath stuff. Special baby shampoo. Talcum powder. Lots and lots of wash cloths. A yellow squeaky duck, because, *come on*. Clothes. A stack of onesies. Tiny, tiny socks. Little t-shirts with button openings along one shoulder. Eensie elastic-waisted jeans. A hat with a pink dinosaur on it that Stiles hums and hars over for a while. Because pink? He doesn’t want to buy into all that bullshit about pink is for girls and blue is for boys. Fuck gender stereotypes. But also, a dinosaur? Dinosaurs are awesome.

They get the hat.

Baby nail clippers. The softest hairbrush in the world.

A few plastic sippy cups, because they don’t know if the baby is too big for the bottles.

A set of plastic dinnerware. Brightly colored plastic cutlery.

Jars of baby food. Lots and lots of jars of baby food.

A box of something called rusks.

Diapers. Boxes and boxes of diapers.

Almost as many wipes.

A bunch of little plastic things that go in electrical sockets. A different bunch of little plastic things that keep cupboards shut.

A weird sling thing that apparently hangs from a doorframe, and the baby can sit in it and bounce herself up and down.

Toys that move and light up and make incredibly obnoxious noises. A turtle with a shell that is a xylophone, and may be the greatest thing Stiles has ever seen.

They browse a while in the teddy bear aisle.

“She has a bear,” Stiles says at last, tentatively. “She, um, she came with one. I think that maybe we shouldn’t replace that, you know?”

A cardboard box, a singed blanket and a teddy bear. It’s not a lot.

“Yeah,” Derek says quietly, and they move on.

When they reach the checkout, Stiles almost flails at the total. Derek just grimaces a little and hands over a credit card.

Stiles thinks they’re done when they load everything into the car, but then Derek mutters something about groceries, and they head for the grocery store.

Apparently Derek doesn’t think babies should live only on rusks and pureed stuff from jars. Apparently Derek thinks things like yogurt and fresh fruit should be a part of a baby’s diet.

Stiles, whose arms feel like they’re about to drop off at any second, staggers along behind him with an increasingly grizzly baby. She’s hungry, probably, and she’s definitely wet. Apparently his old t-shirt is not actually that absorbent. There’s a growing damp patch on Stile’s hip. Gross.

“Oh, hey,” Stiles tells her as she starts to wail when they’re waiting for Derek to just pick a fucking yogurt already. He jiggles her on his hip. “Hey, we’ll get you home and get you changed real soon, okay?”

Her eyes are bright with tears and her face is red. She sucks in a breath for what Stiles knows will be another protracted wail.


Ah-ah-ah, ah-ah-ah, there were once two little kittens.
The old lullaby comes out of him without any conscious thought, and Stiles feels like he’s been punched in the gut, because it’s obvious the baby recognizes it and it soothes her. Suddenly Awesome Mage Stiles, with his imagined tattoos and piercings and fuck-the-universe attitude, isn’t just some crazy what-if version of Stiles. He was the same kid as Stiles once: the kid whose mom sang him Polish lullabies. And, whatever else he grew up to be, he remembered them too and he sang them to his daughter.

“Stiles?” Derek asks in a low voice. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah,” Stiles says, knowing that Derek will hear the lie in the uptick of his heartbeat, but telling it anyway because his pride is worth more than the truth. “I’m fine.”

Then he takes the baby down to the other end of the dairy case to see how many pictures of cows they can spot on the cheeses.

***

They change the baby on the backseat of the Camaro.

It does not go well.

The baby, though, seems relatively happy with her rusk, which it turns out is like a really dry breadstick that tastes really awful. Stiles spits his half out in the parking lot. The baby gums hers enthusiastically.

Derek roots around in the trunk trying to find the wipes, the talcum and the diapers which of course have all ended up in different bags. Everything’s going to plan until Stiles, leaning through one door while Derek leans through the other, knocks the talcum powder over, and it sort of explodes everywhere over the black leather seats of the Camaro.

The baby shrieks with delight.

Derek glares at Stiles through a powdery white mask.

“You look like a scary clown,” Stiles tells him. “Or a member of the French aristocracy.”

Then he backs away, the baby in his arms, before Derek can wolf out and tear his throat out. He almost backs straight into an old lady pushing a cart.

“Sorry,” he says.

“He’s lovely,” the old lady says.

“Oh.” Stiles looks down at the baby. “Thanks? And she’s a she.”

“What’s her name?”

“Um,” Stiles says. He looks around for Derek, but he’s busy shoving stuff back in the trunk and looking really pissed right now. And powdery. “Claudia?” Then he tries it so it doesn’t sound like a question. “Her name is Claudia.”

The old lady smiles at them and continues on her way.
Derek moves around the car and holds his arms out for the baby. He quirks a brow. “Claudia?”
“It was my mom’s name.”
It feels right.
And of course he’d call his half-werewolf daughter something he could shorten to Claude. Because how fucking hilarious is that?
He grins to himself as Derek straps Claude into her car seat.
He is hilarious.

***

When Derek drops him off at home, Stiles races inside to get the yellow baby blanket and the teddy bear. The box, he figures she doesn’t need.
“Okay,” he says, lingering awkwardly by the Derek’s window. “So, um…”
Derek compresses his mouth into a thin line.
“So, if you need a hand to set everything up or anything…”
“Stiles,” Derek sighs.
“What?”
Derek fixes him with a death glare. “If you want to come and see her, you can.”
“Oh.” Stiles tries not to look pathetically grateful. Which he is. “Okay. Like, um, do we need to figure out visitation hours or anything?”
“Whenever you want, Stiles. I’ll text you the address.”
“Okay,” Stiles jams his hands in the pockets of his jeans. “Okay, cool.”
Then he tries not to feel the tug in his heart when Derek drives away with Claude.

***

Stiles makes himself mac and cheese for late lunch, and catches up on his texts. Then he wonders why brunch is a legitimate thing, but there’s no word for the meal you have when it’s too late for lunch but too early for dinner.
Linner?

He’s a genius.

He eats his mac and cheese in the kitchen, and wonders what Derek’s doing with Claude. Has he got the crib set up? Does she like the xylophone turtle? Does she miss him?

His phone buzzes with a text, and he hopes it’s Derek with his new address.

It isn’t.

It’s Scott. He’s at least sixty-five percent sure he failed the pop quiz today in chemistry, and what happened with the baby?

Stiles sends back: Derek has the baby.

And Scott sends back: cool

No, Scott. Not cool. Because it’s crazy and irrational, but Stiles wants her back. Even though he knows there’s no way in hell he could explain her to his dad, that makes no difference to the hole she’s left inside him. He’s known her a little over half a day, but she belongs with him.

He texts Scott back something vague, and then spends the rest of the afternoon not texting Derek. He even makes an attempt at cleaning up the mess in his room, as a distraction technique, and hates himself a little bit when he finds himself holding Claude’s box in his lap and wishing she was still in it.

What the hell is wrong with him?

When his dad gets home, Stiles goes downstairs to start dinner.

“How’d the quiz go?” his dad asks him, hanging his hat on the hook beside the door.

“Um, okay.” Stiles is pretty sure his dad knows he’s lying. Then again, he’s been suspicious of Stiles for months now. He still hasn’t forgiven him for getting him fired over the Jackson/kanima thing. Well, more the Jackson/abduction thing, Stiles supposes. Anyway, that’s a wound that’s going to fester between them for a while. His dad has been reinstated, but it hasn’t wiped the slate clean. How could it?

Stiles hates how things have deteriorated between them. He misses having his dad on his side. Not that his dad isn’t on his side anymore, but these days when he defends Stiles it feels heavily weighted toward obligation. There’s no trust there. There’s no outrage. Instead of my son would never do that, his dad’s gaze falls on him questioningly. What’s he keeping from me this time?

It hurts because Stiles knows his dad deserves better.

It hurts because his dad is the most important person in Stiles’s life, and he can’t tell him the truth.

Werewolves.

Hunters.

Kanimas.

Claude.
No. He doesn’t want his dad exposed to that world. He can’t let it happen. It’s too dangerous, and his dad is all he’s got.

His stomach knots.

Was all he had. Until Claude appeared.

“I’m making stir fry,” he tells his dad.

“Sounds good, kiddo.”

“With tofu.”

His dad grimaces, but doesn’t protest.

Stiles goes into the kitchen to chop vegetables.

His dad is the best, really. The best. Sometimes Stiles just wishes his dad could still say the same about him.

***

It’s past midnight. Stiles can’t sleep. Downstairs, his dad is watching some game on TV. He’s going onto a week of night shifts tomorrow, and this is how he adjusts his body clock: by staying up as late as he can and sleeping late tomorrow so he’ll be halfway turned around to nocturnal before his first shift.

Stiles fucks around online for a while. He starts off actually researching theories about alternate realities and the multiverse, then ends up watching clips from a bunch of Star Trek episodes where you know their mirrorverse alter-egos are evil because they have facial hair and wear leather bondage gear.

Except that gets him thinking about Derek and how he already wears leather in this reality, so what would he wear in a Trek mirrorverse? Assless chaps?

The accompanying visual should not make him hard.

Ugh. That’s all he needs. His feelings about Derek are complicated enough, thanks, without layering in any extra sexual tension. Stiles knows Derek is hot as fuck. He’s not blind. It’s difficult enough not to get tongue-tied by all that in-your-face hotness without thinking of Derek in chaps. Or body oil. Or handcuffs.

Fuck.

Exploring his kinky fantasies is all well and good, but Stiles really needs to keep Derek out of them. Because if he’s going to be spending more time with Derek—and he is, because of Claude—then he needs to do it without his tongue lolling out of his mouth. Or his dick jumping out of his pants.

This would be so much easier if he didn’t know that sleeping with Derek Hale was, at least in some universe, something that could totally happen. And did.

Stiles groans, shuts his laptop, and flings himself on his bed.
God. It’s bad enough that werewolves can tell when he’s horny. Luckily, or unluckily, he’s sixteen and pretty much perpetually horny. His horniness isn’t exactly a smoking gun. It doesn’t have a particular target, either. It’s more of a scatter effect. He thinks dirty thoughts about Derek, sure. He also thinks dirty thoughts about Isaac, Erica, Boyd, Allison, Lydia, Danny, the new blond deputy, the guy who works late nights at the convenience store, the woman down the street who wears yoga pants all the time, and at least ninety percent of people from TV. Stiles is a lot of things. Particular is not one of them.

Derek Hale isn’t anything special.

No, no he is not.

Shut up.

He’s not.

Except now he’s not thinking of Derek in assless chaps, he’s thinking of Derek’s smile when he was holding Claude, and suddenly he can totally see why Awesome Mage Stiles hit that. And then fell in love with that. And had a baby with that. Derek’s hot as all fuck, but he’s not just hot as all fuck. He has depth. He has feelings. He’s not an object.

“And that, ladies and gentleman,” Stiles mutters to his ceiling, “is called personal growth.”

Things were much simpler when Stiles was led entirely by his hormones. This emotional stuff sucks balls. And not in a good way.

Fuck his life. It’s been a day, and suddenly he’s having fantasies of happy families?

He groans and reaches for his phone.

He’s an idiot.

He dials.

A stupid fucking idiot.

“Stiles?”

“Hey, Derek,” he says in his most casual tone. It’s a disaster. “How’s it going?”

For a long time there’s silence. Then: “It’s past midnight.”

“Yeah, but you’re pretty much nocturnal, right?” He winces. What is wrong with him? “I mean, sorry?”

Derek sighs heavily down the phone. “What do you want, Stiles?”

“I just wanted to, um, to check in and see how everything’s going.” Past midnight. Yeah, totally normal.

Derek sighs again. “She’s sleeping.”

“So you got the crib together okay?”

“Yeah.” There’s a rustling sound on the end of the line, and Stiles wonders if Derek’s in bed. And if he sleeps naked. “She took a while to get down though. She cried a lot.”
“Oh.”

“Maybe you need to teach me that song from today,” Derek says.

Stiles smiles. “Yeah, she probably needs that to sleep, right?”

“And we didn’t get a mobile.”

“Seriously? Dude, I feel like we bought everything in the damn store!”

“Tomorrow I’m going back for a mobile,” Derek says. Then, his voice sounding a little gruffer, he adds, “You can come if you want.”

“Okay,” Stiles bites back his smile. “Cool. Um, maybe I’ll come by in the morning first? Like check out your new place and all Claude’s stuff?”

“Claude?”

“Claude short for Claudia,” Stiles informs him archly. “If you’re spelling it c-l-a-w-e-d in your head, that’s not my fault.”

Derek snorts, and it sounds almost like amusement.

“So, um—” Stiles breaks off when he hears a hiccupping wail begin in the background. “I guess she’s awake.”

“Again,” Derek mutters.

Stiles hears the rustling noise again, then the wailing gets louder and he figures Derek has walked over to Claude’s crib. Then there’s a blast of wailing right in his ear, before he hears Derek making shushing noises.

“Stiles? You still there?”

“Yeah.”

“Sing the song.”

“What?”


“Oh. Hey, Claude. It’s way past your bedtime, you know?”

Her wails hit a pitch that only dogs and dolphins should be able to hear.

“Stiles!”

“Okay, but tell me if it makes it worse!” Stiles makes a face and clears his throat. “A-a-a, a-a-a, byly sobie kotki dwa. A-a-a, kotki dwa, szarobure, szarobure ohydwa.”

As he mumble-sings his way through the lullaby, he thinks of his mom. It’s surprising how easily the words come back, even though he hasn’t heard them in years. She sang it to him every night until he was about five and insisted he didn’t need to hear it anymore. The last time she sang it for him was from her hospital bed, when he was eight, and curled up beside her, and she thought he was a little baby again. He hadn’t minded.
“Ach, śpię, kochanie, jeśli gwiazdek z nieba chcesz - dostaniesz.”

Oh, sleep my darling. If you'd like a star from the sky I'll give you one.

He can almost hear his mom singing it. He can almost see her smile.

Stiles’s voice falters, and he rushes through the rest of the verse. His throat aches by the end. He can’t finish the whole thing.

He closes his eyes and listens down the line.

He hears Claude’s gulping little hiccups and Derek’s shushing noises. She’s not wailing anymore though, so that’s good. He’s done good.

He waits on the line for a few minutes before ending the call.

A little while after that he gets a text from Derek: She’s sleeping now. Thanks.

He sends his address as well.

Stiles goes to sleep clutching his phone and thinking of kittens, of promises of stars, and of his mom.
Chapter 4

Stiles turns up at Derek’s place the next morning at seven a.m. On a Saturday. What is even the purpose of having a seven a.m. on a Saturday? But Stiles has been up since six, and he’s already showered, dressed, eaten the last of his Froot Loops for breakfast, and trawled through multiple shopping sites online for the most perfect thing ever. So what else is there to do except swing by Derek’s and check on Claude?

Derek looks sleep-rumpled when he opens the door to his loft. “Come on in,” he says, though most of it is distorted by a yawn.

The loft is big. It’s Derek’s, so it’s sparsely furnished. It has high ceilings and a whole wall of windows at the end of the open space. Is industrial chic a thing? Stiles would almost call it New York cool if, you know, it wasn’t in Beacon Hills.

Over in the corner, there’s a crib. Standing in the crib, bouncing on her chubby little legs, is Claude. “Buh! Buh!”

“Hey, Claude!” Stiles beams at her, and follows Derek over toward her crib.

“Kitchen,” Derek says, gesturing. “Bathroom.” He points at a metal spiral staircase that leads upward. “And my bedroom.”

Stiles looks at the staircase, his stomach knotting. The less he thinks about Derek’s bedroom, the better.

Derek obviously misreads his look. “I didn’t leave her alone last night! I slept down here on the couch.”

Defensivewolf, much?

“Dude, I wasn’t judging you.” Stiles gets to the crib and reaches down for Claude. He lifts her out. “Did you sleep well, Claude?”

Derek snorts.

“Apparently Derek is not a morning person,” Stiles tells her and she beams at him.

“Derek is going to make coffee,” Derek mutters, and ambles off toward the kitchen.

Stiles follows him, Claude on his hip. “Hey, Derek?”

Derek is fiddling with his coffee maker. He growls, which Stiles decides to take as a response.

“So, you know how you said you were going to get a mobile today?”

Derek turns around to face him, leaning on the counter. “Yeah?”

Stiles digs his phone out of his pocket. “Well, I might have been looking at them online, and look at this!”

It’s a wolf mobile. Well, it’s a Red Riding Hood mobile, but the wolf is cute and not at all demonized. Because Stiles’s half-werewolf baby isn’t going to get all that medieval anti-wolf propaganda shoved in her face. The wolf on this mobile is cute and fuzzy, and totally looks like the

sort of wolf it would be fun to get chased down and caught by.

Derek frowns at the screen of his phone.

“So, if I order this now, it should be delivered by Monday.” Stiles wrinkles his nose. “Unless you think she really needs one today. Or you think this one is awful.”

Derek lifts his gaze. His eyes are brilliant. How has Stiles not noticed that before? “I like this one.”

Warmth spreads through Stiles. “Okay, I’ll, um, I’ll order this one.”

“Do you want to use my credit card?”

Stiles tightens his grip on his phone. “It’s okay.”

It's dumb, probably, but he wants to get something for Claude with his own money. Of which he has fuck all, but he’d just like to hang on to the ounce of pride he’s got, so he can tell himself that at least Derek didn’t pay for everything. Even though the wolf mobile is barely a drop in the ocean of financial ruin that is apparently Claude. It's not like sixty bucks will destroy his college fund. Although it will leave more of a dent than he's comfortable admitting.

Derek’s mouth twitches in what an optimist might call a smile. He gestures at the bunch of jars on the counter. “Do you want to feed her breakfast?”

Okay, wow.

Feeding Claude is a whole crazy thing.

It’s like some kind of Jackson Pollack interactive experience. Stiles spends most of his time sitting with her on the floor—Derek adds ‘high chair’ to the shopping list—and using her flat plastic spoon to shovel in bits of pureed apple as quickly as she can dribble them out again. In the end, she’s wearing so much of her breakfast that Stiles is worried she didn’t swallow any of it.

Afterward, making a face at Derek’s smirk, Stiles carries Claude back over to her stack of stuff near the crib, and lies her down on a towel. He strips off her breakfasted-onesie, changes her diaper, and has her cleaned up and redressed all in the space of a few minutes. And he feels kind of proud of it, actually.

“You forgot the talcum,” Derek informs him, leaning against the wall with his arms folded across his chest.

“Wow. One night of custody, and you’re suddenly an expert?” Stiles reaches for the talcum powder, sighs, and pops the fastenings on the onesie.

“I am at least five diaper changes in front of you,” Derek informs him.

“I’ll be sure hold a parade in your honor,” Stiles mutters. “Or maybe erect some sort of monument. Clearly you’ve earned it.”

Derek’s mouth twitches and his eyebrows quirk. “Clearly I have.”

Stiles snorts at him, and makes a face at Claude. She squeals in delight and shoves a fist in her mouth.

What’s weird, Stiles decides as he finally gets the diaper change done right, isn’t so much the fact that a baby magically appeared out of nowhere—although, yes, on balance, that’s incredibly fucking
weird—but the fact that Stiles is *enjoying* this so much. He suspects Derek is too.

It’s a little bittersweet. If Claude makes Stiles miss his mom acutely, he doesn’t even want to think about how she’s affecting Derek. He’s lost so much more, family and pack. He’s tried to rebuild his pack, but Stiles doesn’t know if he ever thought he could rebuild his family. And then along came Claude.

Stiles sneaks a look at Derek.

In another reality, Derek trusted Stiles enough to let him close.

That seems more incredible than anything else that’s happened so far.

***

Claude has no interest in Saturday morning cartoons.

Stiles should probably deny paternity on those grounds alone.

Instead, they play the turtle xylophone together. Stiles manages to get a tune out of it. Claude just bashes at it. It’s kind of fun.

Derek takes the opportunity to grab a shower, and Stiles doesn’t at all think about him naked. He doesn’t at all imagine the way the water is sliding over his body and beading on his skin. Not at all.

Also, he’s not salivating.

He and Claude play the xylophone some more, and then Claude sort of lunges at him and beaches herself on his lap.

“Did you want a hug, baby?” he laughs, patting her on the backside.

“Buh!”

“Buh,” he agrees.

Claude scales him like she’s a tiny mountaineer, grabbing handfuls of his shirt to pull herself up. Finally she’s standing on his thigh, bouncing, and beaming at him in delight.

“Clever girl!”

She squeals and bounces some more, and then nuzzles wetly against his shirt.

Against his chest.

Against his general pectoral area…

Holy crap.

“Okaaaaaay.” Stiles lifts her out of range. “That is highly inappropriate. And also freaky weird. If you’re hungry, we have bottles. *Bottles.*”

He sets Claude down near her toys and goes into the kitchen to make up a bottle.
Because Stiles hasn’t really thought a lot about the logistics of this. Okay, he’s thought a little too much about the fun part of making a baby together with the hotness that is Derek Hale, but not the other parts. Like the part where a baby needs a place to grow. The whole lactation thing. Because eww.

But the little spitty patch on his shirt is a dead giveaway, isn’t it? It was him—or the alternate reality version of him—that conceived, and carried, and gave birth, and fed her. It makes sense since he’s the magic one, but still…

Stiles lifts his shirt and presses his hands against his flat abdomen. He can’t decide if it’s incredibly miraculous or incredibly creepy to imagine a life growing inside him. Maybe it’s both.

He turns around when Derek enters the kitchen.

“Hey,” Stiles says. Then, just to be sure: “When you hold Claude, does she um, does she go for your…”

Crap. If he’d thought about how awkward this question was going to turn out, he probably wouldn’t have started it.

Derek’s eyebrows draw together. “My what?”

Stiles gestures at his chest, but Derek looks confused. Stiles rolls his eyes. “Jesus fucking Christ! You would be terrible at charades. Nipples, okay, nipples. Does she ever go for your nipples?”

Derek chokes out a surprised sound that might even be close to a laugh.

Stiles, his face burning, screws the top on the bottle and shakes the living fuck out of the formula.

“No, she doesn’t,” Derek says at last, and fuck him sideways for sounding like he’s trying not to burst out laughing. “But it makes sense.”

Stiles can’t even look at him right now. Or ever again, probably.

“Stiles? Are you okay?”

“Oh, fine,” Stiles huffs. “Just, you know, coming to terms that Claude’s not the only girl in this little family unit.”

Derek is silent for a long time. Then, finally, he just says, “Huh.”

Stiles spins around. “What do you mean ‘huh’?”

Derek leans against the counter, folding his arms over his chest. His hair’s still damp from the shower. “I mean I didn’t think you were a misogynist.”

Stiles gapes. “A mis— Are you fucking serious? Because I think there’s a pretty big difference between freaking out about being pregnant, and misogyny!”

“But you weren’t pregnant,” Derek points out. “And, even if you were, it wouldn’t make you a girl.”

Stiles pinches the bridge of his nose. “What would it make me then?”

Derek’s gaze narrows. “One of the most powerful mages who ever lived.”

Wow, okay. So it’s hard to feel emasculated when you hear something like that.
Derek shakes his head. “Jesus, Stiles. Claude’s dad, her version of you, he must have been incredible.”

“Yeah,” Stiles murmurs. Derek’s right. Who cares if the guy fucking lactated? It doesn’t make him any less of a badass motherfucker. Stiles knows that. Shit, yesterday he worried about buying Claude the pink dinosaur cap because of all that gender stereotype bullshit, and now he’s freaking out because some guy who isn’t even him had a baby.

“I’m a terrible person,” he tells Derek numbly. “I shouldn’t be allowed near Claude. She’ll grow up full of self-doubt and no self-esteem, and daddy issues and internalized misogyny and it’ll be all my fault!”

Derek raises his brows.

“What? This is serious!”

“You think that Claude, who is half werewolf, will be lacking in self-esteem?” Derek smirks. “Trust me, that’s not going to be an issue. Also, with Lydia and Allison in her life? She’s not going to ever think there’s anything she can’t do because she’s a girl.”

“I guess.” Stiles smiles a little. “Um, so you think Allison will be in her life?”

“I think Scott is your best friend, and Allison is important to him. Of course I’d expect her to be in Claude’s life, just like I hope you’ll expect my pack to be.”

Ugh. Derek’s pack. Stiles does not like Derek’s pack. He really doesn’t like the idea of letting Isaac or Erica close to Claude. Boyd is the least objectionable of them. But then, if Derek’s prepared to let an Argent close to Claude, Stiles can’t exactly refuse. Not when Derek’s being all reasonablewolf.

Stiles gives the bottle another shake. “Do you think in the alternate reality that maybe our friends are friends?”

Derek smiles ruefully. “Well, in an infinite number of universes…”

Stiles laughs.

Yeah, in an infinite number of universes there must be at least one where everyone isn’t an asshole.

***

In the spirit of reconciliation, and also because Derek looked at him like he was crazy when he suggested it and Stiles wants to prove him wrong, Stiles decides it’s time for a get together. They’re going to get everyone over to the loft this afternoon to meet Claude, and check out Derek’s new place. He texts Scott, Allison and Lydia, and has Derek do the same to Isaac, Erica and Boyd.

They go to the mall to pick up a high chair, but end up getting a cool little baby seat that attaches to a regular chair instead. Stiles argues it’ll be easier when it comes to taking Claude to anyone else’s place to eat.

“Who else’s place?” Derek asked.

Which, unfair.
“I don’t know, Derek. I can only presume at some point she’ll need babysitting when, you know, you’re defending the town from supernatural monsters, and I’m studying for exams. Or have an actual social life.”

Stranger things have happened. Claude has certainly proved that.

Derek grunts and throws a book about raising a baby into the cart.

They get a baby carrier, which Stiles hopes Claude won’t grow out of too quickly, because otherwise it seems like a waste of money. Although Derek’s pretty strong. He could probably lug Claude around until she’s old enough to get her driver’s licence.

They also get more diapers, because it’s not like she won’t use them.

They get subs for lunch. Stiles shares his with Claude on the drive back to Derek’s loft. Derek, to his credit, barely flinches when Claude paints herself, her car seat, and whatever parts of the Camaro she can reach with a handful of spit-soaked bread.

When they get back to the loft, Stiles flips through the baby book, and is suddenly intimidated by how complicated it all seems. There are a lot of charts and tables. Stiles might even need to take notes at some point.

He texts his dad that he’s with Scott and will be staying until late.

His dad texts back: ok.

Stiles stares at the screen of his phone and wonders if there’s anything behind that answer: terseness, suspicion, disapproval…or if it really does just mean what it says.

He also wonders how he’s managed to get quite so comfortable in Derek’s loft in the space of a day. It’s not even weird when Claude goes down for a nap and he and Derek sit at the table and read through the baby book together. And that should be weird. It’s not that long ago that Stiles was flailing and panicking whenever Derek even looked at him sideways, let alone shoved him into random walls and furniture.

Whatever’s happening now is new.

It’s a little weird maybe, when Stiles catches Derek’s gaze accidentally, and they both smile a little awkwardly instead of sneering, but it’s pretty nice.

“So, I was thinking maybe I could stay tonight,” Stiles says. “To sing the song? And help out if she doesn’t sleep through the night.”

“You don’t need to do that.” It sounds like Derek is rebuffing him, except everything Derek says sounds like that. So maybe it’s just that Derek has been terrible at communicating this whole time.

“I know,” Stiles says slowly. “But I’d like to.”

Actual color rises in Derek’s cheeks, and he suddenly finds something fascinating in the book that he needs to immediately stare at. “Okay.”

Yeah, this is all new.
Lydia is the first to arrive. Stiles is glad to see her. She’s been more standoffish than usual since Jackson left town and, by default, her. Stiles suspects it’s because she’s devastated, but Lydia’s not the sort of girl who’s going to stay at home in her pajamas, crying into a tub of ice-cream as she listens to Taylor Swift. Lydia’s the sort of girl who’s going to tell everyone to go fuck themselves, and get busy looking gorgeous.

“You look good,” Stiles says when he opens the door to her.

“I know,” she tells him and sashays inside. “Now, where’s this multiverse baby Scott’s been babbling on about?”

