All Stirred Up

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Summary

Derek's first duty as a new deputy is the early morning coffee run to The Leaky Carafe, and it's not long before he discovers that the quirky barista has a knack for making the perfect drink. Every time. Even before you order.

But is it intuition, luck or magic that has all Stiles' customers leaving happy?

Notes

This work is almost (omg - we're so close) finished, with all currently completed parts in beta. Updates will be on Tuesdays and Fridays for the next 6 weeks.

The title of this work was inspired by the song Coffee Shop Love by Ryan Higa (the video is adorable if you’ve never seen it btw!)

Thanks to Piscaria and venis_envy for beta reading!

See the end of the work for more notes.
Derek stood outside the small coffee shop, eyeing the wooden sign as the wrought iron hinges creaked in the breeze. The sign was painted dark blue and looked newish, not yet weather worn or peeling, and the writing was far from professional. In the center was a roughly drawn coffee cup bubbling over like a cauldron, and surrounding it in bronze colored paint were the words *The Leaky Carafe*.

Any other day, maybe he’d be amused at the odd little shop sign, which looked kitschy and out of place on the quiet and boring streets of Beacon Hills, but his nerves chased away his sense of humor. He’d been told to stop here before his shift began, and Derek wasn’t willing to question orders with his uniform still unfamiliar on his frame, the creases stiff and perfect.

He stepped into the shop, unsure what to expect but hoping the service was at least quick. The place was empty, unsurprisingly, as it was still just after six in the morning and this town didn't keep New York hours.

The lighting was unexpectedly soft, beams of morning light just creeping through the spaces between the surrounding buildings to find their way through the large picture window at the front of the shop. There was a charming exposed-brick interior, with shelves stacked with eclectic decor -- everything from old Star War figurines to odd shaped bottles and jars. It was about as far from Starbucks as it could get, really.

Derek was pleasantly surprised. Maybe, on another day, he’d be tempted to look around, and try to get a better look at whatever was in those jars that was making his nose itch and fangs throb beneath his gums.

He tamped the thought down, however, when his phone chirped its reminder that his shift started in fifteen minutes.

When he finally approached the counter, the girl behind it didn't immediately look up from filing her nails. He cleared his throat and her eyes lifted to him, her gaze flickering blandly over his face, then his uniform.

"Stiles!" she yelled, flipping her long blond curls over her shoulder, before going back to her nails as if he wasn’t a *paying customer*.

Another moment passed with nothing happening other than his temper rising. He cleared his throat again. “Excuse me.”

“Stiles will be right out to help you,” she said, the words transitioning into a curse at a particularly stubborn cuticle.

Derek stared at her, his ears going hot. His shoulders straightened, and he puffed out his chest, emphasizing his shiny new badge. He would have thought himself above such petty displays of authority if anyone had asked him before today, but he was also *going to be late*, dammit.

His display had all of zero effect on her anyway. Then again, this place was only two blocks away from the sheriff’s station and uniformed customers were probably their bread and butter. Hell, the daily caffeine runs to *The Leaky Carafe* had been one of the first things he’d been told about, when he’d been hired.

The woman who had handled his new-hire paperwork had talked about this damn place with such
fondness, that Derek had been afraid to mention the fact that he didn’t actually like coffee. She hadn’t signed his paperwork at that point.

He had never fit in with the coffee-obsessed culture that seemed to be the norm these days. Caffeine did nothing for him, his werewolf metabolism processing through the drug before he could benefit from any of its perks, and while the scent of coffee was pleasing, the taste disgusted him.

He’d been equal parts dismayed and resigned when he’d been told that the joy of the early --early-- morning pre-shift coffee run, would be his for the foreseeable future. “Perks of being the rookie,” Deputy Parrish had told him with a wink, as he’d handed Derek a list with everyone’s orders the day before.

Derek still wasn’t sure if Parrish had looked pleased or disappointed to be passing the job along. He had a feeling he knew the answer though, if Blonde and Bitchy was any indication.