“Scott said multiverse?” Stiles raises his brows.

“No.” Lydia smiles archly. “Scott said multiplex, I just knew what he meant.”

Yeah, that sounds like Scott.

Isaac’s the next to arrive. Stiles watches warily as Derek greets him, pulling him into a loose hug and rubbing his hand on Issac’s head. Stiles has watched Animal Planet. He knows it’s a wolf thing. They’re exchanging scent, which ew, but Derek’s also establishing his dominance by putting his hand on Isaac’s head. Isaac ducks his head into the touch, submitting happily to his alpha’s authority.

Stiles vows to pay more attention to the way Claude interacts with Derek, but he has the feeling that if anyone could get away with swinging off the tail of the alpha, it’d be a cub. Their cub.

He lifts Claude up and hands her over to Lydia. She seems happy enough to go, and Stiles figures she probably recognizes Lydia from her world. Then Isaac walks over to join them, hands shoved in his pockets, and Claude goes mental.

“Buh! Buh-buh!” She reaches out her grabby hands.

“Well,” Lydia says wryly, “I know when I’ve been outranked.” She holds Claude out toward Isaac.

It’s sort of hilarious. Isaac looks like he’s going to shit himself. His eyes are impossibly wide as he glances anxiously between Stiles and Derek. Stiles has seen him face down enemies with less tangible fear than this.

“Go on then,” Stiles says smugly, and crosses his arms over his chest.

Isaac takes Claude awkwardly.

“Buh!” she says, sticking her toes into his stomach and trying to climb him. She smacks a spitty hand against his cheek. “Buh buh buh!”

“I don’t know what she wants!” he hisses worriedly. “Derek, help!”

Claude squeals in the same demanding tone she usually saves for banana.

Isaac flashes his eyes at her. They glow bright gold for a moment, before the light fades again.

Stiles is ready to yell at him for going all wolf on a baby, but Claude beams and squeals again—in obvious approval this time—and lifts her arm up into the air.

“That’s a high five, dude,” Stiles tells Isaac. “Don’t leave her hanging.”
Isaac looks relieved and amused and terrified all at once. He smacks her hand gently.

Boyd and Erica arrive at the same time as Scott and Allison and, well, that must’ve been an interesting walk up the stairs. But if they all have a burning desire to kill one another, they’ve hidden it by the time they get to the loft.

The pizza arrives and they all sit around on the floor to eat. Claude starts off in Stiles’s lap, moves to Derek’s, then basically does a circuit picking the most interesting things off everyone’s slices.

“I thought wolves were predators, not scavengers,” Lydia says at last, while Boyd hands over an olive warily.

Claude gums it happily.

“Wolves are predators,” Stiles tells her. “But she comes from a long line of scavengers on the Stilinski side. We’re like seagulls.”

Derek snorts and grins, while everyone else just looks at each other a little awkwardly.

Oh, right. Strange what a difference a day makes. Everyone’s still hung up on that whole ‘boy plus boy does not equal baby’ thing. Stiles remembers his own denial with warm affection. Now his concerns are a lot more practical. Like which sounds better, Stilinski-Hale or Hale-Stilinski?

Or—his stomach lurches a little—just Hale, since shoving his own surname in there is going to raise a lot of questions. Stilinski isn’t exactly a common name in Beacon Hills.

Claude’s going to need some documentation if she’s here to stay. Like a birth certificate. Stiles has no doubt that Deaton will have contacts who can get them documentation that will pass inspection. Stiles is fairly sure that two moms or two dads can go on birth certificates nowadays, because, yay progress. He’s not so sure that’s possible if one of the dads involved is sixteen. In fact, he’s pretty sure that’s just going to raise a lot of questions, and end up with Derek in jail. And Stiles in a medical testing facility the second the authorities run a DNA test on Claude.

She’s as much his as Derek’s, but nobody outside his group of friends and Derek’s pack can know that.

It’s unfair.

Stiles sets his half-eaten slice of pizza down and chews on his thumbnail instead. It takes Scott throwing a piece of garlic bread at him to break him out of his sudden morose mood. Claude, realizing he’s got garlic bread now, shuffles her way over toward him on her bottom.

“Dude, she’s adorable,” Scott says, and Allison nods her agreement.

Stiles hauls Claude into his lap and lets her suck on the garlic bread. He grins at Scott, then exchanges a smile with Derek. “Yeah, we know.”

***

Stiles doesn’t know what they put in baby bath. It can’t just be lavender, because it’s like Claude’s been roofied. He and Derek dry her and get her into a clean onesie, and set her down in her crib.
“A-a-a, a-a-a, były sobie kotki dwa,” Stiles croons, yawning.

It’s seven p.m. and he’s yawning. Claude has seriously ruined him.

He sleeps on Derek’s couch. It’s on the other side of the loft from Claude’s corner, and turned away so she can’t see anyone sleeping there.

Claude wakes up three times, wailing.

The first time Stiles takes care of her.

The second time, Derek is already down the stairs and leaning over the crib by the time Stiles staggers to his feet.

The third time Stiles leans over the crib and mumbles to Claude while Derek gets a bottle ready. “The book says you should be cutting back your night time feeds, Claude,” he tells her.

“Werewolf baby,” Derek says, padding up beside him with the bottle. “She needs a lot more calories.”

“I’m pretty sure she ate a whole pizza tonight.”

Derek nudges him with his shoulder. “You’re exaggerating.”

“Pedanticwolf,” Stiles yawns, and watches as Claude feeds.

Derek must be tired too. Instead of growling, he smiles.

Everything is new these days.
Chapter 5

Raising a baby, Stiles decides, with his hardly-any-at-all experience, is all about time management. And Stiles is an expert at time management. With his dad on night shifts, it’s easy for Stiles to spend nights with Derek. Stiles has it down to a routine by the middle of the week. He goes to school. He goes to Derek’s place after school. He makes sure he’s home for dinner. He does his homework after dinner, then goes to bed. Then, when his dad leaves for work, Stiles heads back to Derek’s so he’s there for Claude’s night-time feeds, and her breakfast first thing in the morning. Then he races home before his dad arrives, and gets ready for school.

It’s workable, okay?

So what if he’s running on so little sleep that he dozes off in Math? So what if he forgets to hand in his English assignment? So what if he takes so much Adderall that for a terrifying few minutes he thinks he can see the event horizon with his brain?

It’s workable.

It’s working.

It’s just so much harder than Stiles expected, because it turns out that every parent in the world hasn’t been lying, or even exaggerating just a little bit: having a baby is hard. Like, really hard. Having a baby on timeshare should be much easier, but it’s not. Stiles is tired, and he knows Derek is as well. Why is it so tiring? All Claude does is eat and sleep and play with her own toes and whatever else she can get her chubby little hands on. On paper, there’s nothing to it. But in practice, Jesus fucking Christ.

Stiles isn’t sleeping, not even when she is, because every tiny noise jolts him awake. Claude could apparently sleep through the apocalypse half the time, but suddenly Stiles is waking up because a moth pinged against the light. A moth. What the fuck is his life? Apart from a crazy hallucination of sleep-deprivation, jars of baby food, and more loads of laundry than make any sense at all. He’s so fucking tired.

He doesn’t even realize how tired he is until it’s six in the morning, and he needs to get home before his dad’s night shift ends, but Claude has woken up with the most disgusting diaper ever, and somehow the mess has leaked all over her bedding, and he just can’t. He’s standing in front of Derek’s washing machine, crib sheets and onesie in one hand, laundry soap in the other, a naked, squirmy Claude on his hip, not enough hands for this, and he suddenly bursts into tears.

Like what the fuck is that even about?

“Okay.” And Derek is right there, all close and warm and bleary-eyed, and he’s divesting Stiles of everything. Bundling the washing into the machine, adding the soap and turning it on, and lifting Claude away from him too. Then, a hand on his lower back, he’s escorting Stiles up the little spiral staircase to his bedroom. Derek’s bedroom. “Lie down.”

Stiles mumbles something that is supposed to be a well-reasoned protest, but it dies the second he hits the mattress.

“I’m gonna use your phone to text your dad and tell him you left for school early,” Derek says, pushing him gently on the shoulders to ease him down fully. “Then I’m gonna call Scott and tell him you’re not going to school today. You need to catch up on your sleep.”
Oh, that sounds awesome. It sounds so awesome that for some reason it produces a fresh batch of tears. “Oh, man, this is ridiculous. I’m ridiculous.”

God, he’s not going to move for at least six hundred years.

“You’re exhausted,” Derek says, pulling the comforter up over him. Claude makes an excited buh-buh-buh sound.

Stiles closes his eyes, and sleep is right there. He’s sinking into it immediately.

“Buh!” Claude exclaims.

“Buh, baby girl,” Derek replies, so yeah, that’s totally cute and Stiles is obviously having some kind of crazy happy families dream. “Let’s get you breakfast and let your daddy sleep, okay?”

Yeah. Stiles is dreaming.

***

When Stiles wakes up, he’s still dreaming. Otherwise, why would he be lying on his side blinking into Derek’s Hale’s perfect face? Derek’s asleep too, but he’s probably not dreaming of Stiles. His dark lashes are resting on his cheeks. Stiles totally resists the urge to reach out and see how prickly his stubble is.

Claude is lying between them. She’s staring at Stiles like she knows exactly what he’s thinking.

“What?” he mouths at her, and she giggles and puts her foot in her mouth.

Stiles grins at her, then feels the same stab of guilt and horror that usually follows on: these are stolen moments. They don’t belong to him. They belong to Claude’s actual dad. Some version of Stiles that he can’t even imagine. Some version of him who’s probably dead right now, and here’s Stiles playing silly games with the baby he died to protect.

Okay, so he doesn’t know any of that. But on another level he does. He knows it in his fucking bones, because there is no version of Stiles—not even one in an alternate evil Trek goatee universe—that wouldn’t die for Claude. And no version of him that wouldn’t move heaven and hell to get back to her if it was in any way possible.

“I’m sorry,” he whispers to Claude. “I’m sorry I’m not him. I’m sorry you won’t remember him.”

He feels like a cheap substitute.

“Buh,” she tells him.

Derek mutters something in his sleep, and Claude’s whole face lights up.

Stiles smiles at her, and dozes off again while she gums her toes and makes happy, burbly sounds as she talks to herself and him.

When Stiles next wakes up he’s on his side, with Claude tucked up against his chest. She’s asleep this time, her eyes closed, her mouth open, and her tiny fingers splayed against her cheek. She smells of fresh talcum, which must be all down to Derek because Stiles hasn’t moved in hours, and Jesus, it
feels good to wake up feeling rested. Claude smells nice, and there’s a warm weight at Stiles’s back too, and an arm slung over his middle, and holy shit Derek Hale is spooning him. After a moment of blind, blank panic, Stiles allows himself to relax. And why the hell not? It feels nice. It’s actually more than nice. It’s kind of… kind of perfect actually, in a hazy just-waking-up sort of way. As long as he doesn’t think about it.

Then Derek shifts, and sighs, and tightens his grip on Stiles. Stiles feels the scrape of stubble against his ear, and, oh shit, that’s kind of perfect as well.

Except he sort of needs to pee.

He takes Derek’s hand and moves his arm back, then kind of wriggles out of bed trying not to wake either one of them.

They’re wolves.

“Buh!”

Color rises in Derek’s cheeks, as he blinks himself awake. “Ah…”

Stiles shoots him a grin and shrugs. “It’s no biggie.”

*I wake up with hot guys spooning me all the time. They all want a piece of this.*

He hurries to the bathroom before he actually opens his mouth and says it.

***

It’s the best day.

He and Derek play with Claude and watch movies. Claude falls asleep on Stiles’s chest halfway through *The Avengers*. Lightweight.

Stiles feels better than he has in days, but he still can’t shake his sadness. He’s not sure he should shake it. He thinks about Claude’s real dads a lot. Someone should.

“I wish there was some way to tell them,” he murmurs, stroking Claude’s downy hair. It’s just long enough to make a tiny duck’s tail at the nape of her neck. She’s lying asleep on his chest, looking like the most adorable thing that has ever existed in the world.

“Tell who what?” Derek asks from beside him on the couch.

“Them.” Stiles turns his head to hold Derek’s gaze. “Her dads. I wish there was some way to tell them she was safe.” His throat aches with tears when he thinks of what must have happened to them. And how they must have given everything to protect her, and not known if it worked.

Derek sighs and reaches out to put his hand over Stiles’s, where it rests under Claude’s backside. “Stiles. You’re only upsetting yourself.”

Stiles can’t bring himself to smile at how fucking cute he is with Claude. “I know, I just…” He shrugs.

“I think that maybe they already knew,” Derek says. “I think that maybe you, I mean Claude’s dad you, had some way of deciding exactly where to send her. And, if he couldn’t keep her, he sent her
“Bullshit,” Stiles says, because if he knows one thing for certain it’s that Derek Hale is not an optimist. In fact, Derek Hale couldn’t spot the silver lining with a pair of binoculars and an advanced degree in meteorology. There is no way in hell he believes that bittersweet emotional closure to-everything-there-is-a-season Lifetime movie bullshit. Even Stiles knows life doesn’t work that way. “Have you been watching reruns of Touched By An Angel again? Because I told you that show is ridiculous.”

Derek rolls his eyes. “Stiles, some version of you was so powerful that he made a baby with another man. I don’t think this was someone lacking in faith, do you? Or in power. I think he knew exactly what he was doing.”

Stiles blinks in surprise. That actually makes sense. At least, he’s put his faith in stupider things before. Why not, for once, believe something that benefits him? Why not believe that Awesome Mage Stiles knew that he would make the best substitute dad for his daughter? Why not believe that he and Derek, even if they’re not as badass as Claude’s real dads, might just be at the top of the list when it comes to raising her and loving her?

Because Stiles does love her.

It’s been a little under a week, and he already knows his life would be empty without her. He always suspected he kept his heart small-drawn, guarded. Because of his mom. Because he’s so afraid of losing someone else. But then Claude came, and somehow his heart’s expanded to encompass the entire universe.

Until Claude, he didn’t know his heart had the capacity for this much love.

The world is at once filled with so much joy.

It’s also more terrifying than it’s ever been.

That’s another thing that every parent in the world hasn’t lied about.

***

On Thursday morning Stiles helps Derek change and feed Claude, kisses her on the forehead, and dashes out before his dad gets home and discovers he’s not there. He makes it home and into bed five minutes before his dad knocks on his door.

“Morning, kiddo.”

“Morning,” Stiles’s yawn isn’t at all faked.

“I’m making pancakes if you want to come down.”

“Choc chip?”

His dad shows him his palms, but his smile seems a little strained. “Blueberry, I swear.”

Stiles isn’t sure they’re much healthier, but fuck it. Pancakes.
And also, his dad. He’s missed spending time with his dad.

He pulls on the clothes that he only just threw off, and staggers back downstairs.

He slumps into a chair at the kitchen table, rests his chin on his folded arms, and watches as his dad makes up the pancake batter. From scratch, because if his dad’s having pancakes, he’s doing it right.

“How was work?” Stiles asks him.

“How was work?” Stiles asks him.

“Nothing too exciting,” his dad tells him, and frowns slightly. “Did you get any sleep at all last night?”

Stiles fights a yawn. “Yeah. Studying.”

He can’t stop what he suspects it a goofy smile spreading across his face when he pictures last night. Claude had been fussy. Beyond fussy. Derek had paced back and forth in front of the window, patting her gently on the back and softly massacring the Polish lullaby Stiles had spent ages trying to teach him.

But apparently the effort was enough for Claude. She’d dozed off with her head resting on Derek’s chest and one hand splayed against his clavicle. And Stiles was not at all jealous of a nine-month-old baby. No he wasn’t. But seriously, did Derek have to be shirtless?

The moonlight had gleamed on the planes of his back, and illuminated his shifting muscles, and… how could a shirtless man holding a sleeping baby be both the hottest and the most adorable thing Stiles had ever seen? Was a feelingsboner a thing?

Yeah, yeah it was.

He’d proved that last night.

“Studying?” his dad says now, raising his eyebrows.

“Uh huh.”

God, he hates the look his dad gives him. The one where he wants to believe Stiles, but he’s not an idiot… Stiles has seen that look too much lately. He hates how every little lie his dad picks up on undermines the foundations of their relationship a little bit more, like sand under a cornerstone. A few little grains here and there, but one day the whole thing will collapse. Stiles is terrified that when it does, he and his dad won’t be able to fix it.

His dad sighs and turns back to the counter. He sets the bowl down, then braces his hands on the edge of the counter. He doesn’t look at Stiles. “Is it a girl? Or guy?”

“What?” Stiles’s jaw drop. "No!"

His dad’s shoulders are a hunched, tense line. “Is it drugs?”

“Jesus, no!” Stiles pushes his chair back, the legs squealing on the floor. “I’m—I’m tired, and this is what you think?”

His dad turns around again. He looks almost haggard. “Yes, Stiles, this is what I think, because whenever I ask, you feed me bullshit!”

Stiles can feel the tears stinging his eyes.
I was with Derek and our magically appearing alternate universe baby.

Something so fucking ludicrous should be hilarious. Not like this.

His dad’s face is red. “Because you texted me the other day to tell me you’d gone to school early, but when I called, they said you hadn’t showed!”

Stiles wants to be sick.

His dad smacks the wooden spoon on the counter. “Because the other night I left my phone charger at home, and when I came to get it at four in the morning, you weren’t here!”

“Dad…”

“So when I ask you where you’ve been, maybe you can at least do the courtesy of not lying to my face!”

“I-I was studying.” Stiles doesn’t even know how he gets the words out.

His dad huffs out a breath, and all the fight seems to go out of him at once. He turns back to the pancake batter. “How many do you want?”

“What?”

“How many pancakes?”

Stiles shoves his shaking hands into the pockets of his jeans. His right hand comes into contact with his keys, and suddenly all he can think is how he needs to get out of here. “I don’t want any fucking pancakes!”

He storms out of the kitchen.

Five minutes later, wiping hot, angry tears from his face as he heads for Derek’s loft, it occurs to him that it might have been the first time he’s dropped the f-bomb in front of his dad, and that his dad didn’t even bother to yell at him.

When did everything get so broken between them?

***

Derek is out.

Fucking out.

Stiles bangs on the door for a good five minutes, then pulls his phone out and texts him: Where r u?

The answer comes back almost immediately: Park, Grant St.

It’s only a couple of blocks from the loft, but Stiles drives since he left his shoes at home. The park is pretty much empty at this hour, and he easily spots Derek and Claude from the street. Well, Derek and the stroller. They’re underneath the spreading boughs of a tree, right next to the duck pond.
The grass is cool and damp against Stiles’s feet as he walks over to them.

“You look like hell,” Derek tells him as he unfastens the sixty-bazillion straps it takes to keep Claude contained in her stroller.

“My dad thinks I’m on drugs,” Stiles says. It was supposed to sound pissed off, but it’s too tremulous for that. His throat aches and his eyes sting.

Derek reaches down under the stroller and pulls out a thick blanket. He spreads it on the grass and gestures at it. Stiles sits then, fuck it, lies down. Derek lifts Claude out of the stroller and sets her down next to him. She nuzzles up against Stiles delightedly, smacking her hands against his chest like he’s her own personal bongo drum.

Derek sits down next to them, and hauls over the diaper bag with the twelve hundred compartments. Stiles has been calling it the Chamber of Secrets. Derek has been letting him. What? Yesterday he put a packet of wipes in one pocket, and they just vanished. Stiles is pretty sure the bag contains the entrance to at least one multi-dimensional rift. It’s the only explanation.

Derek unzips a compartment, looks inside, huffs, then unzips another compartment. He pulls out a brown paper bag and hands it to Stiles.

“Holy crap.” Stiles holds the bag out of Claude’s grasping reach as he opens it. “Is this an apple cinnamon muffin?”

Derek nods curtly.

“Dude. You are the fucking best.”

Claude thinks so too. She squeals and squawks until Stiles breaks off a piece of muffin for her.

“I brought her a cup of yogurt,” Derek says mildly.

“Muffin, then yogurt,” Stiles declares. “Are you a monster?”

They sit in silence for a while. Well, if it counts as silence once Claude spots the ducks in the pond.

“Buh! Buh buh buh!”

“Do you want to talk about your dad?”

“Not really.” But Stiles does anyway. “So, things have been pretty bad since I got him fired. He’s back at work now, but mud sticks, you know? And he blames me. Of course he blames me.”

“It wasn’t your fault.”

“Derek, we stole a police van and abducted Jackson. What part of that isn’t my fault?”

“The part where you were trying to save the town from the kanima.”

Stiles barks out a laugh. “It’s not like I can tell him that!”

“Maybe you should.”

Stiles’s heart skips a few beats. “No! I don’t want him to know, Derek! I need to keep him out of it! I need to keep him _safe_. He’s all I’ve got.”

Except when I don’t.
“Stiles.” Derek’s brows draw together worriedly. “You look like hell. You smell of stress and Adderall. You can’t seriously expect to keep this up.”

“I have to,” Stiles says. “I want to. Claude is… Claude is mine too.”

Derek doesn’t say anything. His mouth is a thin, unhappy line.

“ Anyway, school’s out in a few more weeks, so that’ll be one less thing, you know? I can do this. I can make it work.”

I have to.

He’s not giving Claude up. Not giving Derek up.

He stares at Derek, his eyes stinging again, and silently begs him not to push him away. Not today. Not after everything with his dad.

Then, at last, Derek nods. “Okay. Okay, Stiles.”

***

Stiles is late to school. At lunch, he falls asleep in the cafeteria, and wakes up when Scott shakes him gently on the shoulder. Harris gives him a detention in Chemistry because he called his name three times and Stiles didn’t respond. He then falls asleep in detention.

The school calls his dad about his “behavioural issues.”

His dad picks him up and drives him straight to the hospital, for an appointment with the pediatrician he’s been seeing since he was eight.

“Are you serious?” Stiles asks, when his dad asks the doc to run a drug test on him. “Are you even serious right now?”

“And you’re grounded,” his dad tells him. “For a month. That includes no friends over.”

“Dad, I’ve got exams coming up! I need to study!”

“You can study on your own.”

“Dad, please.” He blinks, and tears slide down his cheeks. He doesn’t care that Dr. Mills is watching. Sixteen years old, and he’s crying in his doctor’s office.

“No, Stiles. I’ve had it up to here.” His dad looks close to tears himself. “I’m not going to let you ruin your life with alcohol or drugs, or whatever the hell it is you’re into! You’re… you used to be a good kid.”

Used to be.

“Please don’t ground me.” He can’t not see Claude for a whole month. Not in any fucking reality. He’ll break the rules. He has to. It’s as inevitable as the dawn.

“We’ve talked about this,” his dad says. “We’ve talked about you earning my trust back.”
Stiles nods numbly, chest heaving as he sucks in a shaking breath.

His dad’s expression softens. “If it’s not drugs, kiddo, tell me.”

“It’s not,” Stiles whispers. “And I can’t.”

His dad’s expression hardens again, but not before Stiles sees the hurt of betrayal flash across it. A parent’s heart has so much capacity for love, Stiles knows now, and so much capacity for heartbreak.

***

Nine hours after his doctor’s appointment, a tiny round Elmo Band-Aid still in the crook of his elbow where Dr. Mills took blood, Stiles locks the front door behind him as he leaves the house. He doesn’t take his Jeep. He wants his dad to see it parked there if he drives past.

Not that it’ll make much difference if he stops and checks Stiles’s bedroom.

Stiles can’t bring himself to worry about that now.

He’s not abandoning Claude. Not now, and not ever.
“Stiles,” Lydia says during lunch the next day, “you’re an idiot.”

Stiles is eating lunch with Allison and Lydia, because Scott had to see Finstock about something, and Danny’s out with a head cold. Isaac, Erica and Boyd are sitting over at another table. It’s easy to forget they all sat around together and ate pizza last weekend. The old divisions fall readily back into place again at school.

“He didn’t catch me.”

“Last night, he didn’t,” Lydia says. “You think. Or maybe he’s just stewing on what to do. Anyway, you know that he will.”

Stiles shovels his tater tots around his tray and grunts. He’s been spending too much time with Derek, obviously, if he’s gone all sub-vocal.

Lydia arranges her tiny packet of soy sauce and her tiny packet of wasabi and her tiny packet of ginger. Lydia doesn’t eat cafeteria food. Today, she had sushi delivered. “If your father has grounded you because he doesn’t trust you, then obviously he’s going to check on you. How long do you think until he catches you?”

“I don’t have any choice!”

Lydia reaches across the table and puts her hand on his wrist. “You’re tired, Stiles. You’re not thinking straight.”

“I told you, I don’t have any choice!”

Lydia sighs. “Okay, so what happens when he finishes his night shifts? You won’t be able to spend as much time with Claude then anyway, even if your dad wasn’t breathing down your neck.”

“I’ll figure something out!” he snaps.

Lydia withdraws her hand and raises her brows. “Fine,” she says primly. “Let me know how that works out for you.” She unwraps her chopsticks.

God, Stiles feels like an asshole.

He is an asshole. It’s just… he’s tired, and he’s upset, and none of his friends are helping him. They’re just all like “Well, Stiles, I guess you’ll just have to be grounded for a month” instead of thinking of ways around it, because it is not going to happen.

“You could tell him,” Allison suggests quietly.

“Tell who?” Stiles pauses with a tater tot halfway to his mouth. “My dad? Tell my dad about Claude?”

Oh, hey, dad. Yeah, good news, I’m not a drug addict. By the way, here’s your granddaughter. She’s half werewolf. Derek Hale’s her other father. Yes, genetically. She gets the werewolf from his side. You remember Derek? He was a murder suspect that one time. Wait. Two times.

Allison nods.
“I can’t tell him!” Stiles drops his fork and rubs his forehead. “He can’t know about all this. He can’t, because if he does, then he’ll think it’s his responsibility to help keep people safe, and it’s my dad, Ally. He’s not like your dad. He’s not trained for this.”

“Well, neither are you.” Allison’s smile is tinged with sadness. “None of us were, once, not even my dad. We all learned when we got shoved into the middle of it.”

“He’s my dad,” Stiles says quietly.

_He’s all I’ve got._

Then he remembers that Allison’s dad is all she’s got as well.

Fuck this town, seriously.

On one hand, it would be such a relief not to have to lie. But Stiles couldn’t bear the guilt if he exposed his dad to the supernatural world and it hurt him, or worse. It breaks his heart that his dad thinks the worst of him now, but at least he’s alive, right?

He might hate Stiles right now, but at least he’s safe.

He eats his tater tots and ignores the worried glances that Allison and Lydia exchange.

After lunch Stiles has Biology. He goes to the bathroom instead, and locks himself in a stall, and texts Derek to see how everything’s going with Claude.

_Good. She’s down for her nap now. She made that face when I tried to sing the song._

Stiles smiles despite himself. Of course she made that face, because Derek does it all _wrong_. But it’s awesome that he’s trying, and it’s even more awesome that Terewolf, who never used to do more than grunt a word here and there at Stiles, is making the effort to actually communicate by text. And actually share stuff, instead of just putting in the minimum effort. It’s kind of the one bright point in Stiles’s life at the moment, and Stiles is clinging to it desperately.

He sends back: _Dude, your pronunciation is terrible._

He flicks through photos of Claude while he waits for Derek’s response. Claude grinning at his phone camera. Claude sleeping. Claude hanging around Derek’s neck like a cheeky monkey. Claude and her bear.

His phone buzzes: _I resemble that remark._

Fuck yeah. He’d told Scott that Sourwolf had a sense of humor. Scott had showed him his screwed-up dubious face. Okay, it was a sense of humor that was hidden extremely well by growls and threats of bodily violence, but Stiles had always known it was there. It was like a Magic Eye picture. You had to kind of squint and hold your head on an angle before you saw it.

Derek sends another text before Stiles replies: _Will we see you today?_

Stiles’s heart clenches. _I don’t know, I want to, but I don’t know._

His phone rings. Stiles answers, and closes his eyes. “Hey, Derek.”

“I don’t want you to get in trouble.” Derek’s voice is soft.

Stiles grips his phone tightly. “I know, but he can’t just… he can’t just stop me, okay?”
“Yeah, he can,” Derek says gently. “He’s your dad.”

“I can’t not see her for a month.” He’s not going to cry on the phone. He’s not.

“How about we visit you instead?”

“Are you serious?”

“Sure.” There’s a hint of a smile in Derek’s voice. “She’s my kid, right? She’s got to learn how to sneak in your bedroom window in the middle of the night sooner or later.”

“You fucking creeper,” Stiles huffs through a teary laugh. “You’ll screw up her sleep!”

“She’s half wolf,” Derek says. “It’ll do her good to spend some time awake in the moonlight.”

“Is that true, or are you bullshitting me and screwing with her routine just to make me feel better?”

There’s too much of a delay between Stiles asking and Derek’s “No!” for Stiles to believe it. The lie warms him.

“Der,” he sighs, “I don’t want you to screw up Claude’s sleep. That seems like the sort of thing the ladies that wrote the baby book would get really pissed about.”

Their tone was judgemental enough in places. Their charts and graphs were daunting. And their immaculately groomed author pictures were incredibly intimidating.

“They’re not the boss of us,” Derek says. “Okay?”

Stiles nods, squeezing his eyes shut more tightly. He’s not crying. Really, he’s not. “Okay.”

“Okay,” Derek says softly. “We’ll come and visit tonight.”


No, he’s not crying.

Shut up.

***

Being grounded is basically house arrest. Stiles is half-expecting his dad to produce an ankle bracelet any second; the sort that will sound a klaxon if he so much as tries to take the trash out.

They don’t talk about it.

Mostly because what is there to say?

Stiles knows his drug test will come back negative for anything except Adderall and possibly obscene amounts of sugar and caffeine, but there’s no point protesting his innocence until then. And
even when the test does come back negative, what then? His dad will just look in other places for
answers.

If it’s not drugs, it must be crime.

If it’s not crime, it must be mental health.

Fuck even knows what he’ll come up with next.

In the meantime, they’ll move around each other silently, warily, each of them wearing reproachful
gazes and feeling the sting of all the lies that Stiles has told.

Stiles goes up to his bedroom straight after dinner.

He sits at his desk and works on his homework. He chats with Scott online for a while, at the same
time as he updates his neglected Netflix queue. He hears his dad getting ready for work. Then the
tread of his boots along the hallway. His dad pauses outside his door for a moment, and Stiles braces
for the knock, but then his dad moves on again. A moment later, his footsteps creak on the stairs.

Stiles tries not to feel hurt by that.

What the hell would they have said to one another anyway?

***

Stiles wakes up to an excited “Buh buh buh!” as Derek climbs through his window. He’s wearing
the baby carrier, and Claude is riding in it. She’s kicking her legs and trying to bounce.

“Hey, Claude!” Stiles sits up and turns his bedside light on. He couldn’t contain his grin even if he
wanted to. A glance at his clock tells him it’s just past midnight.

“She woke up for a feed, so we thought we’d come for a visit,” Derek says. He unstraps Claude
from the carrier and sets her down on the end of Stiles’s bed. She immediately starts to crawl up
toward Stiles, Derek’s hand on her backside to make sure she doesn’t topple off the bed.
Overprotectivewolf. “We passed your dad’s cruiser on the way over here.”

“You didn’t park out front did you?” The Camaro is distinctive.

Derek gives him his patented loaded-eyebrows do-you-think-I’m-an-idiot look. “We’re a block
over.”

Stiles sighs in relief, and hauls Claude into his lap. “Missed you, Claude! Were you good for Da—
for Derek today?”

Shit. He almost called Derek “Daddy”. His face burns, and he lifts Claude up and blows a raspberry
on her belly to hide his embarrassment.

His mattress sinks as Derek sits down. “Stiles?”

“Mmm?” He makes a face into Claude’s yellow onesie.

“We do kind of need to address that.”
Stiles lowers Claude warily. “Address what?”

“What we want her to call us.” Derek looks worried. “I mean, we haven’t really talked about it, but if this is going to be long term, it’s something we need to discuss.”

Wow. Well, of all the things Stiles has ever wondered about in his life, he can’t say that the difficulties of differentiating between two same-sex co-parents has ever been one of them. It just never came up, until now. He’s sixteen. Fatherhood is supposed to be about as distant and theoretical as humans colonizing Mars.

“Well, um, what do you want to be called?”

“I kind of want to be called Daddy,” Derek mumbles, and Stiles can’t stop from almost choking with laughter because, holy fuck, that sounds so wrong. Like kinky wrong. Like porn wrong. Like so fucking wrong it’s hot in all the right ways.

“I’m sorry,” he gasps at last, and waves his hand in Derek’s direction. “It’s just your face, and your abs, and your leather jacket. I mean, that totally sounds like something you should be saying to a twink on gaytube. Except you’d yell it like an order, right? Call me Daddy, boy!”

Derek fixes him with a speculative stare. “You spend a lot of time on gaytube?”

Stiles refuses to be embarrassed by that. “No more than any other bisexual teenager with all the urges.”

Derek regards him silently for a moment, then shrugs. “Fair enough.”

Claude beams at them both.

“So, you’re going to be Daddy,” Stiles says, his lips twitching again. “and yes, one day I’ll be able to say that without giggle-snorting. In the meantime, I just have to let it work its way out of my system, okay?”

Derek rolls his eyes, and reaches down to poke Claude gently in the belly. She grabs his fingers and shoves them in her mouth. “What about you?”


“Tata,” Derek repeats.

Claude bounces excitedly. “Buh buh!”

“She totally recognised that!” Stiles exclaimed. “Buh buh is her word for Tata!”

“Or Dada,” Derek suggests.

“Dude, don’t move the goalposts now. You’re Daddy, not Dada.”

Derek smiles slightly, and it still makes Stiles’s breath catch every time. Derek looks good when he actually smiles. Okay, he looks good with resting bitchface too, but he looks better when he actually smiles. “To be fair, I think buh buh is her word for everything.”

“Yeah,” Stiles agrees, smiling at Claude. “It is, hey, Claudie?”

“Buh,” she agrees.
“Clever girl!”

“Idiot,” Derek says, but his tone is almost fond.

Not for the first time, Stiles wonders what’s happening between them. They’re not friends, exactly, and they’re not boyfriends. They’ve somehow jumped straight from being two guys who mostly communicated by exchanging sarcasm (Stiles) and death threats (Derek), to two guys who are co-parents to a child. They’re partners. How the fuck did that happen?

“So.” Stiles doesn’t look at Derek. “Um, so which one of us, do you think, in the other reality, made the first move?”

Dead silence.

Stiles risks a glance. Derek is staring at him, wide-eyed, his mouth open. Startledwolf. “Yeah, sorry, that’s a dumb thing to ask. I was just curious, you know. I didn’t mean—”

“You,” Derek says suddenly.

“What?”

It’s Derek’s turn to stare at something else. In his case, one of the posters on Stiles’s walls. “You would have.”

“Why?”

Derek scowls at the poster. “Because you do stupid, reckless things all the time.”

“You mean brave, awesome things!”

Derek’s mouth quirks like he’s trying to fight a smile. He turns his head and looks at Stiles, narrow-eyed. “Stupid, reckless things.”

Stiles grins. “Yeah, I’ll bet it was me too. And I’ll bet it was fucking incredible.”

Who knew wolves could blush?

***

It takes a week for the results of the drug test to get back.

“Stiles,” his dad says, but if it was the start of an apology, he bites it back. “You’ve got exams coming up?”

“Yeah.”

“Then I guess you can study at Scott’s,” his dad says. “Or have friends over again. To study.”

This, Stiles realizes, is his apology. It’s as good as he’s going to get, anyway.

“But no leaving the house in the middle of the night again,” his dad says. “No skipping school.”

“Okay.”
“Okay?” His dad looks pathetically relieved.
“Okay,” Stiles repeats.
It’s a lie, of course.

***

“Dude, this is freedom! Sweet, sweet freedom!” Stiles has even bought an ice-cream cone to celebrate. He’s bought one for Derek and one for Claude as well, which was dumb. Because the ice-cream place is two blocks away from the park, and everything is already starting to melt. He should have got tubs instead of cones.

Scott and Allison bought tubs, and they’re being all smug about it too.

“Dude, your dad thinks we’re at my house studying,” Scott reminds him.

“Your house, the park, same thing.” Stiles is not going to let Scott ruin this for him.

Derek and Claude are waiting for them under the tree by the duck pond.

“I have ice-creams!” Stiles crows.

It’s a messy, sweet, sticky disaster. And not just for Claude. Thank fuck for the twelve million baby wipes stowed in the Chamber of Secrets diaper bag. After he cleans up his face, his hands and his shirt, Stiles relaxes on the picnic blanket with Derek. Scott and Allison take Claude down to the water’s edge and try and teach her to throw bread for the ducks, not shove it all in her own face.

Stiles isn’t the only one who notices the puppy dog eyes that Scott gives Allison, then Claude, then Allison again.

“Someone needs to tell Allison to watch out Scott doesn’t put pins through all their condoms,” Stiles says.

Derek hums in agreement, then looks horrified. “He wouldn’t, would he?”

Stiles grins. “No! But he’d totally embarrass himself by asking Allison to marry him before we even graduate high school. And then begging her for a honeymoon baby.”

“He’s an idiot,” Derek says mildly.

Stiles nods, then elbows Derek in the ribs. “Jealous?”

“Jealous?” Derek rolls his eyes. “Right, Stiles, sure. I’m jealous of the schmoopy teenagers who are in lurve.”

“Firstly, schmoopy?” Stiles grins. “Did you seriously call them schmoopy?”

Derek elbows him right back.
“Dude, I’m not disagreeing with you. They are totally schmoopy. It’s sickening, right?” Stiles tucks a used wipe back into the diaper bag. Hopefully into the right compartment for Derek to clean out later. Because he hates littering. Now more than ever, because he’s actually got a child who has to inherit this planet, and Stiles would rather it not be a total dumpster. “But then, part of me thinks I only get sickened by their schmoopiness, because I have no schmoopiness in my life. I mean, would I join the schmoopy cult and drink the schmoopy Kool-Aid? Absolutely. In a heartbeat. Yes. And I bet you would too, sourwolf.”

Derek’s eyebrows shoot up. “Oh, really? That’s what you bet?”

“Yes!”

“That’s ridiculous.” Derek shakes his head. “You’d be just as mouthy and smart ass and full of crap if you were in a relationship. And I’d be just as…”

“Grumpy?” Stiles suggests. “Surly? Homicidal?”

“All of the above,” Derek says, but a smile tugs at the corners of his mouth.

Stiles laughs.

It’s good to spend time with Derek and Claude again, outside the confines of his own room, or Derek’s loft. Stiles isn’t even surprised when Isaac turns up. Claude is as crazily delighted to see him as the last time, and squeals until he gives in and flashes his eyes at her. And Allison stares at him like he’s the cutest thing in the world for giving in to the demands of an infant. Which would possibly be awkward, if only Scott wasn’t doing the same thing.

Wait. What?

When Stiles looks again, everyone’s acting all casual.

Maybe he imagined it.

They stay at the park for an hour or so, until Claude’s getting tired and cranky. Stiles kind of is too, actually, but he hides it slightly better than her.

Allison and Scott volunteer to give Isaac a ride.

“Bro, are you coming with us?” Scott asks.

Stiles taps his fingers along the handlebar of Claude’s stroller while Derek straps her in. “Um…”

“I’ll drop Stiles home,” Derek says.

“Okay. Catch you later!” Scott shows his goofy grin. “Good study session!”

“The best!” Stiles gives him a thumbs up.

Derek walked to the park, so the Camaro is back at the loft. Stiles pushes the stroller. He likes to make racing car sounds. He tells Derek they’re for Claude’s benefit, but he’s pretty sure Derek doesn’t need his enhanced werewolf senses to tell it’s a lie.

“You’re an idiot,” Derek says as Stiles makes screechy-brake sounds as he navigates the stroller around a fire hydrant.

“Dude, I’m—” Every muscle in his body freezes in shock as he hears the familiar woop-woop-woop
of a police siren right behind him. It’s turned off before it winds up into a wail. Stiles turns around.

It’s his dad’s cruiser. Of course it is.

His dad climbs out of the car. “You’re supposed to be studying with Scott.”

“Jesus, Dad, c’mon, not here,” Stiles manages. The siren has also caught the attention of other pedestrians on the street, and an audience of old ladies drinking coffee at the outdoor tables outside the café across the road.

“Get in the car, Stiles,” his dad says in a low voice.

Claude starts to yell. Not in distress, Stiles realizes. It’s the same excited yell she lets out when she sees Isaac. She recognises his dad’s voice. It’s a demand, and it’s frustrated, since the stroller is pointing away from his dad. Claude can hear him, but she can’t see him.

Stiles brushes his fingers across the handlebar of the stroller. “Just let me say good—”

“Get in the car. Now.”

Stiles avoids Derek’s gaze. He walks over to the cruiser and climbs through the door his dad’s holding open. Into the back seat. Great. Where the perps sit.

Way to spell it out, Dad.

“Sheriff,” Derek begins.

“Mr. Hale, I don’t think this is any of your business.” His dad slams the backseat door closed, then climbs into the driver’s seat. He glances at Stiles in the mirror, shakes his head, and pulls out into traffic again.

Stiles twists his head to watch Derek and Claude standing on the sidewalk, watching him.

He doesn’t say anything on the drive home.

He doesn’t say anything when he’s sitting on one side of the kitchen table and his dad is sitting on the other side.

He doesn’t even say anything when his dad asks him to talk: “Just tell me, Stiles. Tell me what the hell is going on with you. Is it Hale? Are you involved with him, because you gotta know that’s a felony.”

He only shakes his head.

His dad sighs. “Give me your phone.”

That gets a word out of him. “Wh-what?”

His dad holds his hand out. “Your phone. Now.”

“It’s mine.”

“As long as I’m paying the bills, son, it’s actually mine.”

Stiles blinks away hot, angry tears as he pulls his phone out of his pocket.
“Unlock it.”

“Dad, c’mon!”

“Unlock it,” his dad repeats.

Stiles presses his trembling thumb against the screen and passes it over.

His dad goes for his text messages first. Stiles almost cringes with embarrassment, but there’s nothing about the supernatural on there. There is, though, a selfie of Stiles in boxer shorts with hearts on them that he sent to Danny.

**YO DANNY! YOU KNOW YOU WANT A PIECE OF THIS ASS!**

And Danny’s reply: **Seek professional help, Stilinski.**

Stiles can’t watch while his dad goes through his messages. He fixes his gaze on the table instead, and tries to remember if any texts between him and Derek will give anything away. Fuck. It’s probably full of messages like *Can I see you tonight?* and *I’ll come over later* and shit that’s going to get Derek arrested for statutory.

The minutes tick by, and Stiles wants to be sick.

Then, at last: “Stiles.”

He jerks his head up.

His dad’s frowning at the screen. He turns it around so Stiles can see. It’s his photo collection, which is at least ninety-five percent Claude.

“Who is this?”

His heart pounds. “That’s Derek’s baby.”

“Derek Hale’s?”

Stiles nods.

“Derek Hale, who you apparently know?”

He nods again.

His dad looks at the screen again. “This baby looks just like—”

The doorbell rings.

His dad sighs, and stands. He puts Stiles’s phone in his pocket. “Don’t move.”

Stiles nods, and listens to the tread of his dad’s footsteps heading for the front door. He wonders, vaguely, who is it. Probably Mrs. Hooper, the neighbor, who’s been labouring for years under the misapprehension that the Sheriff finds her complaints about Mr. Castlemaine’s dog shitting on her lawn highly interesting. Stiles figures that whoever it is, he should be grateful for the distraction.

Except he isn’t.

“What are you doing here?” he hears his dad ask.
Then, before whoever it is can answer, there’s an excited squeal and a “Buh! Buh buh buh!”

*

Shit.

Stiles leaps out of his chair and races for the front door. He gets there just in time to see Derek stepping inside, Claude on his hip.

“Sheriff, I know you said this was none of my business but, trust me, it really is.”
No.
No no no no no.

Fuck.

“Derek, what are you doing here?” Stiles blurts out, which is clearly a stupid question, because he absolutely knows what Derek’s doing here. Derek’s clearly here to be arrested for statutory rape. And that’s actually the best-case scenario. Worst case? Derek’s going to spill the beans on the whole supernatural thing, and Stiles’s dad is going to have a heart attack.

Oh god.

What if he has a literal fucking heart attack?

Stiles is pretty sure he’s going to beat his dad to it. He’s pretty sure he’s having one right now. His chest is tight and he can’t breathe properly.

“It’s okay, Stiles,” Derek says.

It isn’t.

It clearly fucking isn’t.

“Well,” says Stiles’s dad, and gestures toward the living room.

Stiles sees the way his dad’s gaze lingers on Claude for a moment, then flicks to Stiles and back again to Claude. Yeah, he’s seen the resemblance. Except, resemblance? No, it’s more than that. Claude is a tiny, tiny clone of Stiles. His dad sees it, but he hasn’t figured out what it means yet. And why the hell would he? It makes no logical fucking sense. Not in this universe.

Stiles follows them into the living room, his brain working furiously to try and find a way to stop this. Short of starting a fire as a diversion though, he’s got nothing. And he doesn’t really want to burn his own house down. Not even a little bit. Although…

No, Stiles. No.

He sits down instead, on one end of the couch. Derek dumps the Chamber of Secrets on the floor and sits down on the other end of the couch.

Great. Way to make them look like they’re a couple.

His dad looks at them, brows raised.

Claude squeals and bounces on Derek’s lap and reaches out her grabby hands toward Stiles’s dad. Stiles’s dad cracks what looks to be an unwilling grin at her, and folds his arms across his chest.

Claude grizzles, outraged at not getting what she wants: Stiles’s dad.

“Sit down, Dad,” Stiles croaks.

“I’m fine.”
“You’re gonna want to sit down,” Stiles says. “Trust me.”

His dad hasn’t trusted him in months now, but at least he doesn’t point that out. He just lowers himself into his easy chair and angles it away from the TV and toward the couch. Stiles just kind of wishes he wasn’t still in full uniform. Complete with gun.

“Well then,” he says.

Stiles exchanges a look with Derek.

It’s a look that pretty much says: *Fuck you, Derek, this is a bad idea.*

“Buh!” Claude says. Having got no joy out of Stiles’s dad, she squirms in Derek’s grip and tries to make for Stiles instead. Derek gives in and lets her escape. She pushes off him with her strong little legs and nose dives into Stiles’s thigh.

Stiles’s dad watches the easy way he picks her up, a frown on his face.

“Sheriff,” Derek says at last. “First of all, I hope you’ll hear me out and reserve judgment for the moment.”

His dad’s eyes narrow.

“We’re not fucking!” Stiles blurts out, and then his face burns. “Having, um, sex, I mean. We’re not doing that!” He glares at Derek. “What? That’s what he was *thinking*, Derek!”

“Stiles, let me handle this, okay?”

Oh, sweet zombie Jesus. Everything Derek says or does makes it sound like they’re a couple and only digs him in deeper. Stiles slumps back into the couch, and Claude climbs him. Her surprisingly sharp little feet manage to dig into all his soft, unprotected parts. Yeah, even those.

“Sheriff,” Derek says again. “Firstly, what do you know about werewolves?”

Stiles peeks around Claude to glimpse the look on his dad’s face. It’s actually surprisingly even and unruffled, but then his dad has a lot of experience dealing with delusional people. And meth heads.

“Well,” he says calmly, “I can’t say that’s what I expected you to ask me.”

Derek nods. He curls his fingers into his fists on his knees. “Um, I’d really like it if you didn’t shoot me when I do this, sir.”

Then he proceeds to wolf out.

***

The first time Stiles saw someone wolf out, it was Scott. And he almost killed him. Stiles wishes he could say he was used to it by now, but he’s not. Not entirely. He still can’t help the shudder of fear that runs through him each time.
That fear isn’t logical. It’s older than logic. It’s primeval.

It shivers down his spine and whispers: *Predator! Run!*

He has to fight not to flinch away from Derek as he changes.

***

“Stiles,” his dad says, his voice low, and unnaturally steady. “Stiles, get up, slowly, and get behind me.”

“No, Dad, it’s okay.” Stiles shifts closer to Derek, to show his dad he’s not dangerous. Not dangerous to his friends, at least. Claude squeals and launches herself at Derek. She pats his newly-ridged face, tugs at his wild hair, and pokes at the fangs protruding from his lips.

His dad’s face is a mask of shock.

“Buh!” Claude exclaims, then, to Stiles’s surprise, she shrieks again. Except her shriek is pitched differently than usual, and it sounds a little like she’s trying to howl. Oh, Christ on a bike. His daughter’s first word is going to be in wolf. Stiles figures maybe he should be proud she’s bilingual. Although, does that even count as bilingual? He’s pretty sure he barked back at dogs at that age too. Which, okay, is probably a really offensive analogy, but Stiles is kind of winging it here. Then Claude shrieks again, right in Derek’s ear, and Derek winces a little.

“Okay,” Stiles says, reaching for her and pulling her back. “Daddy’s wolf ears are sensitive, Claude.”

He realizes a second too late what he’s said. The blood drains from his face, and he turns his head to meet his dad’s gaze.

“What did you call her?”

“Claude,” Stiles croaks. “Short for Claudia. I named her for Mom.”

“You named her?”

Stiles nods. “Yeah, um, the werewolf thing actually isn’t the weirdest part of the story, Dad.”

“Oh, Jesus,” his dad murmurs, gaze falling to Claude again.

Derek shifts back.

***

Derek tells the whole story in a low, quiet voice. He starts with the Hale fire, and goes through the Argents, through Laura’s death, though Peter biting Scott, through Jackson and the whole kanima thing, and finally ends on Claude. On the day he walked into this house and smelled pack, smelled *family*. He can’t stop the hitch in his voice when he tells that part, and Stiles wants to reach out and
twine his fingers though Derek’s.

He doesn’t.

Instead, he watches his dad anxiously, praying this doesn’t end up in a telenovela moment where Derek’s big reveal is out staged by his dad’s dramatic coronary event. Plot twist!

Derek falls silent at last, his mouth a thin, tense line.

Stiles’s dad leans back in his chair, the cracked leather creaking a little.

“Dad, are you okay?” Stiles asks worriedly. “Do you need a drink of water?”

His dad mutters something about needing a drink of something a hell of a lot stronger. Stiles ignores that.

“Dad?”

His dad takes a deep breath, and then exhales slowly. “You have a kid? A magical werewolf kid from another dimension?”

Stiles wishes he had the balls to try for a joke: Well, when you say it like that it sounds ridiculous! He doesn’t, though. Now doesn’t feel like the time for jokes. Not at all. He nods instead, and pinches Claude’s toes gently to make her giggle.

His dad opens his mouth to say something, then shuts it again. He waits a second, and has another try. “I have a granddaughter?”

Stiles hunches over a little. “Um, yeah.”

“Well,” his dad says. “You’d better hand her over then.”

“What?”

“Give her here, kiddo.”

Stiles stands up and closes the distance between them. His dad stands too, and they meet in an awkward sort of hug in the middle of the living room. His dad takes Claude in one arm, and slings his other around Stiles’s neck. “Don’t you ever lie to me again, kiddo. And don’t you ever think that putting yourself in danger without telling me what’s going on is somehow protecting me.” His voice cracks. “Jesus, I want to wring your neck right now.”

Stiles is crying. He thinks his dad might be too. Claude, oblivious, is squawking with delight like some sort of demented chicken.

“Well, she’s got a good set of lungs,” his dad says, finally disengaging from Stiles and holding Claude out to inspect her. “She’s your spitting image, kid.” He blinks rapidly, his eyes shining. “And your mom’s.”

He sits back down in his chair again, letting Claude pat his face with her fat little hands.

Stiles and Derek exchange a long glance. Stiles wants to murder him slightly less now than he did half an hour ago. Slightly less, because he still doesn’t like that the decision to tell his dad was forced on him by Derek. Or, okay, by circumstances, and maybe Derek and every single one of his friends was right, but that’s so not the point right now.
“Can she…” His dad makes a face, and a vague gesture in Derek’s direction. “Can she shift like you?”

Stiles can’t stop his face from lighting up. How has he not asked that? Probably because he was busy reading the baby book and being terrified by what little he knew about human babies before even thinking to ask Derek about werewolf babies.

He’s always wanted a puppy! Also, how adorable would she be?

Derek shoots him a narrow glare, like he knows exactly what he’s thinking, before he answers the question. “She’ll have to be a bit older. Most kids shift around eighteen months old for the first time, and they can only do it during the full moon.”

“So that’s not going to happen at day care or anything?”

“No.”

“Day care?” Stiles asks.

“Something you should think about,” his dad says. “Also, you say that Melissa McCall knows all about this stuff?”

“Um, general wolfy stuff, yes,” Stiles replies. “About Claude, I don’t know.”

“Tell her,” his dad says firmly. “I don’t care how well-informed Alan Deaton is, no granddaughter of mine is having her medical check ups at a vet’s!”

“Okay,” Stiles says slowly.

A part of him is still waiting for his dad to yell at him, or throw him out of the house, or something. He’s waiting for the enormity of the secret he’s been keeping to tear through the last shreds of their relationship, severing them completely. Instead he finds himself watching his dad dandle Claude on his knee like he’s had months to get used to the idea of her, instead of minutes.

“You say Deaton can get her paperwork? Get her into the system?”

Stiles nods.

“Do that, as soon as possible.”

“We haven’t talked about that yet though! About her name, I mean!” Stiles looks at Derek helplessly.

“I want her middle name to be Talia.”

“Okay,” Stiles says, because it probably already is, because it makes total sense to name her after both their moms. “But what about her last name?”

It’s his dad who answers. “Hale.”

Stiles opens his mouth.

“You’re sixteen. You cannot go on a birth certificate as her father.”

Stiles rubs his abdomen absently. “But I am! He was, I mean. The other me.” He huffs in frustration. “She’s as much mine as Derek’s!”
“You’re sixteen,” his dad repeats. “When you’re eighteen, you get another piece of paper saying
you’ve adopted her, and you can share custody that way. She can wait until then to get our
surname.”

Hale-Stilinski or Stilinski-Hale? Halinski? No, it doesn’t work like that. It’s probably a good thing
they’ve got two years to figure it out.

His dad continues. “In the meantime, Derek, you write a will and you damn well name me as her
guardian in the event anything happens to you, until Stiles turns eighteen.”

“Yes, sir,” Derek says.

“No, Dad.” Stiles grimaces. “It’s not supposed to be that complicated!”

“But it is, Stiles. It is complicated. You don’t just get to bring home a stray baby like she’s a kitten.
What if she needs medical attention? You want her to go to school one day? To college? To travel
overseas? Then she needs paperwork.”

“Dad, seriously, can we wait until she’s walking before we’re planning her backpacking holiday of
Europe, please?”

“Stiles, he’s right,” Derek says quietly. “We need to do this properly.”

“Speaking of,” his dad says, his tone firm, and Stiles resists the urge to cringe. “Maybe in an alternate
universe I’m the sort of parent who doesn’t give a damn, or maybe the rules are different there, or
you’re just a better liar. But here, in this world, I don’t approve of my sixteen-year-old son spending
his nights with a…how old are you, Derek?”

“Twenty-two.”

“And we’re not sleeping together!” Stiles can feel his face burning.

His dad pats Claude on the head. “Well, excuse me for thinking that if it can happen in that world, it
can happen in this one.”

“But Claude can’t get to sleep unless I sing the song about the two kittens!”

“Stiles.” His dad sighs. “I want you to graduate, and there’s a damn good reason most teenage kids
with infants don’t. I don’t mind if Claude stays here some nights. I don’t mind if Derek does too, as
long as he sleeps on the couch. I also don’t mind if he drops Claude off and collects her in the
mornings, as long as it doesn’t happen every night. And you can stay at his place on weekends. But
school nights, you stay here. And your schoolwork comes first.”