Just as Derek’s annoyance prickled into outright anger, the door that led to the back swung open, blurring a cloud of pale smoke, the scent of burning something, and a kid who appeared to be the engineer of whatever natural disaster had taken place in what Derek presumed was a kitchen.

The kid was tall and lanky, with long limbs and the burgeoning confidence of someone who had only just grown into them. The sleeves of his plaid shirt were haphazardly rolled up past his elbows, and there was a smear of what looked like batter across his cheek. Derek couldn’t help but focus on it, and then couldn’t look away, more than a little distracted by the blotchy splash of color beneath it.

The nametag perched at a haphazard angle on his shirt was covered in flour, but not enough that Derek couldn’t see where someone had written “Stiles” in sparkly pink marker, and then placed a little gold star sticker over where the dot for the “i” should have been.

“Hey, uh…” Stiles trailed off. He blinked and wiped his palms on his jeans, leaving a streak of flour behind. “Not Jordan. You’re not Jordan.”

The first instance was a statement of fact, albeit a slightly confused one, but the second definitely sounded like an accusation. Like it was Derek’s fault that he was standing in the damn coffee shop at -- he checked his phone, dammit, he was definitely going to be late -- dealing with a clearly inept staff.

Like it was his fault that he’d had to roll himself out of bed a half hour earlier than he would have needed to, just so he had time to find this place-- which hadn’t even shown up on Google Maps street view, for fuck’s sakes-- wait for all the various coffee orders to be filled, and still be in to work on time.

“Not Jordan,” Derek confirmed, fighting to keep his voice neutral.

“I see that.” Stiles didn’t look impressed, although he did take a second to give Derek a considering once over.

Derek had to fight the urge to fidget under the unexpectedly intense scrutiny. He covered by making a point of unfolding his list of drink orders, setting it on the counter in front of him, and placing his index finger on the paper.

He slid it pointedly toward Stiles. “I need all those. Quickly would be nice.”

“A please would be nice,” Stiles said, although he didn’t sound particularly offended.
He was already moving, not bothering to even glance at the list. His big hands were quick and
certain as he measured out the coffee for the espresso machine, which he petted as it grumbled to
life, espresso finally spurting out in angry starts and stops.

The scent of it was immediately hot and thick in the air.

“Rowena can be a little temperamental first thing in the morning,” Stiles explained when he
noticed Derek’s worried stare, and then he added, “So you’re new, huh?”

“Rowena?”

“Yes, Rowena. Don’t judge.”

Derek rolled his eyes. “At least you didn’t name it Godric,” he finally conceded, then frowned
when Stiles stopped what he was doing to blink up at him. The sudden absence of motion was
jarring compared to the frenetic energy that had followed Stiles into the room.

“Yeah. Too obvious,” Stiles said, voice a little breathy as he continued to stare motionlessly up at
Derek. It was like he’d short-circuited, with his mouth hanging slightly open, and his hands halted
mid-motion. They shared a look for a moment, Stiles’ eyes a golden caramel in the morning light
that streaked, much brighter now, through the front window.

They both jerked at the loud click of nails on Formica, and Derek looked over to see the blonde
unapologetically staring at them. Her nail file was gone, and she was sipping something from a
large mug, eyeing them over the rim in blatant amusement.

“If you don’t hurry, our new deputy is going to be late for work,” she said, as if she were
explaining a particularly difficult concept to a young child. The blatant superiority in her voice
would’ve made Derek bristle, but it did the trick for Stiles. He immediately whirled back into
motion, like a switch had been flipped.

“You could actually, you know, help, Erica,” Stiles said, but she just shrugged and hiked herself
up onto the counter instead, her gaze still firmly fixed on Derek. He was immediately nostalgic for
the few precious moments when he’d been beneath her notice; he had the sudden insight that her
attention was going to prove far more infuriating than her dismissal earlier had.