“Thank you, sir,” Derek says. “That’s more than fair.”

Stiles gaps at him. “No, it isn’t!”

His dad ignores him. “Call me John, Derek.”

“Dad!”

“Buh!” Claude yells back at him.

“You lied to me, Stiles,” his dad says. “You kept the fact that I had a grandchild from me.” He
bounces Claude. “And don’t think I don’t get it, kid, because I do. I know you think you were
protecting me. But you know what it shows me?”
Stiles shakes his head.

“It shows me that you didn’t think.” His dad smiles ruefully. “Or that you thought like a typical teenager. Stiles, you’re not old enough to raise a kid on your own, and no, not with just Derek either. Because is Derek going to make sure you get enough sleep? Or go to school?”

“No! He’s not my—” Stiles groans when he sees exactly where he’s been led.

“Not your dad,” his dad agrees. “But I am, and it’s my job to look after you, Stiles, not the other way around.”

Stiles throat aches.

“You don’t have to do this all on your own, okay?”

“Okay,” he says in a small voice, feeling exactly like the little kid his dad apparently thinks he is. It surprises him a little that he doesn’t hate it.

It’s actually kind of nice.

He’s missed it.

***

Hours later, Stiles is getting ready for bed. He’s in the bathroom, his oldest, holiest track pants just barely hanging from his hips, and Claude yawning in his arms and nuzzling into his bare chest.

“No,” he tells her firmly. “In this universe, those are not for serving dinner! Those are purely for decoration! Or grownup sexy times!”

“Oh, Jesus,” he dad says, walking in behind him.

“Okay, let’s pretend none of that just happened out loud,” Stiles says. “Is Derek back yet?”

“He’s probably figuring out how to get a crib into that ridiculously impractical car of his.”

“The Camaro is a beast. Don’t you dare suggest he get a minivan!”

His dad rolls his eyes. “So, about the whole wolf thing.”

“Yeah?” Stiles asks warily.

His dad seems to ponder the question for a moment, and Stiles is expecting something profound. He’s not expecting what comes out of his dad’s mouth next: “When he shifts, where do his eyebrows go?”

“I know, right?” He barks out a laugh. “I tried asking once, but he just growled at me.” Stiles wipes Claude’s face with a washcloth. She’s at least ninety-five percent pureed apple right now. “So the whole werewolf thing, you’re not freaked out by that?”

His dad pauses to consider. “It actually explains a lot.”
“It does?”

“I feel like I need to write a letter of apology to the mountain lion population.” His dad shakes his head. “But werewolves? Much less surprising than this little wriggly monkey here.”

Warmth spreads through Stiles as his dad takes the washcloth and finishes wiping Claude’s face and hands. He ends by leaning down to press a kiss to the top of her downy head.

“Dad?” Stiles is suddenly hesitant.

“What?” His dad reaches out past him to dump the washcloth in the sink.

“Are we okay? You and me?” His throat aches, and he wants to cry, suddenly. It’s mostly relief. But it’s also heartbreak as well, because the last few months have hurt so fucking much, and he can’t just shake it off. It’s going to linger, he knows.

“Jeez, kiddo.” His dad draws him into an embrace, Claude wriggling between them. His dad scrubs the fingers of one hand over Stiles’s buzz cut, and slides his hand over his skull until he’s gripping the back of his neck. When he speaks, his voice is muffled against Stile’s throat. “I love you. What you’re feeling for Claude right now? I’ve had that for sixteen years, kid, and it’s not going anywhere anytime soon. I also want to strangle you so much right now, but we’re gonna be okay.”

“Really?” He needs to hear it.

“I promise.”

Stiles sniffs, nods, and pulls back. He meets his dad’s gaze, and it’s such a profound relief not to be hiding anything for once. To just be standing here, not wrapped in secrets and deceit. “And you don’t mind if Derek stays over sometimes, really?”

“I swear, Dad! God!” He huffs. “Pretty sure he’s totally out of my league!”

“Don’t sell yourself short.” Then his dad groans as he realizes what he’s said. “No, I mean, please continue to sell yourself short until you’re eighteen.”

Stiles snorts. “It’s weird though,” he says. “I mean, knowing that in another universe we made Claude. Knowing that we, you know…”

His dad looks pained.

“It’s like we’ve inherited all their responsibilities, and all the day to day stuff of like a real relationship, without any of the benefits!”

“Buh!” Claude exclaims.

“That’s right, princess,” his dad says. “You’re a pretty big benefit, aren’t you?”

“Not the sort of benefit I was referring to,” Stiles mutters.

“I know.” His dad lifts Claude out of his arms. “I’m choosing to misunderstand. It’s a parenting tool I’m sure you’ll become incredibly familiar with as this one gets older.” He makes a face at Claude. “Now who wants to watch ESPN with Grandpa until your daddy gets back with your crib?”

“Oh my god.”
“What?” His dad raises his eyebrows.

“Grandpa. That’s so fucking weird!”

“Yeah, well I wasn’t expecting to have to use it myself for at least another decade or so. Also, you’re not too old to have your mouth washed out with soap.”

“Okay, Grandpa.”

His dad waltzes Claude off on his hip.

Stiles brushes his teeth and goes into his room to get his phone. He texts Scott: So I’m not grounded any more.

*Dude, what happened?*

*My dad found out he’s a grandpa.*

*How’d he take it?*

*He’s watching TV with Claude right now. And Derek’s sleeping over.*

He waits a long time for Scott’s reply. He figures he’s either become distracted by Allison’s presence, or by thoughts of Allison, or by some poem he’s writing Allison. When the reply finally comes, he’s surprised it’s still on topic.

*Ur dad is awesome. He knows about wolves now?*

*Yeah. Derek kind of told him everything.*

*Ur dad is awesome.*

Stiles smiles as he taps out a reply: *I know.*

***

That night, Claude sleeps in a crib beside Stiles’s bed and Derek, who’s supposed to be sleeping on the couch, curls up with Stiles instead.

“My dad’s gonna kick your ass if he finds you here,” Stiles mumbles, shifting so his back is pressed against Derek’s front. Derek’s breath is hot against the back of his neck.

“I’ll hear him if he gets out of bed.”

“Super werewolf hearing is cheating. You’re a dirty cheater.”

“Shut up and go to sleep, Stiles.”

“’kay, Snugglywolf.”

He does.
Firstly, how awesome is this art by oneterriblet?

It's awesome! I don't even have words for how stoked I was to get this. I'm over the moon that someone would be inspired to create something because of one of my stories. I'm also incredibly jealous of anyone who can draw. Because me? Stick figures. Weird, creepy stick figures.

Thanks, oneterriblet!

***

It gets easier now his dad knows. It also gets incredibly more complicated.

Stiles staggers out of bed one morning. It’s a Tuesday, he thinks, but he has to check the schedule stuck to the fridge to be sure. Yep. Tuesday. Tonight Derek is bringing Claude by. Then Claude is staying over, but Derek’s not because it’s full moon and he’s doing something with his pack. It’s one of those rare midweek Claude sleepovers that Stiles’s dad watches closely to make sure Stiles isn’t getting railroaded into doing more than his fair share, or something.
He’s not. Really, he’s not. Derek easily spends more time looking after Claude than Stiles does. But Derek, Stiles’s dad points out, isn’t still in school. And he doesn’t have a job. He always says the bit about the job a little grudgingly, as though it’s something he feels he should disapprove of, but he can’t, in good conscience, because then Derek wouldn’t be able to look after Claude nearly as often.

Stiles has a study session with Lydia and Allison in the evening as well. Scott would be coming but, again, full moon. Scott can’t concentrate on chemistry at the best of times. During full moon he’s a lost cause. Derek has somewhat unwillingly agreed to ask Scott on a run with his pack and Scott, even more unwillingly, agreed to go.

Stiles has been incredibly surprised to find out how far he can emotionally blackmail his friends, and Derek, lately.

*But Derek, he’s my best friend. He’s Claude’s honorary uncle. Pleeeeeease.*

*And: But Scott. C’mon, he’s your niece’s dad. Play nice, okay, for Claude and me?*

It’s kind of fun, because he knows he’s as see-through as cellophane, but nobody’s got the balls to call him on it. Except Lydia, of course, but she totally admires him for it.

So.

Stiles blinks at the schedule.

Today he has school, then study, then Claude for the night. Derek will pick her up in the morning after breakfast, and then in the afternoon Stiles will go and visit them. His dad is okay with him staying as late as ten p.m., because it’s exams this week and all the begging in the world won’t get his curfew pushed back to the much more reasonable midnight.

There’s also a big red star scrawled on today on the schedule, and 5.30 p.m. written in it. Stiles wrinkles his nose at it and scratches his belly. A red star means…

He checks his phone.

There’s a message from Derek: *Don’t forget Scott’s mom is coming to your house to check up on Claude.*

And a message from his dad: *Melissa. 5.30 p.m. Pls have pants on.*

Stiles rolls his eyes. That was one time, and he was eleven.

He wishes it wasn’t full moon though. He loves spending time with Claude, but he loves it more when he spends time with Claude and Derek. And now his dad has them on this timeshare arrangement, Stiles feels like they’re like those parents who meet up to exchange the kids at the closest McDonalds parking lot because they can no longer stand the sight of one another.

*And Stiles definitely can stand the sight of Derek.*

*Oh sweet zombie Jesus, yes.*

Derek is so fucking hot he shouldn’t even exist outside of the airbrushed pages of GQ. He’s totally the sort of guy that, if Stiles saw him online, he would have assumed he was the result of some really incredible photoshopping. Because guys like Derek Hale do not exist. And, if they do, guys like Stiles Stilinski don’t get to hit that.
Stiles is totally going to hit that.

If Awesome Mage Stiles from the alternate universe, did it, than so can he. Okay, he might not have magic, but he’s got game, right?

He hitches his sagging track pants up and wipes the crusty bits of leftover sleep out of his eyes.

Shut up.

So, okay, he’s not a morning person. That’s not a crime. Besides, he totally cleans up nice when he puts in the effort. He does. Really. At least, he probably could, right? In theory?

Shut up.

He’s been awake for five minutes and he already hates this morning.

And are they seriously out of Froot Loops?

Why does the universe hate him?

***

“Balinski!” Coach Finstock yells at him, looking personally offended when Stiles drops his gym bag and shit goes all over the locker room.

Stiles freezes like a guilty racoon caught in a porch light.

Okay, so how did a spare onesie get into his gym bag, and why did it have to catapult across the floor and come to rest against the coach’s shoes?

“What the hell is…?” Finstock leans down and picks it up. Shakes it out. It’s the orange one. Stiles had thought the washing machine ate it, but it must’ve gotten tangled up in his lacrosse jersey or something. “A bit small for you, isn’t it, Balinski?”

“Um,” Stiles says. A few of the other guys on the team are starting to grin. “I babysit! It’s my after school job.”

Okay, now they’re laughing at him. And, really, they only just stopped laughing at him for the way he plays. Still, what would organized sports be without some ritual humiliation?

“Oh, yeah,” Isaac says suddenly. “It’s better money than Burger King.”

Scott appears out of nowhere. “Me too.”

If there were more Roman soldiers involved, and fewer high school lacrosse players, this would totally be Stiles’s “I’m Spartacus!” moment. It’s touching, all right? It’s fucking touching.

As it is, he suspects their teammates aren’t impressed by their heroic display of solidarity, as much as they are bored.

“Okay, babysitters’ club,” Finstock says, and tosses the onesie back. “Get out there and run me three laps of the field.”
He blows his whistle shrilly.

***

Claude loves the full moon. She babbles to the moonlight, her dark eyes lit up with excitement. On bright nights like this one, Stiles has to pull his curtains shut because otherwise she’ll take forever to get to sleep, and then she’ll be cranky as hell in the morning. Which she totally gets from Derek, by the way.

He lies in bed and goes over the chemistry notes he borrowed off Lydia after their study session, He squints at them in the faint glow of Claude’s nightlight. He’s not in any danger of failing chemistry, not by a long shot, but he’s pretty sure his grades are slipping, and that is not cool. It’s also not fair, since he hasn’t been out partying or anything. He’s just been tired, that’s all.

Claude is sleeping in her crib, her face turned toward the gap in the curtains. A tiny sliver of moonlight falls across the crib, across her face, and Stiles figures he really should get up and pull the curtains properly shut. Before he can though, they shudder open, and a familiar figure is climbing silently through the window.

“You can’t use the door like a normal person?” Stiles grumbles. “I’m pretty sure my dad gave you a key.”

Derek’s eyes flash red, but Stiles can’t be bothered be intimidated.

He dumps the chemistry notes on the floor and stifles a yawn. “Aren’t you supposed to be doing secret werewolf stuff while you hang out with your pack?”

Derek’s gaze falls on Claude’s crib. “My pack is here.”

Stiles feels unaccountably warm, although Derek probably just meant Claude, right? Not Claude and puny human Stiles, right?

“Dude, the rest of the pack will get jealous,” he teases softly.

“They understand. She’s my cub.”

“And she could currently sleep through an earthquake,” Stiles informs him.

Claude has been sleeping much better in the past week. Stiles doesn’t want to call it a permanent change just yet, but come on, four nights in a row where she’s had a small feed at eleven p.m. and then slept through until past five? It’s like fucking Christmas.

“I’m not going to wake her, Stiles. I just wanted to be close.”

“Oh okay then.” Stiles throws his comforter back. “You can either stand there lurking all night, or you can at least get comfortable. Your choice, dude.”

Please please please pick ‘get comfortable’.

Derek shrugs his leather jacket off, and hangs it over the back of Stiles’s desk chair. He sits in the chair for a moment, and Stiles bites back his disappointment until he realizes Derek is unlacing his boots. Then Derek’s on his feet again, and he’s peeling off those impossibly tight jeans he wears, and
Stiles is not staring. No, he’s not.

Not. At. All.

Oh sweet baby Jesus.

He tries to act all casual when Derek climbs into bed beside him, because hey, they’ve cuddled up before at night. Except all those other times Stiles was half-asleep and pretty much delirious, and he didn’t have the chance to think. And now he is thinking, and Derek’s not wearing jeans, and Stiles isn’t made of stone, you know.

“You sure you wouldn’t rather be in the Preserve right about now?”

“I’m sure,” Derek says.

Stiles lies back and tries not to turn his head to stare at Derek, who is right there beside him. It’s not like he has to look. It’s not like he hasn’t totally memorized the angle of Derek’s nose, of his stubbled jaw, or the hard set of his mouth that Stiles just wants to tease into something softer…

Yeah, he’s probably not going to get much sleep at all, is he?

“I’m probably going to fail my chemistry test tomorrow,” he offers at last, by way of conversation.

“Stiles, I can tell when you’re lying.”

Stiles huffs. “Okay, not fail, but, you know, I might get a B or something.”

“Oh, a B would be terrible. How would you ever deal with the shame?”

“Shut up, Snarkywolf.” Stiles elbows him, then stares at the ceiling. It’s lit with the dim blue glow of Claude’s firefly nightlight. And that’s firefly as in a bug with a glowing ass, not the tragically short-lived Joss Whedon television masterpiece. Because for some reason there is no Firefly nursery line. Talk about a missed opportunity, because Stiles would have been all over that shit. “Anyway, I’m supposed to be trying to get a full ride academic scholarship to Stanford. They don’t give those to B students.”

“Supposed to be?”

“It’s different now.”

“Because of Claude?”

“Yeah.” Stiles turns his head to look at him. “And I know my dad is all like, ‘Oh, but I don’t want you to miss out on all the normal teenage stuff.’ But this is Beacon Hills, you know? I haven’t done normal teenage stuff since Scott got bitten.”

“College is important.”

“Did you go?”

Derek shakes his head. “I was going to, but…”

Stiles thinks of the burned remains of the Hale house standing out in the middle of the woods. “But your whole world changed. Like mine has.”

“My whole world burned,” Derek says quietly. “Don’t even try and equate that with Claude. You
have choices here. You should go to college, Stiles. You’re smart, and you deserve it. You could have any career you wanted.”

“You know, if I was in my twenties or my thirties, everyone would tell me how having a kid is the best thing I could ever do in my life. Better than any career. But because I’m sixteen it’s different?”

“It is different,” Derek says quietly. “When you’re in your twenties and your thirties, you’re supposed to be able to look back at all the dumb stuff you did, the parties and the hook-ups and all the rest, and you’re supposed to have outgrown it.”

Stiles wrinkles his nose. “What, you think I’ll regret not doing that stuff? Skipping the dumb college kid stuff?”

“You might.”

Stiles huffs. “Bullshit.”

Derek sighs. “Look, you wanted to go to college before Claude, right?”

“Yeah.”

“So you’re smart,” Derek says. “Be smart about this. Find a way to be a college student and her Tata. And yeah, it’ll be hard, at times it’ll suck, but you owe it to yourself to try.”

Stiles can’t help but think he could have concentrated on Derek’s pep talk a little better if only he hadn’t said hard. Then suck. Because reasons.

“I think I get that,” he says at last. “I just…”

“You just don’t know,” Derek says wryly, “because you’re used to being the smartest guy in the room.”


“No. You’re smart, Stiles. You’re not used to listening to what other people tell you, because usually you’re right.”

“Wow. That’s the compliment that keeps on giving, doesn’t it? Long after the glow fades, the blatant character smack down remains. You’re smart, Stiles, and it makes you a terrible person.”

“I didn’t say you were a terrible person.” Derek rolls onto his side to face him. “I didn’t say that at all.”

“What am I then?” Stiles asks, suddenly afraid of the answer.

“You’re an idiot,” Derek says, but his tone is so tender that Stiles can’t even bring himself to be offended. “And you’re the most giving person I think I’ve ever met.”

“Oh, I’m a sap.”

“Yes, Stiles,” Derek says, reaching out to put an arm over his waist. “You’re a sap. That’s exactly what I said.”

Stiles breath catches, and he’s sure his eyes are as wide as Claude’s whenever she catches sight of a bird. Or a cloud. Or Isaac. Or her own toes. Derek is touching him. And it isn't accidental sleep touching!
“Did Scott’s mom come over today?”

“Um.” What? Wait, what? They're having a conversation about this, right now? And not about the fact that Derek’s forearm is resting on Stiles’s stomach right where his shirt has ridden up, and that is skin on skin touching? Maybe it’s a full moon thing. Derek’s missing the pack, and Stiles is the closest thing he can get to a puppy pile. But hey, if Derek wants to talk about Melissa McCall, Stiles can get on board with that. “Oh, yeah. She said Claude’s like a good weight and stuff, and that her bottom teeth are definitely starting to come through. She asked about immunisations.”

“She doesn’t need them. She’s a wolf.”

“She’s part wolf,” Stiles corrects. “What if the human part of her can still get the measles?”

“The wolf part is stronger. Trust me.”

“If the wolf part is stronger, why does she look like me and not like you?”

“Because that’s not how it works.”

Stiles huffs.

“Listen.” Derek tightens his grip, shifting closer to Stiles. He draws a knee up, resting it on Stiles’s thigh, almost sprawling over him. “Some of the kids in my family, my cousins, were half human and half werewolf. Some of them were born human and some of them were born wolf. It doesn’t dilute, or anything. You’re either one or the other. And the human kids got immunised, and the wolf kids didn’t.”

“And are you sure Claude’s a wolf?”

“Yes.” Derek sighs, and his breath is warm against Stiles’s cheek. “I can feel it in her. She’ll be able to shift.”

“Huh.”

“What?”

Stiles keeps staring at the ceiling, because he knows if he turns his head their faces will be right next to each other. “I’m jealous, I guess.”

“Of what?”

“It’s dumb, but whatever.” Stiles makes a face. “I’m jealous of the fact that when she shifts, she’ll be able to run through the Preserve with you and the pack, and I guess I’ll just be stuck on the sidelines like always. Scrawny and human and useless.”

“You think you’re useless?”

“Okay, maybe not totally useless, but it’s not like I have superpowers,” Stiles clarifies.

Derek snorts. “Yeah, you do.”

“Oh, really? Because I can’t think of any.”

“Mmm.” Derek lifts his arm from Stiles’s stomach—Stiles is simultaneously relieved and disappointed—and raises his hand to Stiles’s cheek. He tilts Stiles’s face toward his own.
Breathing is not a thing Stiles can do right now.

No.

But who needs to breathe anyway?

Fuck oxygen.

Fuck it sideways.

“You’re a peacemaker,” Derek says softly. “You’re smart. You’re funny. You’re courageous. The rest of us bring claws and fangs to a fight, Stiles, and you’re the guy who stands there with a baseball bat.”

“So you’re saying I’m stupid and reckless?” Stiles murmurs. He can’t tear his gaze away from Derek’s.

Derek strokes his cheekbone with his thumb. “No. I’m saying you’re brave and awesome.”

Yeah he is.

Stiles leans toward him, tilting his jaw up.

Derek meets him halfway, their mouths pressing together, tentatively at first, as though they’re each afraid the other will pull away, and then with more confidence. Stiles’s heart does something acrobatic when he feels Derek’s tongue pressing into the seam of his lips, opening it gently, and they’re kissing for real—lips and tongues and awkward bumping teeth—and if this is a dream Stiles doesn’t want to ever wake up.

He rolls toward Derek fully, and Derek hitches his leg over Stiles’s thigh and hooks him even closer. Something shorts out in Stiles’s brain when he feels the hot, hard press of what can only be Derek’s erection against his hip.

Stiles can’t stop the frantic little sound that escapes him.

He immediately hates himself, because he’s afraid it’ll break whatever spell is between them.

It doesn’t though. Derek responds to Stiles’s needy noise with a low growl, and rocks against him. Stiles grinds against him urgently. He’s going to blow in about twenty seconds, and it'll be humiliating, and he doesn’t even give a fuck.

Two things.

First, semantics. Because whoever called this dry humping was lying. Things in Stiles’s pants are about as dry as an equatorial rainforest.

Second, privacy. That’s a thing.

“Ifh!”

Stiles and Derek disengage rapidly, Stiles’s face burning.

“Oh, hey,” he says to Claude. She’s standing in her crib, fingers wrapped around the bars. He’s pretty sure that if she had a tin cup, she’d be bashing it against the bars like the extra in some old prison movie. “Are you hungry or wet? Wait, don’t tell me. Let’s make it a surprise.”
Talking to Claude means he doesn’t need to look at Derek, right? Stiles is pretty sure that’s how it works.

He climbs out of bed and crosses to her crib. He pops a few of the fastenings of her onesie. Sticks his fingers down the edge of her diaper. Seriously, the thought of that would have grossed him out not that long ago, but now? It’s a time saver. Why undress her all the way to check if she needs changing or not?

And…bingo.

Ew.

Stiles’s bottom drawer is full of Claude’s gear: spare diapers, onesies, wipes, talcum, and those weird little scented trash bags they make just for diaper disposal. To be honest, it’s not exactly how he imagined it would be when he eventually cleared a drawer for a girl at his place so she could stay overnight. There were definitely no diapers in that scenario.

He gives Claude to Derek while he grabs what they need, then unfolds a towel over the end of his bed, because he learned \textit{that} lesson very early on.

There’s nothing like a stinky diaper change to completely destroy any remaining sexual tension between him and Derek. Watching Derek blow raspberries on Claude’s belly is still the cutest fucking thing ever though. Claude giggles and wriggles.

“Hey, c’mon,” Stiles says. “Do you want her to be up all night, or what?”

Derek raises his eyebrows at him.

“Well apparently one of us has to be the responsible parent.”

“Says the guy who makes racing car sounds when he pushes her stroller.”

“Hey, that happens to be highly educational.”

Derek snorts.

Stiles leaves him to put Claude back in her crib and heads for the bathroom to wash his hands. He’s standing in front of the basin in the dark when the light flickers on and his dad is leaning in the doorway.

“Hey, Dad.”

“Stiles.” His dad rubs a hand over his head, making tufts of his hair stick up at odd angles. “What’re you still doing up?”

“Changing Claude.”

“And I suppose it was Claude I heard you talking to, was it? And answering back?”

Stiles tries to look innocent. He’s pretty sure it fails.

“Kiddo, let’s not make it so we have to tighten those rules, okay?”

“Um, okay,” Stiles says warily.

“Goodnight.” His dad pads back toward his bedroom, muttering to himself. Something about
‘damned kids’.

“Night!” Stiles calls, and scuttles back to his bedroom. He closes the door very firmly behind himself, and crosses to Claude’s crib, where Derek is standing. With his jeans and boots on again. Dammit. “So, um, my dad…”

“I heard,” Derek murmurs. “I should go, I guess.”

Stiles nods unwillingly. Because post-awkwardness aside, he would very much like to get back to a place where kissing is on the table again. And erections. And grinding. Yes please.

Derek glances at the window, and then down at Claude. He leans down and kisses her on top of the head. “Goodnight, Claudie.”

“Buh buh.”

Then Derek surprises the hell out of Stiles by reaching out for him, hooking his fingers under his jaw to tilt it up, and leaning in for another kiss. This one is warm, and sweet, and steals Stiles’s breath out of his lungs. Derek leans back again. “Goodnight, Stiles.”

“G-goodnight!”

Derek climbs out the window.

“Oh my god!” Stiles whispers to Claude, wide-eyed. She beams up at him. “Did you see that? I didn’t imagine that, did I?”

“Buh.”


Once he's back in bed, it takes Stiles a long time to fall asleep.

Almost as long as it takes to wipe the stupid grin off his face.
Chapter 9

The next morning, Stiles wishes he was even slightly capable of playing it cool.

He’s not.

He’s so not.

He imagines he is. In his imagination he’s incredibly cool about the kiss. He’s so cool he’s sitting in an inner-city café drinking an espresso. He’s so cool and so unaffected by his own coolness that every hipster in the vicinity is seething with envy.

Except he’s not cool about the kiss at all.

Because it implies things, okay? It implies that Derek wants a physical relationship. Which, okay, fine, yes, great, but why didn’t he just say so? Stiles can’t be expected to rely on body language alone. He needs language-language. Stiles is good with language-language. Mostly. Except suddenly, last night, with Derek, when he was totally tongue-tied. And brain dead. And owl-eyed.

He wants to know, but he’s terrified to ask, because if there’s one thing that movies have taught him it’s that relationships change when they become physical and, if they break down, you don’t just get to fall back to the friendship. It’s kind of the staple of every rom-com he’s ever seen.

Ever accidentally seen.

Shut up.

He doesn’t watch rom-coms.

Anyway, Stiles is not cool about the kiss. He’s sixteen years old and never been in a relationship, and he can’t afford to screw this one up because if he does the real loser will be Claude, and he’s terrified to make a move in case it’s the wrong one.

So he does what anyone would do. He pretends it never happened.

Even though he totally wants it to happen again.

He decides he and Derek need to talk about it.

Then makes sure he’s in the shower when Derek comes to collect Claude in the morning, so his dad has to hand her over.

Shut up.

“Everything okay?” his dad asks in a too-casual-to-be-actually-casual tone when he finally comes down for breakfast.

“Peachy,” Stiles says, gnawing on his thumbnail and scowling. He punches the buttons on the coffee machine until it beeps angrily at him and spits out a flashing sequence of lights that is obviously some sort of error message, but he’ll need to get the manual out and check. And fuck it, he just wants coffee.

His dad comes up behind him and hits the reset button. Oh, so apparently that works. “Worried about your chemistry test today?”
Well, he is now.

“No,” he lies.

“You’ll do fine,” his dad says with the calm certainty of a man who hasn’t taken a high school chemistry test in well over twenty years. He puts a new pod in the coffee machine. Decaf. Stiles doesn’t drink regular coffee in the morning. Thanks to his ADD it just makes him sleepy. “And how are things with you and Derek?”

Stiles drops some bread into the toaster. “Fine.”

“So you weren’t avoiding him this morning?”

“Why would I be avoiding him?” Stiles asks in a valiant attempt at deflection.

“Hmm,” his dad says, pressing the start button on the coffee machine. “So it’s okay if I invited him and his—” Air quotes. “—pack for a barbecue on Saturday afternoon.”

Wait, what?

Stiles sighs. “Okay, Dad, first of all, it is an actual pack, like actual wolves have, not like a code name for anything, so you don’t need to do the air quotes. And secondly, what?”

“Don’t worry, I’ve invited your pack as well.”

“Okay, you can do the air quotes for my friends, because we’re not a pack.” He scowls at his dad. “And I thought we were past the stage were you were arranging play dates for me.”

His dad shows him his palms. “Hey, I just thought you kids could use a little reward for getting through your exams this week.”

Stiles has his number. “More like you thought that you’d be able to sneak some red meat if you hold a barbecue for werewolves.”

“Stiles, come on,” his dad says. “Really?”

But he doesn’t try to deny it.

***

His chemistry test is weird. Harris sits at the front of the class, glaring at them all like a particularly malevolent gargoyle. That’s not the weird thing. That’s fairly typical. The weird thing is that Stiles suddenly doesn’t give a damn. Okay, he wants to get an A, but he’s not going to stress about it if he doesn’t. Because five, ten, or twenty years from now, it won’t even matter.

Lydia catches his eye and smiles. She looks as cool, calm and collected as always.

Allison is working slowly and surely. She has the same look of concentration on her face that Stiles has seen when she draws a bowstring.

Isaac is sitting beside her, chewing on his pen and frowning at his paper.
Scott is struggling. He’s doing that thing where he keeps turning his paper over and over, just hoping it will finally start to make sense. Stiles feels suddenly guilty for worrying about getting a B, when it’ll be nothing short of a miracle if Scott manages to scrape a pass.

Stiles wishes he could lean over and promise Scott that it really doesn’t matter. This isn’t their lives. This isn’t their story. This is nothing but filler.

Stiles glances up toward the front of the class again, and catches Harris’s death glare. He can’t help himself from smirking a little.

Seriously, Harris thinks he’s intimidating? He thinks his little chemistry test is hard?

He thinks that Stiles doesn’t know the pH of a 0.02M sodium hydroxide solution?

Please.

Stiles runs with wolves.

He’s brave and awesome.

He can change a diaper one-handed.

He’s a fucking boss.

***

Stiles is a fucking boss right up until lunch, when Lydia sits beside him in the cafeteria, then looks at him with a wry smile and says, “Well, Stiles, what have you got to say for yourself?”

“Excuse me?” he manages, and great, now Scott and Allison are staring at him too.


“What?”

“Oh, look.” Lydia smirks and reaches out to dab her napkin against Stiles’s mouth. “You have just a tiny smidge of stubble burn.”

“Dude,” Scott intones, eyes wide. “You and Derek?”

“No! Wait, what? No!” He scrubs at his mouth. How did he not notice that? Did his dad? Did Harris? “Okay, so maybe, but it’s not serious or anything.”

Allison exchanges a look with Scott. “Um, you have a baby together. It’s pretty serious.”

“An alternate version of him, and an alternate version of me, in an alternate reality, had a baby.” He stabs at his fries. “And, yes, I’m grasping at straws, because see if any of you would like that kind of pressure! I mean, how do I know if it’s something we did because we wanted it, or something we did because knowing the alternative us were together has influenced all our decisions here? I mean, what’s the point of resisting, or even thinking it through, because, hey, the universe wants it to
happen?”

Whoops. Stiles might have gotten a little loud there. Right about now a few kids from other tables are staring. He slumps down in his seat and squishes a fry.

“Oh, Stiles,” Lydia says, and pats him on the forearm. “You’re over-thinking this.”

Allison nods.

“If you think he’s hot, you should totally keep making out with him,” Scott says.

“It’s not that I think he’s hot,” Stiles begins, then huffs. “I mean, shit, although I’m not blind, obviously. He’s hot. Totally objectively, he’s hot. Traffic-stopping hot. So it’s not, not just that I think he’s hot…”

“Oh,” Scott says, and smiles his goofy lopsided smile. “Stiles, if you think you’re in love with him, you should definitely keep making out.”

Stiles gapes.

Lydia squeezes his forearm. “In the meantime, I’ll give you some tips on how to cover up that stubble burn, ’kay, sweetie?”

Stiles groans and hides his face in his hands.

Apparently this is his life now.

He definitely needs to talk to Derek.

***

Talking with Derek is supposed to happen that evening.

It doesn’t.

“Okay,” Stiles says as Derek pushes him up against the wall. “Oh, shit, okay. This is a thing we do now.”

Derek growls at him and nuzzles his throat.

Claude is downstairs watching ESPN with her grandpa—that’s a thing they do, too—and Derek and Stiles are up in his room folding her laundry. For a tiny person, Claude has a lot of laundry. Except they’re not folding laundry, are they? No. No, they are not.

“The thing is,” Stiles manages, and holy god, that’s Derek’s tongue licking a stripe up his throat then sweeping back down and pressing against his pulse point. He tangles his fingers in Derek’s hair.

“The thing is—oh Jesus—the thing is…”

The thing is pressing against his thigh.

“Derek, fuck!” Stiles tugs on his hair, buying himself a second’s reprieve. “Derek, Der, wait.”
Derek stops, breathing heavily, his eyes wide.

“Holy shit,” Stiles murmurs. He runs his fingers through Derek’s hair, hooks them behind his ears just because he can. “Holy shit.”

Derek leans into him, and nudges him with his chin. Nudges him into a warm, gentle kiss. A butterfly kiss.

Stiles’s eyes flutter closed. “Oh, fuck, Der.”

He wants it. He’s also terrified of it. Because what if he fucks it up? He will. He’s bound to. What if they really do end up like those parents who hate each other? And what if it all happens before Stiles turns eighteen, and he’s left with no legal rights to Claude at all? The thought of that makes him more breathless than any kiss ever could.

“Stop.” He gets his hands against Derek’s chest and pushes him back.

Derek looks confused. “What’s wrong?”

“What if we are?”

Derek frowns. “What do you mean?”

“You and me,” Stiles says. He tries not to stare at Derek’s mouth. “What if we’re wrong? If we fuck this up, it’s not just us we’re fucking up, is it? It’s Claude. She needs us both. She needs us both on the same team. And we are, right now. But what if we try to be more, and we can’t, and it ruins everything?”

“Every relationship is a risk,” Derek says quietly.

Well, yeah, he’d know, wouldn’t he?

“I know that.” Stiles still has his hands on Derek’s chest. He wants to grab his shirt and pull him closer, but he doesn’t. “If it was just us, I’d say fuck it, go for it. But it’s not. It’s Claude. If we break up—”

“Stiles, we’re not even together yet, and you’re already worried about breaking up?”

“Yes, because there are consequences!”

Derek nods slowly. Then he curls a hand around Stiles’s neck, and it’s warm. “Yes, there are consequences, and yes, there are risks. But, Stiles, doesn’t the fact that we were together in another reality, that we had a child together…doesn’t that prove we can be together here?”

“Okay, but what about the version of us from the multiverse where we’re sworn enemies and kill each other?”

Derek’s eyebrows do something complicated. “You think there’s a version of us where we kill each other?”

“That’s the point of a multiverse, Derek, anything can happen.”

“Stiles.” Derek sighs. “I don’t want to be the adult pushing the sixteen-year-old into a relationship he’s not ready for. I’m not going to do that. So whatever you want, that’s what’s going to happen. If you want me to back off, I will.”
Shit.

Of course Derek won’t push. But what if Stiles needs him to? He wants this, he really does, but he’s terrified it’s against his better judgement, and hey, it turns out that his dad’s wrong: sometimes he doesn’t just do the first crazy thing that pops into his head, however much he wants to.

“I’m not brave and awesome in this reality,” Stiles manages at last. “I’m so fucking scared, Der.”

Derek’s expression softens. He rubs his thumb up and down Stiles’s throat. There’s no hiding how fast and panicked his pulse is now. Derek can probably hear it as well as feel it. “I know.”

Stiles swallows, flushing. “Of course you know.”

Derek’s mouth quirks slightly. “Stiles?”

“Yeah?”

That tiny hint of a smile fades. “I’m scared too.”

“You are?” Stiles feels his jaw drop.

“It’s all so big, and I’m the alpha, and I’m supposed to know what I’m doing, and I don’t. Sometimes, when Claude’s with me, all I can think about is all the stuff I might be doing wrong. She settles so much faster with you than with me. Sometimes she grizzles and I don’t know why.” He closes his eyes briefly. When he opens them again, they’re bright with unshed tears. “And I wish my mom and dad were here so I could ask them what to do. There’s so much I never got to ask them.”

Stiles twists his fingers in Derek’s shirt and pulls him close. He wraps his arms around his broad shoulders, and breathes against his neck. “I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.”

Every time he’s wanted his mom, to tell her about something funny Claude did, or to complain about how tired he is, or just to hear her sing that old lullaby, it’s broken his heart just a little bit more. When his mom died, it felt like Stiles had lost his entire world. He can’t even imagine what it felt like for Derek.

“I do want you,” he murmurs, his mouth close to Derek’s ear. “I do. I want us to be together. I want us to raise Claude together. I want us to be in a real relationship. I want…”

“What do you want?” Derek whispers.

“I want us to have sex.”

Silence.

Stiles is pretty sure he’s about to combust with embarrassment.

He should have said fuck. No, because that sounds like something you do with a guy you pick up from The Jungle, not Derek.

He should have said make love. No, wait, what? That’s ridiculous.

Why isn’t there some goddamn middle ground here?

Stiles resists the urge to squirm. “Der?”

Derek untangles himself from Stiles’s arms, and puts his hands on either side of Stiles’s face. His
face is serious, his gaze intense. “I want that too.”

Oh thank fuck.

Thank fuck.

Stiles laughs, relieved, overwhelmed. “So we’re dating now?”

Derek smiles at him, and it’s just about the most beautiful thing Stiles has ever seen. “If that’s what you want.”

“If it means I get to kiss you all the time, then it’s definitely what I want.”

Derek nudges him into the wall again, and licks a line up his jaw. “So it’s just the kissing you’re interested in, huh?”

Stiles has to wait a moment for his brain to come back online. “Oh, is there more than just kissing?”

Derek growls and presses a knee between Stiles’s. Then he grabs Stiles by the hips and pulls him forward, and suddenly Stiles is straddling his thigh. “Yes, there’s more than kissing.”

Stiles rocks forward. His dick is hard in his jeans, and Derek’s muscled thigh is just perfect for getting some friction on it. He rocks back, then forward again, and then suddenly realizes: oh sweet squishy mother of Cthulhu. He’s humping Derek’s thigh.

That is not cool. Not fucking cool.

His face burns and he tries to pull back, but Derek tugs him closer instead. His eyes are dark. “Do it, Stiles. I want you to do it.”

Holy shit.

Stiles wraps his arms around Derek’s neck and buries his whimpers against his throat. His dick is aching, and it’s humiliating, but it’s also incredibly fucking hot as well, because Derek wants him to do this. He mouths at Derek’s throat, grinding back and forth on his thigh. His underwear is already wet. He can smell himself. He must fucking reek to Derek.

Derek slides one hand down the back of Stiles’s jeans, under the band of his underwear, his fingers sliding into the cleft of his ass. Stiles jerks forward in shock, Derek growls again, and, embarrassingly, that’s all it takes for him to come. His muscles seize, and then he shudders wildly, moaning against Derek’s throat.

Derek slides his hands up and down his trembling spine. “You’re so hot, Stiles,” he whispers, his voice hoarse.

Stiles blinks slowly back into awareness.

What even just happened?

Whatever it was, he needs new pants.

Stat.

***
It’s late by the time they get downstairs again. Claude’s fallen asleep in Stiles’s dad’s lap. She’s dribbling on his chest, her mouth scrunched up. Stiles’s dad has fallen asleep as well.

“Sorry,” Stiles says, his face flushed, stepping forward to lift Claude gently off his dad.

His dad wakes up with a grunt, and blinks between Stiles and Derek for a moment before he levers himself out of his chair. “Goodnight, boys. If you’re staying, Derek, you’ll be making up the couch.”

“Yes, sir.”

They both watch, awkwardly, as Stiles’s dad heads upstairs.

“He totally knows,” Stiles whispers. “He’s going to arrest you!”

“He’s not going to arrest me,” Derek whispers back.

“He probably won’t,” Stiles agrees. “He’ll just shoot you.”

“He’s not going to shoot me.” Except Derek sounds a little less certain this time.

Stiles rubs Claude’s back gently. “Do you want to stay?”

It’s pretty late, and a lot less hassle to put Claude down in the crib in Stiles’s room than load her and all of her gear into the Camaro and then have Derek have to unpack everything again on his own when he gets to the loft.

“I’ll stay,” Derek says, reaching out to brush his fingertips over Claude’s soft hair. “We like to have breakfast with you guys in the morning.”

Stiles likes it too. His days start right when they start with Claude. And Derek.

“Goodnight,” he says, suddenly shy, not knowing if he can kiss Derek or not. He escapes upstairs with Claude before he paralyses himself with indecision. Claude doesn’t even stir as he sets her down carefully in her crib and draws the sheet and blanket up. Then he climbs into his bed and listens for a while.

He can hear the toilet flush, and then his dad’s footsteps creaking along the hallway back to his room. His door snicks shut.

He can hear Derek downstairs too, and that makes him smile because he knows Derek usually moves totally silently. The creeper gene is strong in him. Stiles has an idea the noises he’s making down there are purely for his dad’s benefit.

The house creaks as it cools and settles.

Stiles is just dozing off when his door opens. Wordlessly, he flips his comforter up and Derek slides into bed beside him. In the dim blue glow of Claude’s firefly light, Stiles can see the curve of his smile.

Stiles curls toward him and Derek’s arm comes around him. He rests his cheek on Derek’s chest, and luxuriates in the warmth of his embrace. He falls asleep listening to the slow rhythmic thump of Derek’s heart.
An hour later, maybe two, he’s awake again. His bedroom is bathed in a soft green glow, and for a second Stiles blinks, confused, but his brain is addled with sleep and he’s not sure what’s wrong. Just an itch at the base of his skull. Just a strange weight in his stomach. Just something.

“Buh!”

Stiles is about to haul himself out of bed, when he realizes Derek’s already up, and already singing to her:

"A-a-a, a-a-a, byly sobie kotki dwa."

Stiles shoves his face into his pillow. His pronunciation is heaps better than it was. Gold star for Lullabywolf.

“A-a-a, kotki dwa, szarobure, szarobure obydwa.”

Unease prickles him.

Claude’s night light is blue.

He’s awake in an instant, and halfway out of bed before Derek grips him by the arm and wrenches him back. Stiles can’t fucking breathe.

Because if Derek’s in bed with him.

If Derek’s in bed…

He chokes out a desperate sob.

“Buh!” Claude says to the figure standing by her crib.

“Ach, śpij, kochanie—” The figure by the crib falters on that word. “Kochanie. Kochanie…”

Sweetheart, sweetheart, sweetheart…

Stiles turns his head to stare at Derek. Derek’s face is bathed in the same weird green light that fills the room. It’s the color of the sky before a hailstorm, Stiles remembers. It’s the color of magic.

He smells ozone.

“Kochanie,” the figure says again. “Claudie kochanie.”

“No,” Stiles whispers, his voice cracking on that single word. “No, please.”

Please don’t be here.

Please don’t take her.

Please.

The figure half turns, and Stiles is suddenly staring into his own face.
“Where am I?” his other self whispers, his forehead creasing in a frown. His gaze jumps from Stiles to Derek. His eyes widen. “Oh shit, I—”

There’s a crack of thunder, and then he’s gone.

The air smells like ozone.

“Buh!” Claude yells in the sudden silence. “Buh buh!”

Stiles staggers out of his bed and stumbles over to her crib, Derek at his side. He lifts Claude out and holds her close.

“He can’t take her,” he says. He’s sobbing. “He can’t. He can’t. He can’t.”

Derek wraps his arms around the both of them, but he doesn’t say a word.
Chapter 10

Derek calls Deaton. He arrives within twenty minutes. Stiles had thought he’d be relieved to see Deaton turning up on his front door, as calm and Zen-like as always, but he’s not. It terrifies him more, somehow. It makes the threat of losing Claude seem real.

His dad is awake too, careworn and sleep-rumpled, and silent and unhappy.

Deaton checks Stiles’s room with Derek.

Stiles stands in the doorway, unwilling to cross the threshold. Claude is sleeping again. She’s heavy, and Stiles’s arms are sore, but he’s not going to let go of her now. Not ever.

Deaton paces up and down in Stiles’s room, checking carefully around Claude’s crib.

“Mountain ash,” Stiles blurts out. “Except for people. Is there anything we can use to protect the house? To keep him out?”

He’s been reading about wards and charms.

Deaton’s smile is small and, Stiles chooses to believe, sympathetic. “He broke the laws of the universe, Stiles, firstly to create his daughter, and then to send her here. I very much doubt there’s anything I can do to stop him from doing exactly as he wants.”

Stiles blinks though his hot tears.

His dad puts a hand on his shoulder.

Deaton runs his fingers along the top of Claude’s crib. He pauses, and looks up at Derek. “And you say he didn’t seem to know where he was?”

Derek nods. “At first he didn’t even seem to notice we were there. He was singing to Claude. Then Stiles spoke, and that was when he turned around and saw us. He seemed… shocked. He asked where he was, then he vanished.” Derek draws his brows together in a frown. “The room smelled of magic but…”

Deaton waits patiently.

Derek’s frown deepens. “But he didn’t smell of anything. He had no scent.”

“None at all?”

Derek nods.

“How very interesting.” Deaton inspects Claude’s firefly night light. It’s giving off its usual sedate blue glow again. “I certainly can’t see any signs that anyone’s been here. Usually magic like that will leave a trace, but there’s nothing here.”

Derek looks worried.

“It happened!” Stiles blurts out suddenly. “He was here. We weren’t dreaming!”

“No,” Deaton says thoughtfully. He nods to himself as though he’s reached some sort of decision. “But perhaps he was.”
Astral traveling is a thing, Deaton says.

It’s a thing that doesn’t leave a scent, or a trace of magic, because it’s all done through the unconscious, in a dream-state. Stiles really doesn’t understand it. The only thing he takes away from Deaton’s explanation is that Claude’s actual dad, Awesome Mage Stiles, sought her out while he was in an altered level of consciousness—either asleep, or in a self-induced trance, or dreaming. It was very probably unintentional, Deaton suggests. Maybe he just followed their bond and this is where it brought him.

“So he was never here?” Stiles asks.

“I don’t think so,” Deaton says.

For the first time in hours, Stiles relaxes a fraction. Derek takes the opportunity to lift Claude away from him. Stiles almost staggers as he readjusts to the sudden loss of her weight, and his dad holds his shoulders to keep him from flailing backward.

They go downstairs to the kitchen.

It’s three in the morning, everyone’s awake, so what the hell else is there to do but drink coffee? On the corner of the counter, the machine burbles away.

Deaton’s voice is soothing. “He was, to all intents and purposes, an apparition. If he was here in a dream state, he had no agency, no ability to manipulate objects in this reality.”

“But the light, and the thunder?” Stiles rolls his aching shoulders and looks anxiously at Claude. She’s nestled in Derek’s arms, still asleep.

“As much an apparition as he was,” Deaton says.

“What if he tries to come back though, for real?”

Deaton looks grave. “I can’t answer that, I’m afraid.”

“He can’t take her,” Stiles whispers, then catches the looks that his dad and Derek exchange. “What? No!”

Because he knows exactly what they’re thinking: that Awesome Mage Stiles is her dad, not him. And they’re right, but this isn’t about logic, and it will never change what he feels in his bones. Claude is his daughter. It will rip his heart from his body if someone takes her away.

A treacherous voice in his head whispers: Just like sending her away ripped his heart out?

So what?

Fuck him.

He made his decision.
Right?

When Stiles was eight, when losing his mom was still a fresh, horrible thing, his dad took him on a trip to Sacramento. It was only a few days, to get away from everything. He later found out it was so Melissa McCall could empty all his mom’s clothes out of her closet and pack them off to Goodwill. Stiles had screamed loudly enough when his dad had put her shampoo and toothbrush in the trash that it would have been a disaster for him to be there for her clothes.

So, Sacramento.

There was a shopping mall close to their hotel. There was a pet store in the mall. Every day Stiles went and looked at the puppies and kittens, and every day his dad told him that no, they couldn’t get one. Except a part of Stiles didn’t believe it. A part of him believed he was owed, and not just because the universe took his mom and it was only fair and right it gave him something in return, but because a part of him knew beyond doubt that there was nobody else in the world that would love those puppies and kittens as much as he would. His little heart swelled when he watched them. His entire world lit up. It was impossible that they wouldn’t take one home.

Impossible.

Nobody would love them as much as Stiles would.

It was unthinkable that he’d go home without a puppy or a kitten.

He felt exactly like that now.

Nobody could love Claude as much as he did.

Nobody.

Nobody could say he couldn’t keep her.

Nobody.

Stiles had cried all the way in the car from Sacramento back to Beacon Hills.

The second they’d arrived home, he’d raced up to his parents’ room to hide in the closet like he always did. He liked the space between his mom’s shoes and where the hems of her dresses hung and tickled his skin. He liked to curl up in there and sob until the darkness and the quiet and the gentle swoosh of fabric over his face and arms comforted him.

“Stiles!” his dad had yelled at him, his voice breaking, helpless. “Stiles, don’t—”

Don’t open the closet.

He felt like that now.

Doors wrenched open, nothing inside but empty space.

Heart ripped out.

He’d had his first panic attack aged eight, standing in front of his mom’s empty closet.

He’s having another one now.
“Breathe, kiddo.”

His dad’s voice is the first thing he hears. His chest aches. He’s shaking. He’s curled up on his side on the couch. His dad is perched on the edge, leaning over him and rubbing his back.

“Breathe,” his dad says.

“Wh-where’s Claude?”

“Derek’s putting her back to bed.”

“I don’t want him to take her. It’s not fair.”

His dad sighs. “I know, kiddo. I know.”

***

Stiles doesn’t go to school the next day. His dad is okay with it. Instead, Stiles and Derek take Claude to the park, then back to the loft. Stiles is still on edge. He gets anxious whenever he puts Claude down for a nap, afraid that he’ll turn up.

He doesn’t.

Stiles reads up more on astral traveling and dream walking, and the more he learns the more it makes sense that Deaton had called the other him an apparition. He couldn’t have taken Claude. Not in a dream.

It doesn’t kill his fear, but it lets him breathe again, just a little.

“So, are you coming to this barbecue tomorrow?” he says on Friday afternoon, lying on Derek’s floor, on the comforter Derek’s dragged down from his bedroom. He’s lying at an angle to Derek. Claude is sitting between them, bashing some colorful plastic blocks together.

He’d wanted to call the barbecue off, but his dad had convinced him to reconsider.

“What are you gonna do, kid? Lock yourself in the closet with Claude?”

“Is that an actual option?”

His dad had hugged him. “No, son it’s not.”

So the barbecue is still on, apparently.

Derek reaches out and twines his fingers through Stiles’s. “I think your dad has me working the grill.”

“Oh, high praise indeed.” Stiles smiles absently and adjusts the book he’s got balanced on his stomach. He’d borrowed the book off Deaton. He’s up to a weird ass chapter on shamans. Lots of
stuff on peyote. “He doesn’t let just anyone work the grill.”

“I asked how he liked his steak,” Derek says, a smile creeping into his voice. “He said big.”

“I’m buying him a tofu steak,” Stiles decides.

“Sadist,” Derek teases.

“Buh,” Claude announces.

Stiles hates how precarious all this seems now. He feels a little like every quiet moment like this is a stolen one, and every smile a false one. He feels brittle, as though one tap could shatter him, and his whole world, into a million pieces.

“Buh,” Derek tells her. He releases Stiles’s hand, and rolls onto his side and props himself up onto an elbow. He stacks a red block on top of a yellow block, and then grins as Claude knocks it down. “He also told me you make the best potato salad.”

“I make an adequate potato salad,” Stiles says, closing the book. “My dad just thinks it’s the best because he can’t make one to save his life.”

“Well, I can’t wait to try your adequate potato salad.”

“That sounds like the dirtiest euphemism ever.” Stiles snorts. “My adequate potato salad brings all the boys to the yard.”

“Idiot,” Derek says fondly.

“Potatowolf,” Stiles shoots back.

“That doesn’t even make sense.”

“It makes perfect sense,” Stiles says, and catches Derek’s hand again.

He squeezes tighter than he needs to, but Derek doesn’t pull away. Stiles figures he understands.

Stiles has only just discovered days like these. He can’t bear the thought of losing them now.

***

Saturday is perfect barbecue weather. A bright, warm day with a cool breeze. Stiles isn’t exactly pumped about the idea of the barbecue, but he’s feeling a lot better after getting a full night’s sleep with no interruptions from apparitions wearing his face.

“I feel like we ought to have a big line down the middle of the yard,” Stiles says. “Hatfields on one side, McCoys on the other.”

“You’re exaggerating,” Lydia says, carrying a bowl of salad out to the trestle table Stiles’s dad set up in the morning. “Have you even seen how Claude turns everyone to goo? There will be no factional fighting today.”

Stiles heads back inside.
The barbecue starts at midday, but Lydia’s been here since ten, chopping potatoes and making up salads. Derek has already been and gone once. He dropped off an inflatable paddling pool, and Claude, and left again to get ice.

His pack arrives before he’s back: Erica, Boyd and Isaac.

“Hey, you guys,” Stiles says. “My dad and Lydia are in the back, Derek should be here soon, and Isaac, you want to introduce Claude to her new swimming pool?

“Um,” Isaac says, but once Claude sees him it’s not like he has a choice.

“Buh! Buh buh buh!”

Isaac is definitely her favorite of all the betas.

Claude looks adorable in her bathing suit. Yellow spotty plastic pants big enough to go over her diaper, and a shirt with a duck on it. Stiles puts her pink dinosaur hat on her head, and then she’s ready for the pool.

“Dude, don’t you even take your eyes off her for a second,” Stiles tells Isaac. Okay, so there’s only an inch and a half of water in the pool, but not the point. Safety first.

“I won’t!” Isaac’s eyes are wide.

He carries Claude outside, following Erica and Boyd.

Stiles hears the front door open and close again. “Derek? You’d better have that ice!”

It’s Scott and Allison, and Scott’s mom Melissa. Scott’s loaded up with chips and sodas. And Melissa’s made pie.

“You’re the best, Mrs. McCall,” Stiles beams.

She slaps his hand away. “That’s for dessert.”

“Harsh.”

Scott and Allison head out into the back yard.

“So, how are you doing, Stiles?” Melissa asks him, trying to make space in the fridge for the pie.

“I’m good.”

She closes the fridge door and fixes him with an assessing gaze. “Really?”

Stiles feels a little like a trapped animal. “Um…yeah?”

Melissa folds her arms over her chest. “You know, when Scott was a baby, we had this big party with all our friends, and I spent the whole damn afternoon running around after everyone, and when I was still doing the dishes at midnight, Rafe was all, ‘What are you in such a bad mood for, hon? It’s a party.’”

“Oh,” Stiles says. Shit. Is he having a new mom talk with Scott’s mother? Because that’s beyond weird. “Well, I’m just making the potato salad and then I’m gonna come outside and be sociable. And we’re totally using paper plates, so, um, minimal dishes.”
“Okay,” she says. “I’ve already told Scott he’s doing the dishes anyway.”

Stiles smiles at that. “Awesome.”

Melissa heads outside. Through the kitchen window, Stiles watches her approach his dad at the grill.

When he and Scott were younger they used to imagine how amazing it would be if their parents got together so then they could be brothers for real. It had been a fun fantasy, but one that had lost a lot of its shine when they’d started discussing who’d move into whose house. Because Stiles’s bedroom was set up just how he liked okay, and Scott could have a mattress on the floor… Except apparently Scott was laboring under the misapprehension that Stiles would be happy with a mattress on his floor.

Yeah, no.

It was good that Stiles’s dad and Scott’s mom were friends, and nothing more.

Stiles finishes up the potato salad, and hunts around for a serving spoon. He doesn’t even realize Derek is back, and standing right behind him, until a pair of warm hands slides around his middle.

“Shit!” he exclaims. “Ninjawolf!”

Derek’s stubble rasps against his cheek. “Ah, the adequate potato salad I’ve heard so much about.”

Stiles snort giggles. It’s not pretty. “Um, okay, so do you want to help me take some more stuff out, then we can see how Claude’s enjoying her pool? If my dad will let you off the grill, that is.”

“I’ll risk it,” Derek says, and nuzzles against Stiles’s throat, scenting him. He slides one hand under Stiles’s shirt and splays his fingers against his abdomen. It’s possessive and affectionate at the same time, and his touch fills Stiles with warmth and comfort.

They carry bowls and dishes outside, then Stiles takes a soda and sits down on a patch of grass close to Claude’s pool and watches her splash around. Isaac’s hovering over her protectively, flashing his eyes to make her giggle and splash.

Stiles figures he should probably mingle or whatever, but fuck it. It’s nice sitting in the sunlight relaxing. Anyway, people come to him. Even Boyd, and Stiles doesn’t think he’s heard Boyd speak more than five words in a row. Ever.

Lydia’s right though. Claude turns people, and wolves, into goo.

And maybe Derek is right too. Maybe Stiles is a peacemaker.

Something’s changed since the other night. When Derek comes and sits next to him, bearing burgers, Stiles leans into him and Derek puts an arm around his shoulders, and they totally look like a couple, and nobody cares. Stiles’s dad doesn’t even glare. Just watches carefully for a moment, like he’s ready to beat Derek with his barbecue tongs if he so much as even thinks about hurting Stiles.

It’s nice.

Claude comes out of the pool with wrinkled toes and fingers. Derek takes her inside to change her, and Stiles dozes in the sunlight until they’re back. Then he sits up again, and takes Claude in his lap, and feeds her chunks of potato salad.

“Buh!” She squishes a chunk of potato between her palms.
“That goes in your mouth, baby girl,” Stiles informs her. “It’s delicious.”

“It’s adequate,” Derek says.

Stiles elbows him. “Don’t you listen to Daddy. He’s just a jealous hater because he can’t make potato salad like Tata can.”

“Buh buh.” Claude squishes more potato and squeals with glee.

The afternoon is winding down.

His dad and Melissa have retreated to a pair of fold-out chairs in the shade. They’re in deep conversation about something. Probably about how they once thought they’d have relatively normal lives with relatively normal kids, and what the hell ever happened to their lives?

Scott and Boyd are throwing a football around. Lydia is flicking through a fashion magazine, and pointing something out to Isaac. He looks cautious. Erica and Allison are looking at something on Erica’s phone.

“I am a peacemaker,” Stiles whispers.

Derek’s mouth quirks. “Told you so.”

An hour later and Claude is asleep in Stiles’s lap, and Stiles is awkwardly balancing a paper plate with pie on her belly. What? She’s sort of a stable surface, as long as she stays asleep. Derek huffs at him and picks his plate up and holds it for him. It’s just the sort of service Stiles could get used to.

“You are totally spoiling me,” he says, pleased.

Derek shrugs. “I know.”

Wind rustles through the leaves of the trees. It’s just gentle background noise at first, and then Stiles become aware of it. He looks up in time to see the cloth of the trestle table flapping, and several paper plates being blown across the lawn.

His dad and Melissa hurry down to the table before everything else goes.

“That’s come up quickly!” Melissa exclaims.

Stiles looks up at the sky. Dark clouds, tinted green, are rolling across the sky.

His heart stops.

He’s aware of Scott and Isaac laughing as they chase Claude’s inflatable pool across the yard. He’s aware of Boyd and Lydia shoving used paper plates in a trash bag, trying to beat the wind. Erica’s hair is blowing madly, a riotous halo of gold curls.

Derek is standing over him now, and reaching down for Claude. He lifts her up then reaches down to haul Stiles to his feet.

Thunder claps overhead.

Stiles can’t breathe.

Suddenly he can hear that stupid song in his head again, like it’s weeks ago, like he’s shimmying around in the kitchen looking for Froot Loops, and singing that it’s raining men.
Weird green sky.

Thunder claps.

The smell of ozone in the air.

“Der,” he says as the wind picks up into a howl, the thunder cracks in the sky. “Der.”

And then it’s all over, as suddenly as it began.

The clouds are rolling away.

The wind is dead.

The sky is blue again.

“What the hell?” Erica exclaims, but she might as well be a million miles away.

“Der,” Stiles says, his heart pounding. “It’s him! It’s him!”

***

There’s a man lying on the front porch.

A boy, really.

He smells of smoke and ozone.

He smells of blood and charred flesh.

Through the crush of bodies surrounding him—his dad, Scott, Allison, Boyd, Lydia, everyone—Stiles only catches glimpses of him. His skin is burned, red raw in places.

“Oh, my god!” Melissa exclaims, pushing forward through the others. “Stiles, honey.”

*That’s not me*, Stiles thinks, holding Claude tightly. *That’s not me.*


The boy cries out as someone—Derek—lifts him.

*Don’t touch him*, Stiles wants to scream. *Don’t bring him in here! This is not his home!*

He backs away as Derek sweeps past him, holding the boy in his arms.

The boy’s eyes flicker open. Tears spill from them.

“Derek.” His voice rasps and cracks. “But Derek, I saw you die.”
Chapter 11

It’s been an hour.

Deaton is here now.

Stiles can’t settle. He paces the hallway outside his bedroom, up and down, up and down, stopping every now and then to listen outside his door.

Sometimes he hears voices, and sometimes he doesn’t.

Sometimes the boy is lucid, and sometimes he isn’t.

His burns are bad. Melissa tries to treat them, but there isn’t much she can do. She’s never seen burns like them. Stiles overhears her telling Deaton, in a hitching voice, that she lifted a wet compress off one and blue sparks lit up the wound.

It’s burning him from within, Deaton tells her. It’s powerful magic, created to target a powerful mage. It’s turned his own spark against him. It’s forcing his own magic to keep igniting the fire, and to keep it fuelled. Deaton can give him something for the pain, but there’s nothing else he can do for him.

Nobody has left the house.

Derek’s pack and Stiles’s friends are still downstairs, talking quietly amongst themselves sometimes, but mostly just sitting. Just waiting.

Derek and his dad are in Stiles’s bedroom. They haven’t come outside since they took him in there.

Scott treads up the stairs at one point to tell Stiles that Claude’s hungry, and is she just supposed to have formula or should they give her some baby food, or maybe some real food? Stiles makes it halfway down the stairs to the kitchen before he can’t go any further. He sinks down onto the stairs and buries his head in his hands.

He hates himself.

“Dude,” Scott says in a low voice, “you didn’t do this.”

Scott’s always known Stiles’s darkest secrets, without Stiles telling him. It started in first grade when that kid didn’t invite any of the loser kids to his birthday party. Scott didn’t get an invite because of his asthma, and Stiles didn’t get one because he was weird and loud and bad at social cues. Stiles hadn’t known until then that he was a loser. He hadn’t known anyone was. When everyone came back into class after recess and saw someone had ripped the kid’s painting into pieces, Scott had only looked at Stiles with his big puppy dog eyes but he hadn’t said anything to anyone.

Scott has always known about the terrible things Stiles is capable of when he lashes out in hurt and anger.

“You didn’t do this,” he repeats now.

“I wanted to keep Claude.”

“Stiles,” Scott sits down beside him and puts an arm around his shoulder. He pulls him close. “Dude, we all wanted you to keep Claude.”
“I just…I just wanted…”

He just wanted him to stay away, not die.

He never wanted him to die.

But that’s what he’s doing.

The mage who bent space and time, who broke the laws of the universe, is lying in Stiles’s bed and he’s dying.

***

Stiles lingers in the doorway of his bedroom. He afraid to go inside. Afraid to see.

He doesn’t want to see his own face, his own body, twisted in agony. He doesn’t want to hear his own voice crying out in pain. He’s afraid it will be the most horrifying thing he’s ever had to face. He’s more afraid he’ll feel absolutely nothing, and he’s terrified of what that might mean.

He also doesn’t want to go in because he’s not as cold as he’s afraid he is. He doesn’t want to destroy the boy lying in his bed. Because he’s heard Derek and his dad talking to him, playing their parts for him, letting him think they’re his.

“Derek, I saw you die.” His voice is plaintive, confused. It sounds young, and it sends a shiver down Stiles’s spine.

“I’m here. I’m right here.” Derek’s voice is soft.

“Where’s Claudie? Is Claudie okay?”

“She’s downstairs. She’s okay.”

Stiles can hear the way his breath rattles and wheezes in his chest. He can hear the way every time he moves it costs him. “It hurts. Dad, it hurts.”

“I know, kiddo. I know.”

Stiles wonders if he knows, in his heart of hearts, that it’s not his dad beside him, and not his Derek. Maybe he does know, but he just doesn’t want to look it in the eye. Maybe he’s taking whatever comfort he can, and Stiles doesn’t blame him for it.

He’d do the same thing.

Anyone would.

Stiles moves away from the door as it opens. Deaton throws him a worried glance as he steps outside.
“Are you all right?”

Stiles nods.

Deaton puts a hand on his shoulder and squeezes gently, then hurries downstairs. He’s back moments later, lugging the cooler from the back yard. Stiles can hear ice and water sloshing around inside. The barbecue seems like a lifetime ago.

“What’s that for?”

“Compresses,” Deaton says.

“Will that help?”

“All I can do is try and make him comfortable.”

Stiles wants to tell Deaton that he never wanted him to die, but he suspects the protestation is too little too late. Worse than that, he knows it’s selfish. Someone is dying, and Stiles is worried about his conscience? He’s an asshole. He’s a monster.

He hears Deaton’s voice, but can’t make out the words. Whatever he’s saying, he’s saying it in a low, soothing tone.

“Don’t! Don’t, don’t! It hurts!” His voice rises and ends in a wail.

Downstairs, Stiles hears furniture shifting, and then a low, thunderous growl: Scott. Stiles is in pain—it doesn’t matter which version of Stiles—and so is Scott.

Stiles puts his hands over his ears. He’s not sure which one of them he’s trying to block out.

It’s silent for a little while after that. And then the voice from his bedroom, says, in a tone a little clearer than before: “This isn’t my house.”

His dad says something then, something that Stiles’s doesn’t catch.

“This isn’t my house. I dreamed… I dreamed of this. Of you, Der. Where… where is he?”

Stiles’s heart skips a beat. No. He can’t mean…

The door opens and Deaton appears. “Come in, Stiles.”

Oh fuck.

Fuck fuck fuck.

What’s he supposed to do? What’s he supposed to say to the guy wearing his face, lying in his bed and dying? He steps into the room.

Melissa is by his desk. She’s dunking washcloths in the cooler of cold water, then wringing them out to fold into compresses. She’s been crying.

Stiles doesn’t even want to look at his bed, but he has to.

He does.

It’s like something out of a creeping nightmare. His dad and Derek are sitting on either side of his
bed, both of them defeated, drawn. Stiles hasn’t seen that look on his dad’s face since his mom died. He’d hoped he’d never have to see it again.

The boy lying in the bed is him. He’d thought Awesome Mage Stiles might be older, but he’s not. He’d thought he might have his skin covered in tattoos and piercings, but he doesn’t. Not that Stiles can see under the burns anyway.

The burns are fucking horrible. They cover most of his chest and his arms. They creep up his throat, across his face. The ones on his chest are the worst. The burns there are red and blistered, and somehow alive. Blue light arcs like electricity through the burns, like there’s a lightning storm inside his body. His limbs tremble with it. His fingers twitch and jerk against Stiles’s sheets.

“I dreamed of you,” he says. His eyes are the color of dark amber. Stiles has only ever seen those eyes staring at him from out of a mirror before. “Weeks ago.”

“Last night,” Stiles tells him. “It was last night.”

It feels like longer though. It feels like a whole lifetime.

“Dude, it was weeks,” the other him says, and grits his teeth as his body’s wracked with pain. Blue sparks arc across the widest burn on his chest, like lightning trapped in storm clouds. “I dreamed of you. Made me think... made me think of alternate realities. Made me think if we ever needed somewhere to run to...” He reaches out and grips Derek’s hand. “But when we did, I wasn’t fast enough. Couldn’t get you both... Sorry.”

Derek rubs his thumb over his knuckles. Blue sparks follow his touch, but Derek doesn’t seem to feel it. “Don’t be sorry.”

“Selflesswolf,” the mage mumbles, his mouth quirking up in a grimace that’s maybe supposed to be a smile.

Stiles tries to swallow down the lump in his throat.

He is selfless. And if the Derek in the other reality was anything like him, the fact that Claude’s safe is all that matters. It’s all he would have wanted. He would have been glad to die to protect her. The same as Stiles.

“Look at us,” the other Stiles murmurs, his gaze flicking to Stiles. “Look at your spark, it’s so bright and new. We’re like a circuit, you and me. Like an electrical circuit.” He runs his fingers across his chest, wincing as the light arcs between his skin and his fingertips.

“Careful,” Deaton murmurs in a low voice. He moves forward and places a cold compress across his abdomen.

“Shit!” The mage arches off the mattress, his lean body twisting. Then he sags back down, and draws in a shuddering breath. His gaze finds Stiles again. “Dude, if it wasn’t weeks that I came here in a dream, if it was only last night for you, you know what that means?”

“It means you astral-traveled through space and time,” Stiles says.

“We completed the circuit,” the mage agrees. A blue spark flashes for an instant in his eyes, and he flinches. “There’s no cause and effect, just a circuit. A circle. I only sent Claudie here because I saw you in a dream.”

Stiles nods slowly. “And you only saw us in a dream because you sent her here.”
No cause and effect. No chicken and egg. Just a circle.

“That’s trippy as balls.” The mage grin-grimaces again, and then his body arches off the bed as another wave of pain catches him. “Oh, fuck. *Fuck.*”

Deaton steps forward. He’s holding a coffee mug. Stiles has no idea what’s in it, but it stinks like rancid fucking swamp water.

The mage twists away. “No, no more, man, please.”

“Stiles, if you don’t drink it…”

“What? I’ll die *faster*? Alan, I’m done. I’m *done*, okay?”

Deaton holds his gaze for a moment, then steps back.

“I don’t even know where those assholes found someone who could work a curse like that, but the fucker caught me before I could follow Claudie through. I was just a second, just a second behind her.”

“Weeks,” Stiles whispers.

The mage closes his eyes briefly. A tiny smile tugs at the corner of his mouth. “It’s totally wibbly wobbly timey wimey.”

Stiles can’t even laugh at the reference nobody else in the room gets. His chest aches.

The mage opens his eyes and brings his burned hands up to where he can see them. “A curse like this… Jesus, you wanna hope you never see a curse like this on this side.” He closes his eyes briefly, squeezes them shut. When he opens them again, they’re swimming with tears. “Our whole pack’s gone. Whole town, maybe. They were so brave. So fucking brave.”

Stiles doesn’t think he’s ever heard anything so horrifying in his life.

He doesn’t want his friends to be brave.

He wants them to live.

“I’m done,” the mage says. Tears slide down his face. “Just... just one more thing, and then I’m done.”

***

Stiles’s hands shake as he dresses Claude in her green onesie. It’s the one she came in. He finds her blankie as well, that old hand-me-down from her Tata, and her teddy bear. Claude is sleepy, pliant and soft.

“You won’t remember this,” he murmurs to her. “God, I hope you won’t.”

Allison and Lydia are sitting together on the couch, watching him.
The wolves are restless, pacing. Stiles doesn’t know if it's their alpha’s distress that’s putting them on edge, or if it’s *his*. The mage called them *our* pack. Not Derek’s. Whatever that means, whatever connection he has with the pack in his own reality, maybe they can feel an echo of it here.

“Hold on,” Scott says when Stiles lifts Claude into his arms. He reaches out to adjust the sleeve that she’s already caught her hand in. “That’s better.”

Stiles kisses Claude on the top of the head, and she makes a murmuring noise.

“Are you okay, dude?” Scott asks in a low voice.

“I don’t know.” Stiles isn’t the one burning from the inside out. “I don’t even know what I’m feeling right now.”

He wants to run upstairs and drag Derek out of that room. Show him that *he’s* Stiles, that he’s alive, and he’s okay, and not everything has to end with fire, and they can *prove* it. God, they can prove it if only they’re given a chance in this universe.

“Okay.” Scott’s forehead is creased in concern.

Stiles nods at him, and carries Claude up the stairs.

She won’t remember this.

He steps into the bedroom.

“Buh!” Claude looks between them, her eyes as wide as an owl’s. Then she squeals, delighted, and claps her hands together.

“Claudie,” the mage whispers. He tries to sit up, and cries out. Pain and frustration roll off him in waves. Stiles’s dad takes him carefully by the shoulders and helps him sit up, then Derek slides in behind him on the bed and holds him there.

The mage leans back against him, shivering. Stiles can see where Derek’s hand is on the mage’s chest. Black lines twist up the veins of his arm as he draws away his pain.

“Not too much, Der,” the mage murmurs. “Not too much.”

Stiles steps forward and sets Claude into his arms.

She won’t remember this.

*Please, don’t let her remember this.*

She’s too young to know that he’s hurting. She’s too young to know that she shouldn’t climb him, that she shouldn’t bounce, shouldn’t dig her hands and feet into his blistering burns.

The sound he makes isn’t just his physical pain, though, Stiles knows. It’s the sound of his heart breaking.

Stiles sets the bear and the blanket down beside him. He can’t look at Derek or his dad.

“Claudie,” the mage whispers. “You’re gonna grow up so happy here.” He raises a shaking hand to stroke her hair.

“Buh!”
“A-a-a, a-a-a,” the mage croons to her, “były sobie kotki dwa. A-a-a, kotki dwa, szarobure, szarobure obydwa.” His arms are shaking, becoming too weak to hold her. “Ach, śpij, kochanie, jesli gwiazdke z nieba chcesz - dostaniesz.”

Derek brackets his arms around the mage’s.

If you’d like a star from the sky I’ll give you one.

“Okay,” the mage whispers. “Okay, someone needs to take her now.”

His gaze fixes on Stiles’s. Stiles blinks, and hot tears slide down his cheeks. There are a thousand things he wants to say to him—I’m sorry. I wish I knew you. I’ll look after her. I never hated you—but he knows. He knows, because he’s giving Claude to Stiles.

Stiles bends close to take her.

“You’re a spark,” the mage whispers. “You could be more. You could have what we had.”

Stiles straightens up, Claude clinging to him. For a moment he doesn’t know what the mage means, then he sees the way his hands slide on his abdomen and his gaze settles on his daughter as though he’s remembering when he carried her inside him.

Stiles catches Derek’s gaze.


“Buh buh,” the mage murmurs, and then turns weakly into Derek’s embrace to cry.

***

Stiles doesn’t go back to his bedroom. He takes Claude downstairs and leaves her to the pack to watch. The pack. He doesn’t even think of their old divisions anymore: Derek’s betas, and his friends. They’re pack. Then he climbs the steps again. He leans against the wall outside his bedroom door, and then slides down it until he’s sitting on the floor, his arms curled around his drawn-up legs, his head resting on his knees.

Scott sits beside him.

All Stiles can think was this wasn’t how the day was supposed to go. They were supposed to look back on today and think of steaks, and pie, and Claude splashing in her little wading pool. Not this.

The mage isn’t lucid anymore.

The pain is too much for him.

“I don’t wanna… I don’t wanna drink the stuff anymore, Alan.”

“This is different,” Deaton’s tone is calm. “This’ll help you sleep.”

“Okay. Okay.”

It’s not long before he doesn’t know where he is anymore. He thinks Stiles’s dad is his dad, and
Derek is his Derek.

“Der,” Stiles hears him say, his voice alight with wonder. “I thought you were dead!”

“Not a scratch on me, Stiles,” Derek says, and Stiles doesn’t know where the hell he’s summoned up the smile that’s softening his tone.

“Omigod, that’s so great. That’s so fucking great.” His breath rasps. “Did I just say fuck in front of my dad?”

“Yeah, you did.”

“Shit! Dad, I’m sorry!”

“I guess you’re grounded, kiddo.”

“Yeah? Doesn’t sound…” His voice trails off, and Stiles holds his breath in sick anticipation. “Doesn’t sound so bad.”

There’s silence for a few minutes. Then the bedroom door opens and Melissa steps out. She glances at Scott and Stiles sitting in the hallway and, wordlessly, sits down on Stiles’s other side, and suddenly he’s in a McCall sandwich.

“Dad?” the mage asks after a while.

“Yeah, Stiles?”

“I’m real tired. Thanks for looking after me. You’re the best.”

He can tell his dad’s struggling to keep his voice even. “Right back at you, kiddo.”

Then, in a voice hardly over a whisper: “Love you, Der.”

Stiles clamps his hands over his mouth to stifle the sob that racks through him when Derek replies:

“I love you too, Stiles. I always will.”

After that it’s quiet.

***

The packs leaves in dribs and drabs, quiet and subdued.

Stiles doesn’t hear them go.

He curls up in his dad’s bed, and lies there until his dad joins him.

When he was eight, when his mom had just died, he slept in his dad’s bed for weeks. A part of him wanted to sleep where his mom had slept. Another part of him had been terrified that if let his dad out of his sight, he’d been gone too.

He remembers waking up back then and listening to his dad cry. When he was eight, Stiles had been a little embarrassed by that. His dad was a grown up, and a deputy, and he wasn’t supposed to cry at
night like he was a scared little kid. That was Stiles’s role.

Now though, Stiles knows better.

Now he hugs his dad, and doesn’t give a fuck if he’s a grown man and he’s crying. He just spent hours watching his kid die. Doesn’t matter what reality he was from. Doesn’t mean it wasn’t real.

“Never do that to me,” his dad says, his wet face pressed against Stiles’s shoulder. “Never.”

Stiles only closes his eyes, because he’s pretty sure that’s not a promise he can make.

“I love you, kiddo,” his dad says.

“Love you too, Dad.”

He waits until his dad is sleeping before he goes downstairs to be with Claude and Derek. Claude’s asleep on a folded up blanket on the lounge room floor. Derek’s sitting on the couch, but when Stiles appears in the doorway he’s on his feet in an instant, dragging Stiles into a tight embrace.

“Don’t ever let me go,” Stiles says.

“I won’t,” Derek tells him. “I won’t.”

One day soon, Stiles knows, the ‘I love you’ will be for him.
It takes about a week for the nightmares to stop.

Stiles dreams that he’s burning from the inside out.

He dreams that he’s trying to get to Derek, to Claude, and can’t reach them.

He dreams that his dad is crying over his deathbed.

It takes about a week for that to stop, and about another week until Stiles works up the courage to ask his dad and Derek what happened to the mage’s body.

Derek takes him to a place in the woods that Stiles doesn’t think he’s seen before. It’s nothing special, he thinks, just a little rocky outcrop that overlooks a shallow gorge below. A dry creek bed runs through the gorge.

Then he sees the initials carved into one of the trees.

A long list of them, all under the other, some so old they’ve been almost worn away by the elements. All of the initials end in H.

“At night you can see almost the whole sky,” Derek tells him. “When I was a kid, my mom brought me here and showed me this spot. It was kind of a tradition. We’d sit here for hours, and she’d teach me the names of the constellations.”

Claude, strapped into the carrier on Derek’s chest, kicks her legs and beams out at the woods from underneath her pink dinosaur hat.

“He’s here?”

“His ashes,” Derek says. “We couldn’t…”

Couldn’t risk a burial. It would be pretty damned hard to explain if some random hiker stumbled across the shallow grave, or a wild animal dug it up. Even after years, a face could be reconstructed by a forensics team, and how would the Sheriff of Beacon Hills explain that a body was found in the woods that looked exactly like his son? Oh, and that the DNA matched? There’s a shit fight that nobody needs.

Stiles runs his fingers over a set of initials. LH. Laura Hale? “You’d better bring Claude here when she’s big enough, because I can’t tell the difference between my ass and my Equuleus.”

Derek raises his eyebrows.

“That was an astronomy joke,” Stiles explains. “It’s a constellation.”

Derek huffs.

Stiles leans in and plants a loud, smacking kiss on Claude’s forehead. “Apparently Daddy’s not the astronomer he thinks he is. You’d better stick with me for the science stuff, Claudie.”

She squeals with delight.

Stiles smiles at Derek. “It’s nice. It’s a good spot. I’m sorry I couldn’t do it with you. The, um, ashes
thing.”

He hadn’t been ready to deal with it, not until today.

“Your dad came with me,” Derek says.

Stiles feels worse. “I hate that you and Dad had to watch him die.”

“Me too,” Derek says. He puts his hand on the side of Stiles’s face, and Stiles leans into the contact. Derek rubs his thumb gently along his cheekbone. “But I’m glad he didn’t have to be alone.”

“Me too.” What was it the mage had called him? Selflesswolf.

It’ll be a long time, Stiles knows, before he can divorce his memories of the mage from the horror, before he can think back to him without feeling fear and heartbreak. But eventually he knows he will. The memory of him will always be tinged with sadness, but maybe one day it will be bittersweet. Maybe one day there will even be something about it that’s beautiful.

Stiles will tell Claude how brave he was, how strong. How there was no power in any universe that was big enough to stop him from getting to hold her one last time. Then he’ll tell her how brave Daddy and Grandpa were, and how they made sure he was surrounded by love at the end.

Maybe one day he’ll stop being afraid that something else will tear the veil between realities and squeeze through the gap. Deaton has told him it’s incredibly rare, that it should be impossible, that the mage was…

_Incredible._

_Unthinkable._

_Unimaginably powerful._

Deaton says nobody else should ever be able to do that. He says that nobody should have been able to do it in the first place.

Stiles wonders about the spark inside him. Wonders if he should nurture it. Wonders if it will one day burst into a flame and incinerate him. Not everything has to end in fire, in ashes—he believes that—but he’s a little afraid of his spark now, he supposes. He doesn’t want to be like the mage. Doesn’t want to die like that.

Stiles sits down with his back against the trunk of the tree, and watches with a faint smile as Derek lets Claude out of her carrier and plays with her in the pine needles.

Awesome Mage Stiles was a freak. Well, that’s not how Deaton says it, but it’s what he means. Even with years of the most intense training in the world, Stiles will never have a fraction of that power.

Stiles is incredibly okay with that. Except for that one thing…

_“You could have what we had,”_ the mage had whispered to him.

Stiles rubs his hands against his abdomen and tries to imagine what it would feel like. A part of him thinks it’s weird to even be wondering about it. But then he looks over at Derek and Claude, and he knows there’s nothing more perfect in the world.

Derek glances over at him and raises his brows.
Stiles flushes and finds an interesting stick to stare at.

They haven’t even had sex, and Stiles is already planning babies and a forever after. Stupid. He’s sixteen. He has high school to graduate. And then college to worry about. Although he can always take a break from college, right? Because the baby book did talk about the ideal gap between siblings, and…

And shit. He’s totally planning on being a teen mom.

Somebody stop him, please.

Stiles picks up the stick and traces a few patterns in the dirt with it. He can’t stop the dumb grin from spreading over his face.

So he wants to be a pregnant teen.

So the fuck what?

This is Beacon Hills. This is magic. This is the life of the kid who runs with wolves.

The normal rules do not apply.

***

School gets better.

They all sit together at lunch now: Derek’s pack and his friends. Stiles doesn’t really notice the divisions anymore. Sometimes he’ll watch Lydia going through algebra with Boyd, or watch Allison leaning close to share a joke with Isaac, or Erica demanding a ride on the back of Scott’s bike, and he’ll marvel that he never saw this coming, but he’s glad about it. Sometimes Danny or a few of the other guys from the lacrosse team sit with them, and Stiles wonders if they’re accidentally popular now.

He’s not really sure, since he’s never been popular before.

But then he thinks that no, they’re not popular exactly. They just don’t give a fuck. They have Lydia, who was once one of the most popular girls in the school—rich, pretty, and, well, okay, a bitch—all the way through to Boyd, who was a quiet loner, and Stiles himself, who was the weird, loud ADD kid. They kind of defy easy definition now, and it turns out a lot of people like that.

Stiles is actually happier at school than he’s been in a long time.

He’s happiest with Claude and Derek though, either at home or at Derek’s loft, wherever he doesn’t have to pretend to be Claude’s babysitter if someone spots them in public. He’s pretty sure there’s a rumor doing the rounds at school that he’s dating an older guy who has a kid, and he’s not sure what the hell that does for his reputation.

Oh well. At least people know his name, right?
He can’t wait until he’s old enough to tell people that Claude is his daughter too.

Weirdly, it’s his dad who comes closest to letting the cat out of the bag.

Stiles is delivering him dinner at the station on Wednesday night. He and Derek are on the way to Derek’s place to meet the pack and watch a movie, and Claude isn’t going to sit patiently in the car when they’re outside grandpa’s work, so they bring her in to say hello.

They make it all the way to his dad’s office—“Yeah, this is my friend Derek and his daughter, Claudie. Yeah, she’s cute right?”—and that’s when Stiles sees it:

“ Seriously, Dad, you have a picture of Claude on your desk?”

Not just Claude, but Claude sitting on Stiles’s lap showing her new teeth to the camera as she beams. And Derek’s sitting beside them, an arm around Stiles’s shoulders. Claude’s the only one looking at the camera. Derek and Stiles are looking at each other, which Stiles figures explains how he doesn’t remember the photo being taken.

He makes a face. “Dad! We couldn’t look more like a couple if we tried! What are you going to say if anyone asks about it?”

His dad sticks his thumbs in his belt. “Well, first I’ll probably ask what they’re doing around my side of the desk. Usually my son’s the only one pushy enough to think he owns the place.”

Oh. Oh. Derek did not just laugh.

“Dad, I’m serious!”

His dad squeezes his shoulder. “Kiddo, if anyone asks, I’ll tell them that’s my son, his boyfriend, and his boyfriend’s daughter. Because listen, I might not be able to tell the truth, but there’s nothing in the world that’s going to stop me from putting a picture of my granddaughter on my desk, okay?”

“Fine,” Stiles huffs, turning away so his dad can’t see how pleased he secretly is.

“Now, what’s for my dinner?”

“A zucchini and kale salad with pine nuts,” Stiles announces, and puts the bag on the desk.

His dad looks a little like a cornered animal.

Serves him right!

“And no ordering out for a burger and fries,” Stiles tells him. “Make no mistake, I will know.”

“Sure, kid,” his dad says. He takes Claude out of Derek’s arms. “And how’s my princess, huh?”

“Dad, we’re not doing the whole gender roles thing.”

“I know,” his dad says. “But Claudie knows I was talking about Princess Leia, right, Claudie?”

“Buh!”

His dad is incorrigible.

“Okay, I’m heading over to Derek’s for movie night with the pack,” Stiles says. “I’ll be home by midnight.”
“By eleven,” his dad says. “School night.”

Stiles rolls his eyes. “Fine.”

“Who’s got Claude tonight?” his dad asks.

“I do,” Derek says.

“I guess I’ll see you when I see you, princess.” He kisses Claude on the forehead. And laughs when she screws her eyes shut. “Okay, bye bye!”

“Buh pah!”

Stiles’s jaw drops. “What was that? What did she just say? Pah? What’s pah?”

Is it Grandpa? Did his dad just beat him and Derek to Claude’s first word? Or is it just a new noise? Can he actually put it in her baby keepsake book as her first word? Because he already put buh in, even though he’s not sure it’s an actual word, because he got sick of all the blank spaces just staring at him.

“You’re over-thinking it, kid,” his dad tells him.

“It’s what he does,” Derek says wryly, reaching out to take a squirming Claude back. “I’ll make sure he’s home by eleven.”

“Thanks, son,” his dad says, and Stiles’s heart skips a beat when he realizes what his dad just said. Who he was talking to.

Holy shit.

This is a big moment, right?

The biggest.

Stiles isn’t sure if he should acknowledge it or just act totally cool like he didn’t hear a thing, or he did, but it’s not even a big deal. He freezes instead, unable to make a decision.

Derek slaps him gently on the back. “You’re over-thinking it.”

Stiles stares at him, wide-eyed.

Behind him, his dad snorts with laughter. “You’d better take him away, Derek, before he, you know, turns this moment into something awkward.”

“Yeah,” Derek says, grabbing Stiles by the wrist. “We’d hate for that to happen.”

Stiles is aware he’s gaping like a fish, he just can’t seem to stop.

“I’m fine,” he manages at last, as Derek’s dragging him toward the door. “I’m totally fine, and cool, and whatever. Bye, Dad!”

“Bye, Stiles!” His dad’s laughter follows them down the corridor.
Movie night is a total bust.

Stiles stares at the six pizzas on the table, then checks his phone again.

Un-fucking-believable.

Every single member of the pack has managed to come up with some totally bullshit excuse as to why they can’t make it. And Derek’s just dropped over fifty bucks on pizza.

“This is—” He lowers his voice so Claude, smashing blocks together in the corner, doesn’t hear. “—fucking ridiculous!”

Derek shrugs. “It doesn’t matter.”

“It does!” Stiles jabs him in the chest with a finger. “You’re the alpha. It’s disrespectful!”

“Um, seriously?” Derek’s eyebrows do something complicated. “I don’t want to call you on your blatant hypocrisy, Stiles, but you’re the most disrespectful member of the pack. Probably of any pack. Ever. In all of history. And every reality in the multiverse.”

“Wow,” Stiles says. “I’m so glad you didn’t want to call me on it, or otherwise that might have been harsh.” He scowls. “Der, look at all that pizza! It’s wasteful.”

Derek shrugs again. “It’ll microwave.”

“But, come on!” Stiles shoves his phone in Derek’s face. “Look at this one from Scott. He says he has to study. Scott. Disregarding the fact that exams were last week, since when does Scott ever choose studying over movies? His poor life choices are why he’s constantly in danger of failing!” He swipes his thumb over the screen. “And Isaac says he has to go emergency scarf shopping, which I’d totally believe because he’s a douche about his scarves, but since I was teasing him about wearing one at lunch today, I know it’s a lie. And Lydia! Lydia just says that movie night is now date night. Can you believe that? I didn’t even know she was seeing anyone, and…”

He trails off when he sees the color rise in Derek’s cheeks.

Well, fuck.

He checks Lydia’s message again: So, movie night is now date night. xoxo.

That, um, that actually reads differently the second time around.

“Oh sweet zombie Jesus,” he murmurs, his face burning. “It’s our date night.” He can hardly bear look at Derek. “Did you know about this?”

“No. I swear.”

“Oh, god.” Stiles pinches the bridge of his nose. “Dude, if I’d known it was date night, I would have worn something with a little less squashed banana on it.”

Thanks, Claude.

“You’re not mad?”

“Why would I be mad?” Stiles asks. Seriously, why? Although he’d rather all his friends weren’t
actively trying to get him and Derek into each other’s pants, he’s not going to waste this opportunity for some fun grown-up times with Derek. *Carpe diem,* right? He flips the top pizza box open. “So. Let’s do this thing. Pizza first, then a movie, and then can we make out and stuff?”

Derek swallows. “Um. Okay.”

Stiles shoves some pizza in his face.

*Awesome.*

***

Claude is asleep by seven-thirty.

Derek and Stiles go upstairs to Derek’s bedroom. That doesn’t have to mean anything, Stiles tells himself. It doesn’t mean they’re going to have sex. It just means they don’t want Claude to wake up and see her dads making out on the couch.

They make out on Derek’s bed instead, and it takes Stiles seconds—*nanoseconds*—to get hard and start rocking against Derek’s thigh like last time. Except this time he’s lying on Derek’s bed, and Derek is a hot, heavy weight on top of him, and there are too many clothes. Way too many clothes. Stiles squirms, trying to get his fingers to his fly, or to Derek’s, and Derek catches his hands and holds them up over his head. He presses them into the mattress, and wow, okay, Stiles suddenly gets why people sometimes like to be restrained. Because the idea of Derek having total control over his body? That’s *hot.*

“Der, c’mon.” He totally sounds like a whining kid, and he doesn’t even care. He hooks his legs around Derek’s thighs, trying to drag him closer. Derek’s too strong, dammit. “Derek!”

Derek licks his lips. “What do you want, Stiles?”

“I want…” He can’t stop staring at Derek’s mouth. “I want…” What was the question again? “Not letting you rub off against me this time,” Derek says, his voice low, and Stiles almost cringes in embarrassment as he remembers rutting against Derek’s thigh last time, like an over-excited puppy. “Not when I can finally get my mouth on your dick.”


“Yeah,” he breathes. “Yeah, that sounds much better!”

Derek’s smile is practically evil. “Keep your hands up there, okay?”

Stiles nods, his throat dry.

Derek stands up. He reaches for the hem of his Henley, and draws it up over his head.

He has way too many abdominal muscles. Seriously. That’s not even a six pack. That’s a six pack, plus another six pack just in case. Stiles wants to trace every inch of those muscles, of his skin, with his fingers. And then his tongue. His dick jerks in his jeans as he imagines it, and he squirms again.

Derek steps toward the bed again. Thanks to the tightness of his jeans, Stiles can tell he’s not the
only one with an erection. Derek drops a hand to his crotch and adjusts himself as he kneels back on the bed, and that is possibly the hottest thing Stiles has ever seen. Because he did that. Somehow pale, scrawny weak human Stiles has made Derek hard.

Life’s just full of surprises, right?

“Your turn,” Derek says, and slides Stile’s shirt up. His hands are hot against Stiles’s skin, and Stiles shivers. Derek sweeps his hands up slowly, as though he can’t touch enough of Stiles’s skin. Stiles almost bites through his bottom lip when Derek’s fingers first graze his nipples, then pinch them.

“Fuck!” He almost jack-knifes off the bed.

“Shh.” Derek takes the opportunity to tug his shirt off and toss it onto the floor. “You like that?”

“Dude, I like everything.”

Derek pushes him gently back onto the bed, and follows him down. He nuzzles against Stiles’s throat for a moment, kissing and licking and scenting him, then moves his mouth down.

Stiles moans when Derek’s tongue laves his left nipple. Then—fuck—nips it gently with his teeth. Then Derek shifts and does the same with his right. Then left again, then right, until Stiles is gasping for breath, his dick leaking in his suddenly too-tight underwear, his body shifting restlessly, wanting more.

“Please, Der,” Stiles moans, not even sure what he wants. Anything Derek can give him, he thinks. “Please.”

Derek shifts down, his mouth leaving a hot trail from Stiles’s belly button down. Stiles give an embarrassingly unmanly squeak when Derek reaches his jeans. Derek kneels up, and Stiles watches, breathless, as he tugs open the button of Stiles’ fly, and then pulls the zip down.

“Oh,” Stiles whispers.

Derek hooks his fingers into the waistband of Stiles’s jeans and tugs them down. He manages to snag his underwear on the way, and Stiles gasps as his erection is suddenly freed, and, Derek’s staring at it, and fuck—

Is it okay?

It is the right shape?

The right size?

Should he have shaved or waxed or something?

What if there’s something wrong with him?

“Stiles, you’re so fucking hot.” Derek meets his gaze. “I want to blow you, but I don’t think I can wait much longer myself. Can we try something else?”

“Anything,” Stiles says, before it occurs to him that’s a pretty dumb thing to say, except this is Derek, and Stiles trusts him. Loves him.

Derek stands up again, and strips Stiles’s jeans and underwear all the way off. Then he takes his own jeans off, and Stiles averts his eyes at first, but then why? He’s allowed to look. So he does. Derek’s not cut like Stiles is. He’s maybe a little bigger. Not longer, although, hell, apparently he’s a grower,
but definitely a little thicker.

Stiles licks his lips.

Then blushes because he just totally licked his lips when he was staring at Derek’s dick.

Derek smiles at him and climbs back onto the bed. “Put your legs around me again.”

“Oh, okay,” Stiles says, then he’s hit by nerves. “Um, Der, I don’t think I’m ready to… um, you know.”

“I’m not going to penetrate you,” Derek says, and is there an uglier word in the world than penetrate? Stiles doesn’t think so. He lowers himself over Stiles, and lines their dicks up together. “Just this, okay?”

Oh, okay. Frottage. Stiles is onboard with that. He relaxes a little, and hooks his legs behind Derek. Derek reaches up under the pillow beside Stiles’s head and pulls out a tube of lube.

“Seriously? You keep that there?”

“Knew you were coming over tonight,” Derek says, and then flushes. “I didn’t know we’d be doing this, but I…ah…”

“You jerk off after you spend time with me?” Stiles asks, touched when Derek actually looks embarrassed. “Dude, me too! Totally!”

Derek slicks up his hand and then slides it between their bodies. “Yours too,” he says.

Oh god. It’s like holding hands in the dirtiest way possible. Hot, slippery hands, with dicks. Stiles lets his head fall back as he and Derek rock against one another, fingers entwined, dicks rubbing together. Derek licks and sucks at his pulse point, and Stiles moans and shivers.

“Oh god,” he groans. “Jesus. Der. Derek!”

Derek growls, squeezing their dicks, and Stiles jerks and shudders as he comes. There’s a lot, and it takes Stiles a second to realize that Derek’s coming too, and it’s hot and messy and kind of sticky and gross and Stiles doesn’t even care.

He pulls his sticky hand free and drags it against Derek’s sheet before he cups his cheeks with his hands and angles his head toward him to steal a soft kiss. “That was awesome, Hotwolf.”

Derek nips at his lower lip. “Next time I’ll blow you.”

Stiles looks at the clock beside Derek’s bed. “Der, it’s not even eight o’clock. I think I’ve got at least three more next times in me before my curfew.”

Derek huffs out a laugh. “Sounds like a challenge.”

Stiles cocks a brow. “Are you up for it?”

Derek raises his brows. “Do you actually doubt it?”

No, he doesn’t.

Not at all.
Stiles arrives home at ten to eleven, flushed, and dog tired, and dehydrated.

His dad is watching TV. “Good night?”

Stiles pretends not to realize it’s a question.

“Good night!” he calls, and hurries upstairs.

“I can see your hickeys!”

“La! La! La!” Stiles yells back, hands over his ears.

Okay, so his dad called Derek ‘son’ tonight. He’s not going to shoot him now, is he?

Or, if he does, he’ll probably at least feel pretty bad about it.

Stiles takes some consolation in that.
Claude takes her first steps the week before Derek’s twenty-third birthday. Later, when Stiles replays the video for his dad, it’s kind of blurry, and most of the audio is Stiles yelling excitedly: “Derek, are you getting it? Are you getting it, Derek? Is it recording? Derek! You’re missing it!” Luckily once Claude gets the hang of walking there’s no stopping her, so there are plenty more opportunities to capture the moment.

Her vocabulary is also coming along in leaps and bounds. Stiles gets it in his head that it would be the best birthday present ever if Claude called Derek “Daddy”, and he trains her for days, showing her pictures of Derek on his phone and repeating the word so often that it loses all meaning.

Stiles is obviously too good a trainer, because, the morning after the full moon when Derek arrives to collect her—but a whole day before his birthday—Claude greets him with a burbling “Dah dah!”

Derek cries.

Sensitivewolf.

Stiles cries too, because it’s a milestone her real parents should have celebrated.

Derek knows what he’s thinking, like always. He wraps his arms around him. “The best way to honor their sacrifice is to love her.”

Stiles is still a little emotional when he gets to school and reminds everyone about Derek’s birthday on Friday night. Stiles has a plan. They’re having Derek’s party in the Preserve. It will be beautiful. There will be picnic blankets and cushions. There will be fairy lights and candles in mason jars. It will look like something out of a movie. The sort of movie where the romantic guy with no money but a whole lot of love (Stiles) woos the hottest girl in the world (Derek).

It’s probably for the best that Stiles never shares that with Derek.

He slides into his seat in English, opens up his notebook, and goes through the checklist for Derek’s birthday. Everyone is bringing a dish because, yeah, Stiles has no money. Not after he bought Claude that outfit for the party, anyway. Also, the Jeep is making that weird noise again, so that’s bound to cost him. Stiles feels kind of bad because he hasn’t gotten Derek a present, but then Derek’s not really into possessions. Hence the grand romantic gesture instead.

Lydia sits down next to him and inspects her nails. They’re perfectly glossy, as always. Then she peers at his list. “Food and drinks for that many people? You’re going to need more than two coolers.” She takes her lipstick out of her bag. “I’ll bring another one.”

“You’re the best, Lyds.”

“Don’t call me that.” She opens her English textbook. “Also, do we need to talk about what you’re going to wear for the party?”

Stiles blinks at her, then looks down at himself. He’s wearing his jeans, his Converse, and his t-shirt with an open flannel shirt over the top. “Um… kind of something like this?”

Lydia purses her lips. “Hmm.”

“Lyds,” Stiles begins, then sees the look in her eye. “Lydia. Derek doesn’t care about stuff like that.”
“Yes,” Lydia says with a sigh, “but don’t you think he’d like it if he saw that you’d made the effort to do something special?”

Stiles blinks at his list. There will be tea lights. In mason jars. “I am doing something special.”

The best part? Despite being a total sourwolf, and despite repeatedly telling Stiles that he doesn’t “do” birthdays—as though they’re something you do, instead of something that you have—Derek is letting Stiles make these plans. He doesn’t even know any specifics, and Stiles has forbidden him from putting pressure on his betas to find out.

Lydia taps her nails against her desk. “Okay, so don’t you think it’s a little strange to put so much effort into making the woods all pretty, without doing the same thing for yourself?”

Stiles chews his pen. She actually has a point.

“Besides,” Lydia says, lowering her voice, “the nicest presents come in the best wrapping paper.”

Stiles feels his face start to burn, because, okay, he did kind of have an idea of what to give Derek for his birthday, but it’s not something he can keep. In fact, it’s something he can help Stiles get rid of once and for all. And now all he can imagine is Derek unwrapping him.

Lydia smiles. “Hmm. Well I guess I know what Derek’s getting for his birthday.”

“You are evil,” Stiles hisses at her, because she’s totally figured out the rest of his plan for Derek’s birthday. First, a magical night-time picnic in the Preserve. Second, doing it. Doing The Sex for real. Because Stiles’s body is ready, and he’s not at all freaking out whenever he thinks about it.

Not at all.

Shut up.

Stiles tries to lean casually back in his seat and ignore Lydia, but it turns into a flail and instead he manages to drop all his papers over the floor just as class starts.

***

“Big night tomorrow night,” his dad says that afternoon when Stiles gets home from school, and Stiles almost has a coronary.


As deflection goes, it’s a terrible attempt. His dad looks up from the report he’s reading, his glasses perched on his nose, and narrows his eyes. “I was talking about Derek’s party. What were you talking about, Stiles?”

Uh oh.

His dad closes up his report and shakes his head slightly. “How the hell did you ever even manage to lie to me?”

“Um…” His mind is a blank. A serious blank.
The only thing he’s even capable of thinking about is the twelve-pack of condoms he bought at the
gas station yesterday. And he threw away the receipt, didn’t he? He’s sure he did. He didn’t leave it
lying around anywhere his dad could find it, did he?

Oh god.

Now all he can think is condoms condoms condoms.

The actual condoms are still in the bottom of his underwear drawer.

He hopes.

His dad doesn’t go digging around in his room.

He hopes and prays.

“Sit down, Stiles.”

Stiles sits opposite him at the small kitchen table. He wonders if it’s always going to be like this; if
his dad will always have the knack of making him feel as though he’s just a kid. Which, okay, fair
enough, he’s sixteen, but he bets his dad will still be doing this to him in ten and twenty years.

“You’re sixteen,” his dad says, and holy crap, he is a mind reader. He rubs his forehead and sighs.
“Listen, I know I can’t tell you what to do. I know your circumstances aren’t exactly normal, but I
just want to know that you’ll be careful.”

“I will,” Stiles says, a little too quickly. “I bought condoms!”

Shit.

What is even wrong with him?

His dad grimaces. He looks physically pained. “I was talking more in a general emotional sense.”

“I mean,” Stiles says, trying to backtrack, “no, I didn’t buy condoms. What would I possibly need
them for?”

Except there really is no backtracking from here.

“No, let’s start with that,” his dad says. “You know how to put a condom on correctly?”

“Um, yeah?”

“Because I will get a banana right now and show you.”

“Not necessary, Dad, I swear!” This talk is going to be awkward enough without an accompanying
visual demonstration.

His dad seems relieved. “Okay.”

Stiles stares fixedly at the tabletop. “Okay.”

He’s hoping that’s it for The Talk, but apparently his dad isn’t done yet. “I’ve learned a lot about you
in the last few weeks, son.”

Stiles meet his gaze worriedly. “You have?”
“It’s not all bad, don’t worry,” his dad teases gently. “Listen, Stiles, I’m incredibly proud of you, okay? But you’re still a kid. You’re still my kid. And I know that you think you’ve got it all figured out but, trust me, you’re not as smart as you think you are at sixteen.”

Okay. Ouch.

His dad must read the hurt expression on his face.

“That’s all teenagers, Stiles, not just you.” His dad’s tone is even. “Hell, when I was sixteen I had screaming arguments with my folks because I wanted to quit school and play bass in my buddy Steve’s grunge band.”

“You were in a grunge band?” Stiles’s jaw drops.

“For a week,” his dad says, a smile tugging at the corner of his mouth. “We were terrible. My point is, if I’d done what I’d wanted when I was sixteen, it would have been the dumbest decision of my life.”

“Oh, or you’d have a Grammy, hello!”

He dad leans across the table and swats him gently on the head. “Don’t make fun of me while I’m trying to impart my fatherly wisdom.”

Stiles grins. “Sorry.”

“I just want you to be careful, kid,” his dad tells him. “And I want you to remember that the law is there for a reason.” He holds up his hand to forestall any objection Stiles might have. “No, I’m not going to arrest Derek, unless you two do something idiotic and tell people, and force my hand. But the law is there because it recognizes that, however smart you are, and whatever you think to the contrary, most sixteen-year-olds aren’t ready to have an adult relationship.”

Stiles figures this is the most non-judgemental response he could get from his dad. Who is also the sheriff, after all. “I get that, Dad, I really do. But I’m not like most sixteen-year-olds.”

His dad’s smile is tinged with sadness. “Kid, when that other you was up there, lying in your bed… Jesus.” He passes his hand on front of his eyes, and sucks in a breath. “The most powerful mage who ever existed, according to Deaton. But you know what? When it came down to it that didn’t even matter. He was a sixteen-year-old kid who needed his dad.”

“I get that,” Stiles says. “I get that because I don’t think I’ll ever stop needing my dad either.”

His dad stands up, and for a second Stiles thinks he’s picked an odd place to walk out of the conversation, but then he’s motioning for Stiles to get up too, and pulling him into a hug when he does.

“I’m not telling you what to do,” his dad says, “because God knows it wouldn’t make a lick of difference. I’m just asking you to be careful.”

“I will.” Stiles pats him on the back.

His dad squeezes him tighter. “And I want you to remember that you can talk to me about anything, okay? Anything. I like Derek a lot, but if I ever have to pick a side, there’s no question it’ll be yours. Got it?”

“Dad, that’s sweet,” Stiles tells him. “Also kind of unfair. I mean, I can be a total dick sometimes.”
His dad releases him. “It’s not my job to be fair, kid. It’s my job to have your back.”

At times like these Stiles doesn’t have the words to tell his dad how fucking great he is. How _beyond_ fucking great he is, and how much Stiles loves him. But he figures he knows.

***

On Friday evening, Derek picks Stiles up and they drive out to the Preserve. Claude has already left, with Stiles’s dad and Melissa.

“You look nice,” Derek tells him, and Stiles silently thanks Lydia.

He’s wearing his usual jeans and his Converse, but Lydia bought him a button-down blue shirt that somehow manages to cling to his torso in a way that doesn’t make him look too scrawny. When Stiles worried aloud about the cost, Lydia told him she considered it part of her contribution to Derek’s birthday.

“Thanks.” He studies Derek’s face for a moment. He looks grim, which isn’t exactly unusual. “Are you okay?”

Derek grips the wheel tightly. “I haven’t celebrated my birthday since before the fire.”

“Oh.” Stiles can’t say he’s surprised.

Derek frowns. “I don’t really know what to _do._”

“You just have to try and not bite people’s faces off.” Stiles reaches over and touches his shoulder. “Der, you don’t have to worry about this. It’s the pack, plus my dad and Scott’s mom. Nobody’s going to mind if you need to take a minute or anything. We get it.”

Derek’s mouth is a thin line.

“But you know why I kind of had to make a big deal out of this, right?”

Derek’s expression softens, and he nods.

“We’re not replacing your family,” Stiles tells him. “But, you know, we’re family too. Me and Claude and the pack.”

Derek exhales slowly. “I know.”

“Also, this is totally my way of easing you into birthday parties again,” Stiles says. “Because in a few months Claude will be one, and there will be cake and face painting, and probably a pirates and princesses theme.”

“I thought we weren’t doing gender roles.”

“Dude, I’m totally going as a princess,” Stiles says with a grin.

Derek laughs.

“Just for that, so are you. And Claude is going to be a kickass pirate.”
“I am not going as a princess, Stiles. Or a pirate.”

“Sure you’re not, sourwolf.” Stiles rolls his eyes, because he knows that if he presented Derek with a pink frilly dress and demanded he wear it, for Claude, that Derek would totally do it. He’s an awesome dad, that’s why.

Derek snorts, but the tension has bled from him. “Okay, so where are we going.”

“The Preserve,” Stiles tells him, clipping on his seatbelt.

He makes Derek pull over to the side of the road before they get there, and hands him his birthday present, because this isn’t something he wants Derek to open in front of his dad. Then he sits there nervously and tries not to fidget as Derek tears the paper off the small box.

The small box of condoms.

Derek stares at the box for a moment, then turns his head to stare at Stiles.

Stiles squirms.

Derek’s raises his brows. “Are you sure?”

“Yes.”

Derek lifts his nose. “You smell like fear.”

“That’s because I’m terrified,” Stiles tells him. “Der, it’s kind of a big deal and, yeah. I’m kind of nervous about it. And you know what sucks? Having a boyfriend who is like a giant mood ring, and won’t even let me pretend I’m all casual and not freaking out.”

Derek looks worried.

Stiles huffs. “I’ve seen your dick, okay? I know how big it is. That’s why I’m nervous. But I wouldn’t have arranged for Claude to spend the night with Dad if I wasn’t sure I wanted to do this. I trust you, Der. I…” Fuck it. Go big or go home, right? “I love you.”

Derek reaches over and cups his cheek. “I love you too.”

Oh, thank fuck. Because that could have been totally awkward.

Stiles sags a little in relief. “Awesome.”

Derek’s mouth quirks. “Awesome?”

“Shut up and drive, Birthdaywolf,” Stiles tells him. He points out the windshield. “Onward!”

***

He and Derek are the last to arrive by design.

And fuck yes, it’s magical. It’s a glittering shining wonderland.

Claude screeches when she sees them. “Dah dah! Buh tata!”
She totters forward, holding Stiles’s dad’s hand for balance on the uneven ground, looking totally fucking adorable in her wolf suit. Derek picks her up with a laugh, and swings her in the air while she squeals.

“Seriously,” he says to Stiles. “A wolf?”

“It was that or Little Red,” Stiles says. “And I thought I’d save that for Halloween. For me.”

His dad groans.

At times like this a brain to mouth filter would be handy. Or even just some volume control. Still, whatevs.

Stiles leads Derek over to the biggest picnic blanket. It’s the one piled with the most cushions. “Now, this is where you sit tonight, and we feed you treats and cake, and you smile, dammit, because it’s your birthday and we’re all awesome.”

“You’re all awesome,” Derek agrees softly, and pulls Stiles forward for a gentle kiss. “But especially you.”

Warmth floods through Stiles. He pushes Derek toward the blanket, and then goes to get them both drinks from the cooler.

It’s a beautiful night. It’s cool, but not cold.

Allison and Lydia sit together on a rug. Scott lies down with his head on Allison’s lap and she runs her fingers through his hair as she talks to Lydia. Stiles should totally grow his hair out, because that looks really nice and Derek absolutely needs to do that to him.

Erica weaves Boyd a bracelet out of grass, and makes him wear it. She weaves Claude one as well. It lasts about twenty seconds on Claude’s wrist before she tugs it apart and then looks confused about where it went.

Isaac and Claude play growly wolves together. It mostly involves Isaac flashing his eyes at Claude and Claude making noises that are supposed to be growls or howls, but mostly come out as “Baaaaah!”

Melissa and Stiles’s dad sit together and talk, and, Stiles hopes, ignore the way their respective sons are getting snugly with the ones they love. Scott is practically asleep in Allison’s lap now, and Stiles is curled up against Derek’s side, and is that weird? In front of their parents, is that weird?

It gets weirder.

When the food is gone and the first of the tea lights have started to drown in their own wax, with the glade now lit only with fairy lights and the glow of the moon, Stiles gets sleepy. He’s not the only one. Isaac sneaks a little closer, holding Claude still, and lies down on Derek’s other side. Derek lifts an arm and lets him burrow closer.

Erica isn’t far behind him.

Boyd’s next.

Scott’s the last one to join them, snuggling up to Stiles.

“It’s a wolf thing,” Stiles hears Lydia tell his dad and Melissa.
It’s a puppy pile, and Stiles has never been inside one before. He likes it. It’s warm and comfortable, and he could seriously sleep for hours like this. Days, probably. Except Claude isn’t settling, is she? No, Claude’s bouncing between the pack members like a little marauder, grabbing at hair and ears and fingers and whatever she can reach.

Derek gives her a warning growl—*settle down, pup*—which she ignores because he might be the alpha but he’s also her daddy, and she knows her daddy will let her do whatever the hell she wants.

She’s a monster.

Erica snorts as Claude wriggles between her and Boyd.

“Baaaah!”

Isaac stifles an actual laugh.

Stiles looks up at the stars. The sky is partially obscured by the shifting treetops, but the stars he sees are brilliant. He wonders how far away they are from the place Derek took him, where the mages’s ashes are scattered. He wonders if the mage can see them now. He hopes he can.

Wherever he is now, Stiles believes it’s with his Derek, and their pack.

When she’s old enough to understand, they’ll tell Claude. They’ll make sure she knows that she was so loved he tore holes in the universe to save her. And maybe Stiles and Derek can’t do that, but they can love her just as much. Their love won’t be measured in power or magic, but in nights like these, when Claude is surrounded by joy and laughter and comfort.

Stiles turns his face toward Derek, and catches his smile.

“Love you,” he whispers, and he doesn’t even care that the entire pack is right there.

“Love you too,” Derek replies. He rolls toward Stiles, dislodging Isaac.

The puppy pile collapses like a Jenga tower, in huffs and puffs and wolfy mumbles of discontent. Stiles doesn’t care. He puts his hands on Derek’s shoulders and pulls Derek on top of him for a kiss.

If this were a movie, this would totally be the right place to cue the fireworks and roll the credits.

This isn’t a movie.

“Dude,” Scott says at last. “I don’t want to interrupt or anything, but you’re lying on my arm and you’re kind of heavy.”
Chapter 14

Stiles has never been so nervous walking into Derek’s loft as he is right at this moment. He feels like he’s reached some sort of precipice—he’s standing right at the reach of his courage, staring over the divide at where he wants to be, and he’s terrified. It’s dumb. He trusts Derek, he loves Derek, so why the hell is his heart racing like he’s about to have a panic attack?

Derek shrugs off his leather jacket and leaves it hanging over the end of the couch.

Stiles excuses himself and hurries to the bathroom. He sends Scott a panicked text: *Bro, knotting. Is that a thing with a werewolf dick?*

It’s a painstaking few minutes before Scott replies: *WHAT? NO! WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOU?*

Okay, so that’s something of a relief.

Stiles heads outside again and distracts himself by crossing over to Claude’s crib—she’s had one at each house since the first time Derek tried to fit one in the Camaro—and reaches in to pick up her plastic bath duck. She’s been taking it to bed with her lately, and Stiles hopes she doesn’t fuss about not having it with her tonight. He runs his fingers over the duck’s beak.

Derek comes and stands behind him, wrapping his arms around him. He leans his chin on Stiles’s shoulder. His stubble scratches Stiles’s ear. How many times have they stood there like this, watching Claude sleep?

Great. They’re both creepers.

“It’s weird she’s not here,” Stiles says at last. He’s not sure if he’s trying to start a conversation or create a diversion.

This suddenly seems like a really big step. Scary big.

Derek nuzzles his throat. “So, want to know what I got myself for my birthday?”

“You actually got something? Something for yourself?”

“For myself and the pack,” Derek says, a little defensively, because of course Derek would never get something purely for himself. Like a normal person.

“What is it?” Stiles asks curiously.

“Netflix,” Derek says.

“Are. You. Serious?” Stiles gasps and spins around. “Derek, this is like a whole new world for you!”

Derek raises his eyebrows. “So go and pick something to watch.”

Oh.

*Oh.*

Wait, what?

“Aren’t we going to...?” Stiles makes an incredibly awkward hand gesture.
“We’re going to watch a movie,” Derek says.

Stiles doesn’t know whether to be relieved or disappointed. But it’s actually really nice to spoon with Derek on his couch, and watch some dumb movie with plenty of explosions. It’s especially nice that Derek is the big spoon and hooks a leg over Stiles to keep him close. It’s so nice that pretty soon Stiles forgets about the movie altogether, and rolls over to make out with Derek instead.

Derek does that thing where he gets a leg between Stiles’s thighs, which is like a total invitation for Stiles to hump his leg, right? Derek doesn’t complain. He just presses one hand between Stiles’s shoulder blades and slides the other one down the back of Stiles’s jeans. He cups Stiles’s left ass cheek and encourages him to rock back and forward on his thigh.

Stiles huffs a laugh against his throat. “Dude, whose birthday is this again?”

Derek moves his head and catches Stiles’s lower lip between his teeth. He tugs on the flesh gently, then releases it and licks a stripe up Stiles’s cheek.

Stiles squirms. Wolves are weird. Or maybe that’s just Derek. Who even cares? It’s tactile and wet and Stiles likes it. “Der…Derek!”

Derek slips a finger into the cleft of his ass, and Stiles jerks forward.

“Derek!”

“You want to stop?”

“Oh my god, no, why would you even ask that?” Stiles rubs his cheek against Derek’s. “But I’m about to come in my pants.”

Derek growls, the sound low and pleased. “And?”

Stiles hooks a hand around the back of his neck. And bites his earlobe, for being a fucking smugwolf. “Let’s go upstairs. Now.”

He squeaks as Derek sits up and swings his feet to the floor, at the same time somehow manipulating Stiles’s limbs so Stiles is straddling his lap. Stiles laughs, and puts his arms around Derek’s neck as Derek stands up.

“Are you trying to impress me with your super wolf strength?” he asks, wrapping his legs around Derek’s hips.

Derek grins. “Is it working?”

“Oh, my god, yes!”

Derek carries him up the stairs, and Stiles laughs into the side of his neck. Derek sets him down on the edge of the bed, his feet touching the floor, and stands there between his knees. He leans forward and tugs at one of the buttons on Stiles’s shirt.

“I like this shirt.” Derek’s voice is soft, almost reverent.

“Lydia said it suited me.”

“It does.” Derek slips the button through the buttonhole.

Stiles watches him, silent. His laughter when Derek was carrying him up the stairs has faded, but it
was cathartic. He doesn’t feel as anxious any more. He’s relaxed enough to enjoy this moment without worrying about whatever happens next.

Derek finishes unbuttoning Stiles’s shirt, and Stiles shifts up obligingly so he can slide it off his shoulders. Then Derek kneels on the floor, between Stiles’s knees, and wow, okay, he has to close his eyes and take a deep breath before he blows.

Derek leans forward and presses a kiss to Stiles’s abdomen. “Don’t even move.”

He couldn’t if he tried.

Derek walks around the bed, and Stiles hears the soft snick of his nightstand drawer opening. Stiles knows what’s in the nightstand. He and Derek have gotten quite familiar recently with Derek’s lube which, by the way, is better than the stuff Stiles has at home. Less slimy.

Stiles opens his eyes as Derek walks back to him.

How the hell did he get so lucky? Derek Hale is way out of his league. And that’s not Stiles being down on himself—he’s knows he’s cute, he’s quirky, and he’s got a certain “Hey, the librarian took her glasses off and it turns out she’s totally hot” thing happening in his favor—but he’s not in Derek’s league. Then Derek strips his shirt off, and Stiles can’t even see Derek’s league from here.

Derek kneels on the floor again, and reaches up to thumb the button of Stiles’s fly.

Stiles does not jump like he’s been electrocuted.

Shut up.

He doesn’t.

“Relax,” Derek tells him with a smirk.

Asshole.

Stiles tries to take his advice anyway. He closes his eyes again, and keeps them closed as Derek unzips his fly. He tilts his hips up as Derek pulls his jeans and his underwear down. Then Derek slides his hands up the inside of Stiles’s thighs, pushing his legs apart gently.

“What are you—” Stiles opens his eyes just in time to see Derek lower his mouth onto his dick.

“Holy shit!”

Things get a little hazy after that. Stiles is possibly having an aneurism. He’s aware of Derek’s mouth, his tongue, working his dick. And not just his dick either, but also his balls which is totally awesome. Derek’s given him blowjobs before, but this one feels different. It’s not the end game here, Stiles knows. When Derek presses a lubed-up fingertip against his hole, Stiles has to remind his muscles how to relax.

It’s not as though the sensation is foreign. Stiles has tried this before with his own fingers, and it was uncomfortable and awkward, and it didn’t feel as good as internet porn promised. Derek, as it turns out, knows how to do it right. He opens Stiles up slowly, using plenty of lube, and distracting him from the initial discomfiting stretch and ache by gently sucking the head of his dick into his mouth.

As distractions go, it’s pretty effective.

“Jesus fuck, Der.” Stiles stares down at him, wide-eyed now. Derek leans up for a moment, Stiles’s
dick slipping from his mouth, and he grins.

“You like that, Stiles?” Derek’s mouth is wet and shiny with saliva and Stiles’s pre-cum.

“Yeah. Do you like asking dumb questions, obviouswolf?”

Derek laughs, and twists his finger inside Stile’s ass and—shit—okay, there’s the good stuff the internet was talking about. Stiles arches his back, trying to push down on Derek’s finger. He really didn’t expect it to feel that good. Suddenly the idea of taking Derek’s dick in his ass doesn’t seem so scary.

“Whatever you’re doing, do more of it,” Stiles mumbles.

“That’s the plan,” Derek tells him, and lays a trail of kisses across his abdomen.

Stiles squirms.

One finger in his ass becomes two, becomes three. It takes forever to get to three. Derek is taking it so slowly. Objectively, Stiles knows that’s a good thing, but this is no place for objectivity, or any kind of logical, rational thought at all. Stiles wants Derek’s dick in his ass yesterday.

“Der, please, c’mon,” he groans. He’s slick and open. He’s ready to fucking blow, and he needs this.

Derek withdraws his fingers slowly, looking almost regretful. He stands up, and strips off his jeans.

Oh sweet baby Zeus.

Commandowolf.

Stiles shuffles further up onto the bed, making room for Derek to kneel down between his thighs. He’s read that this would be easier on his hands and knees the first time, but he kinds of wants to hold onto Derek. So if Derek doesn’t ask him to turn over, he won’t.

Derek doesn’t. He slides his hands under Stiles’s ass and tilts his pelvis up. Stiles watches as Derek retrieves a condom from the box Stiles gave him for his birthday, tears open the foil package, and rolls it over his dick. Stiles feels a rush of nerves, and hooks his legs loosely around Derek’s hips. The head of Derek’s dick feels hot and huge against his hole. God. Any second now, right? His heartbeat skips and his pulse spikes.

“Stiles,” Derek leans down and kisses him. “We don’t have to.”

Stiles reaches up and cups his cheek. “I want to, Der. I’m ready.”

“Okay,” Derek says, and slowly pushes in.

***

In another universe, another Stiles once did this with another Derek.

They were in love too.

Stiles wonders if, even that first time, they looked into each other’s eyes and saw forever.
“Okay?” Derek asks a minute or so later.

Ouch.

Seriously, ouch.

It’s not that the pain’s unbearable exactly. It’s more pressure than anything. It’s just that it’s uncomfortable. Derek’s dick is big, and, it turns out, Stiles’s ass is not.

“Yeah,” he says, and wishes that the word didn’t end on a wavering upward inflection and sound quite so much like a question.

“Just give it a minute,” Derek says.

Easy for him to say.

But Stiles trusts him. He also trusts that not everyone on the internet was faking it.

They kiss, and that’s nice. Stiles closes his eyes and offers Derek his mouth. He puts his arms around Derek and splays his fingers against his back. He can feel the muscles bunching and shifting under his hands as Derek moves in tiny, tiny increments. Then he does something, and his dick hits Stiles’s prostate. Stiles gasps, his eyes flashing open.

“Oh. My. God.”

He expects Derek to look smug but, if anything, he looks relieved.

Sweetwolf.

Stiles shifts, moaning as it changes the angle of Derek’s dick inside him, and it hits that spot again. That spot is fast becoming Stiles’s favorite thing in the world. He digs his heels into the back of Derek’s thighs to encourage him closer. Stiles’s dick, which has been politely disinterested ever since penetration, suddenly starts paying attention again.

“Better?”

“So much better,” Stiles breathes.

He’s so lucky. He knows he is. Derek is strong. He can keep up this slow, gentle pace for hours, probably, holding his weight above Stiles without squashing him. Derek won’t rush to finish just because he can’t hold back. They’ll take this at exactly the pace Stiles needs.

Stiles rocks slowly into a gentle rhythm with Derek. So easy, so soft, like the lapping of tiny waves in the shallows. Derek isn’t even thrusting, just rolling his hips a little, just teasing Stiles with fleeting little flashes of pleasure that gradually overcome the uncomfortable ache in his ass.

It’s such a slow process, and Stiles is so distracted by Derek’s kisses and the way he nuzzles his throat and sucks marks up onto his skin, that he doesn’t even realize when it turns into something urgent.
“More,” he moans, clutching tight at Derek. “Please, more.”

He almost whines as Derek pulls back, then arches his back and gasps at the first real thrust. It’s slow and strong, and lights him up like a fucking firecracker.

“Der!” he whimpers, arching up to meet the thrust. His wet dick is trapped between them, rubbing up against the furrows of Derek’s impossible abs. “Holy fuck, Der.”

“You’re so beautiful, Stiles,” Derek growls against his throat.

Stiles is pretty sure he’s slack-jawed and red-faced, but whatevs. He’ll take the compliment. He’ll take whatever Derek gives him, apparently. Take it like a fucking champion.

“I want to never stop doing this,” Stiles mumbles, throwing his head back so Derek can leave stubble burn against his jugular. “I want to live with your dick inside me.”

Derek huffs out a laugh. “You don’t think that would be awkward?”

Stiles grabs a handful of his hair and angles his face for a sloppy kiss. “Don’t care. Want it.”

Derek moans as Stiles clenches down on his dick. “Jesus.”

“Please make me come,” Stiles groans in his ear. “Please, Der, I’m really close.”

Derek picks up the pace, and every nerve inside Stiles’s body turns electric. Then Derek gets a hand between their bodies and wrapped around Stiles’s dick, and he’s done. He’s seriously done. And it’s messy and sticky and as sudden as hell, and how did he even manage to hit himself on the chin?

Derek fucks Stiles through his orgasm, and then he’s coming too, with Stiles clinging to his shuddering body.

It stings a little when Derek pulls out, then they’re lying curled together on Derek’s bed and Stiles is trying to figure out exactly what he’s feeling.

“I have no bones left,” he decides at last. “Dude, I can’t even move right now.”

Derek leans over and licks the spot of cum off his chin.

“Gross,” Stiles says, but also hot, and he can’t stop the grin from spreading over his face. “Love you.”

“Love you too.”

***

So, sex is worse than lacrosse practice. Stiles is moving like an eighty-year-old man with a plastic hip when he finally stumble out of Derek’s bed and heads for the bathroom. He’s just had the workout of his life, apparently. Every ache feels perversely good though, and he’s very much looking forward to trying that again. As soon as he can move freely.

He’s just finished peeing when Derek comes into the bathroom.
What? They don’t have boundaries anymore? He’s too shattered to protest.

Also, Derek grabs him by the shoulders and steers him toward the shower, and it turns out a hot, steam-filled shower with a naked Derek is just what he needs.

They make out a little, but Stiles is too sore and tired for shower sex. And probably too uncoordinated, honestly. When they get out and dry off, Derek throws a pair of sweatpants and a clean Henley at Stiles. Which, sweet, but also, he’s swimming in them.

“I should keep some spare clothes here,” he decides, hitching the sweatpants up over his hips for the millionth time in the space of a minute.

“You should,” Derek agrees, and that’s weird.

Every sitcom Stiles has ever watched has taught him that encroaching on your boyfriend’s apartment needs to be done with the speed and strike force precision of a SWAT team. You need to be in and entrenched before the poor bastard knows what hit him. But Derek is incredibly easy.

“I ordered a pizza,” Derek says as he hangs their towels up.

Easy and perfect.

Stiles heads outside and settles on the couch. “You’re the best boyfriend ever.”

Derek actually flushes a little. “You are.”

Yeah, Stiles is in love.

Head over fucking heels in love.

***

On Saturday morning they collect Claude and Stiles’s dad and head for the diner for a pancake breakfast.

“Special occasion?” Stiles’s dad asks over the menu.

Stiles cringes and turns bright red.

Derek holds his ground. “Breakfast with the Stilinskis. What could be more special than that?”

Stiles’s dad snorts, and orders bacon with his pancakes.

***

After that first night, sex becomes something they add to their repertoire as easily as kissing. Stiles is delighted the first night that Derek growls at him and shoves him up against a wall. It’s just like old times, except it ends with Derek pretty much fucking his brains out. So actually it’s a million times
better than old times.

TV and movies also promised him that sex would complicate things.

It doesn’t.

Well, apart from having to make sure they’re not going to scar Claude for life by getting carried away in front of her, it doesn’t. Sometimes Stiles wishes they could just have sex whenever they wanted, and not wait for nap time or organize a babysitter, but it is what it is. One day, when they’re not stuck in an open plan loft, or sharing Stiles’s childhood bedroom with Claude, it’ll get easier.

Derek starts talking about rebuilding the old Hale house.

It would be big enough for the entire pack to crash at, for days or weeks on end if they wanted. They could give Claude her own room. Stiles and Derek could have their own room as well.

And just like that they’ve planned their forever.

It’s weird how easy it is.

“So,” Stiles says one evening. “Mates. Is that a thing?”

“Yes,” Derek tells him.

Stiles’s jaw drops. “And were you ever going to tell me?”

“That you’re my mate?” Derek frowns. “Stiles, we’re practically living together. We have a child. We have sex. A lot. I’m not sure why this would be a surprise for you.”

Sarcasticwolf.

“Oh, well maybe because if we have like this mystical magical bond, I’d like to know!”

Derek’s eyebrows shoot up. “We have a mystical magical bond?”

“The mating bond.”

Derek blinks at him. “Have you been ‘researching’ on the internet again?”

Stiles narrows his eyes. “Maybe.”

“Stiles, you’re my mate. But there’s no mystical magical bond. You’re my mate because we liked each other and we chose each other.” Derek snorts. “It doesn’t mean we’re stuck together for eternity.”

Stiles throws a plastic sippy cup at his head.

“Okay,” Derek says, milk dripping down his shirt, “that came out wrong. Stiles, I’d be the luckiest guy in the world if we were stuck together for eternity, but there’s no magical bond forcing it to happen.”

“Better,” Stiles concedes. “So wolves don’t mate for life?”

“This one does,” Derek says.

Stiles grins. “Much better.”
Wolves might not mate for life, but they can totally be domesticated.

So, apparently, can Stilinskis.
Three years later

Stiles shoves his notebook in his backpack and checks his watch as he leaves the lecture hall. He’s got half an hour to get back to his dorm and pack a bag for the weekend.

“Yo, Stiles!” Gabe yells at him. “Party tonight at Sigma Phi! You coming?”

Stiles grins and shakes his head. “Going home for the weekend, bro. See you Monday!”

Stiles had once thought that college would mean a certain degree of anonymity. He wouldn’t be the weird, loud, awkward kid, or at least he wouldn’t be the only one. He wouldn’t be the sheriff’s kid in a small town. There would be a crowd, and he would totally blend into it.

It hasn’t really worked out like that.

He’s nineteen. He’s married to a guy. He has a kid.

People have noticed.

His roommate, Mark, had worried at first he was in a cult. Or Amish. Or something. He’d been kind of vague.

“Seriously, you never party. You go home every weekend. Dude, I don’t think I’ve even seen you drink a beer. Is it like forbidden by your people?”

“My people?”

“Aren’t you like super religious or something?”

“Actually, I’m super married.” Stiles had shown him a photo of Derek and Claude. Once Mark had picked his jaw up off the floor, he’d been pretty cool about the whole thing.

So, yeah. Maybe Stiles is missing out on a lot of the usual college experiences, but he doesn’t mind. He stays in every night and does his work then so that on weekends he can go home to Beacon Hills and spend some time with his family. So what if it turns out he can’t juggle his family, his GPA and a crazy college social life? He’ll take the first two, and not regret it for a second.

Stiles’s weekends are as carefully scheduled as his classes.

Friday night is pack night. Anyone not currently staying at the house turns up for dinner. It usually gets pretty raucous.

Saturday morning is for spending time with Derek and Claude.

Saturday afternoon is emissary training with Deaton.

Saturday night is his and Derek’s.
Sunday morning is breakfast with his dad, and Derek and Claude, at the diner. His dad always orders pancakes and bacon, and blatantly lies to Stiles about his latest cholesterol levels.

Sunday afternoon is for spending more time with Derek and Claude.

Then, in the evening, he hugs Claude goodbye so she can get to bed at a decent hour, and they leave one of the pack watching over her while Derek drives Stiles back to Stanford. Sometimes it feels like they spend half their lives in the Camaro. Still, he wouldn’t have it any other way.

Stiles hurries back to his dorm.

When he gets there, Mark is just climbing out of bed. At two p.m. But hey, Stiles isn’t about to judge anyone else’s life choices. Mark doesn’t snore, he doesn’t play his music loud, and he hasn’t tried to steal Stiles’s Adderall. Stiles could have done a lot worse.

“Oh, hey,” Mark mumbles. “You know that redheaded kid from down the hall?”

“Well, I guess.” Stiles throws some clothes in his backpack. Then he hauls the book Deaton loaned him out of his bottom drawer and slides that carefully in. He’s not ready to return it yet, but there are a few things he wants to ask Deaton about it over the weekend and it would be easier to have it with him. Also, he doesn’t really like the idea of leaving books this old and rare—and powerful—in his dorm when he’s not at school. And this book is powerful. The first time he opened the book and ran his fingers along the line of letters, he felt his spark respond. Like recognized like; it manifested as a kind of magnetic pull.

Stiles might be majoring in Sociology at Stanford, but he’s also studying to be the emissary of the Hale pack. Or the Hale McCall pack, as they’ve taken to calling themselves ever since Scott turned out to be an alpha as well. Color everyone surprised. Stiles guesses that maybe Derek and Scott should have ripped each other apart in a bloody battle for territory, but instead they sorted the whole thing out over pizza. It was Stiles’s idea. Sometimes not knowing what he’s doing and making up the rules as he goes along is actually a good thing, especially since Deaton later told him it should have been impossible.

Stiles kind of stopped believing in impossible a while back.

Because reasons.

One pretty big reason, mostly.

He rubs his hand absently over his abdomen.

He’s not exactly sure how it happened. Deaton said that Awesome Mage Stiles had managed it because he was incredibly powerful. Stiles isn’t. He can do a few things now, but this? This is way, way above his skill set.

This is a gift, and Stiles might not know how it happened, or why it’s happened now, but he knows who it’s from. He remembers the boy lying in his bed, dying. The boy, burning with unimaginable power, who whispered: “You could have what we had.”

He’s not showing yet, but… hey, baggy clothes have always been his thing, right? And if he has to take a semester off, or even a year, then so what? It’ll work out.

Everything will work out.

“Yeah,” Mark pulls a shirt on and rubs his hands over his face. He stinks of stale beer. “Anyway, he
owes me twenty bucks because he said it was bullshit that you were married with like a kid, so if you could friend him on Facebook or something and show him your photos, that’d be awesome.”

Stiles blinks. “Um. Okay, I guess.”

“Thanks, dude.” Mark scratches his belly and heads out of their room in the direction of the bathroom. “See you Monday.”

“See you,” Stiles says as the door swings shut.

Stiles zips up his backpack. He checks he’s got his wallet and his phone, then slings his backpack over his shoulder and heads downstairs.

He waits in the shade of a tree on the sidewalk, flicking through the messages on his phone. He supposes he shouldn’t really be so surprised that people don’t believe he’s married. Some days Stiles can hardly believe it himself.

Three weeks after his eighteenth birthday, he and Derek went to the Beacon Hills Courthouse and got married. An hour after that, Stiles submitted his paperwork to officially adopt Claude. The entire process felt a lot more bureaucratic than romantic, and Stiles was totally cool and grown up about it. Right up until they got back to Derek’s loft and the entire pack was waiting, and there were fairy lights and canapés, and who even knew Derek knew how to waltz? And it was incredibly fucking perfect and Stiles had cried, he was so ridiculous.

He smiles at the memory.

He says hi to a few people walking past. He recognizes a few of them from classes, or from his dorm building. Then he checks the time on his phone. There’s a group of kids gathering outside the front of the dorm building, casting curious looks in his direction. One of them is the redheaded kid Mark was telling him about.

Seriously? He’s a spectacle now? Although he kind of gets the point of people gathering to await Derek’s arrival. You just don’t see hot like that every day. There should be crowds, and banners waving, and possibly a parade.

Stiles can’t stop the grin spreading across his face as he hears the distinctive low roar of the Camaro as it turns into the street.

The Camaro pulls to a stop.

The driver’s door swings open first, and Derek climbs out.


Derek Hale knows how to make an entrance.

He smiles at the memory.

Stiles is sure he’s not imagining the murmur of appreciation from at least half the small group of spectators.

Derek opens the back door of the Camaro, and Claude scrambles out.

“Tata!” she screams, and runs for him. Her pigtails stream out behind her, her dress flaps in the wind, and her sandals slap on the sidewalk. Is it possible she’s grown in a week? It looks like it. “Tata!”

She launches herself into his arms, and Stiles catches her, swings her around, and settles her on his
She squeezes him tight. “Daddy made me eat broccoli!”

“Oh. My. God.” Stiles makes his eyes go big. “Daddy is a monster!”

Claude presses her face into his throat, nuzzling and snuffling. Scenting him.

“A monster,” Derek says, taking his sunglasses off and quirking an eyebrow. “Really?”

“I call it how I see it, Der.” Stiles turns his head to look at their audience, then flashes Derek a grin. Well, why not give the people what they want? “Now get over here and kiss me. Stiles needs some sugar.”

“Idiot,” Derek huffs, but kisses him anyway. He presses his hand gently against Stiles’s abdomen as they kiss. Stiles knows he can hear the tiny heartbeat inside him. “Missed you.”

“I missed you too.”


Claude beams at Stiles. “Curly fries!”

“I love you both beyond words,” Stiles says, and kisses Derek again.

Because he’s a perfectwolf.

Chapter End Notes

Wow. I can’t believe I actually finished this thing!

Fifteen chapters in fifteen days - and over 50 000 words. Suck it, nanowrimo!

A huge thanks to everyone who read this, and took the time to leave kudos and comments. Especially the comments—seriously, I think without your encouragement, the pace would have killed me on this one. Churning out over 3000 words a day wasn’t always easy, particularly with the day job and other commitments getting in the way.

This has unexpectedly turned out to be my most popular fic so far, which is down to all of you guys. So thanks again, and see you next time!

Works inspired by this one

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!