It didn’t take long for Stiles to finish with the drink orders all by himself though, carefully writing
names on the outsides of each cup. Done, he settled them into a large box that had “Sheriff’s
Station” scribbled on each side in black sharpie.

When Derek peered down into it, he saw that someone had lined the bottom of the box with cups
from a typical cardboard drink holder, cutting each out individually, before gluing them in place to
hold the dozen or so orders. Derek hadn’t considered how he was supposed to get all the drink
orders back to the station, and he was a suitably impressed with the innovation.

“Someone’ll bring it back to me for the afternoon order,” Stiles explained. “It’s about the only way
to get everyone their coffee. Lord knows that no one in that damn building can make a decent cup.”

Derek hummed, non-committal, and subtly checked his watch. A weight lifted from his shoulders
when he realized he still had about five minutes before he was late. Finally Stiles moved to the
register to ring up the order, shooing Blonde and—Erica—out of the way in the process.

“If you take the receipt to Linda, uh, the secretary? She’ll make sure you get reimbursed.”

“Thanks,” Derek said, although he’d already been told to do that.
“No problem.” Stiles smiled brightly at him, before helping to get the box settled securely in Derek’s hold. “I’ll get the door for you.”

The early morning spring air had a bit of a chill on it when Derek finally stepped outside, careful of jarring his precarious hold on the coffee.

“You never did tell me your name,” Stiles said, his arm extended to hold the door open as Derek slid past him.

Derek looked back over his shoulder, and he was momentarily transfixed by the way the direct sunlight burnished Stiles’ hair into strands of copper and auburn. “It’s Derek.”

“Well then, Deputy Derek,” Stiles said, winking in a way that came across both self-deprecating and flirty. “I guess I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Derek gave Parrish a grateful smile when he rushed forward to pull open the employee door to the sheriff’s station. He held it for Derek with one hand, his other clamped over his mouth to stifle a yawn.

Parrish nodded, still mid-yawn as Derek walked past.

“Not gonna lie. It was nice to sleep in a little this morning. Stiles give you much trouble?” Parrish asked, following Derek inside.

“He’s… interesting,” Derek admitted as they walked together into the station. He still wasn’t entirely sure he knew what to make of the events of the morning so far. “But he’s not the one I’d be afraid to turn my back on.”

Parrish didn’t even pretend to hide his laugh. “I take it you met Erica. Don’t mind her. She’s all bark. Mostly. Just… ”

Derek turned to look back when he realized Parrish had stopped walking.

“Probably best not to piss her off. She’s friends with Lydia, and the last person they decided to vent their righteous anger on… well, let’s just say it wasn’t pretty. I heard the hospital bill was outrageous too.”

Derek didn't know Parrish well enough to know if he was being jerked around or not, but he hadn’t detected a lie. He simply nodded and took note.

Parrish continued to look serious for a moment, and then his face split into a shit-eating, and devastatingly handsome, grin. He stepped around Derek to head to his desk, patting Derek on the shoulder as he went. “Put the coffee in the break room. Everyone knows to look there.”

Derek stared after him for a minute, but finally shook his head in tentative amusement. He had the distinct impression Parrish was inwardly laughing at him, but Derek was used to that feeling. Growing up with Laura as a sister definitely had that effect. At any rate, he was pretty sure there wasn’t a malicious bone in Parrish’s body.

The quick tour after he'd signed his papers had mentioned a break room to the left, and Derek went to seek it out. When he found it, he set the box of coffee down on the counter beside a very dusty—someone had drawn a fingerprint frowny face on the top-- percolator that might have been from the 70s.
He was just on his way back out when his phone rang shrilly from his pocket. He frowned, looked over his shoulder to make sure no one had noticed, and ducked back into the room, fumbling his phone out of his pocket. He stared down at Laura’s name.

He had learned from long and painful experience that ignoring her always ended up being more trouble than it was worth, so it was with some resignation that he answered.

“Hello, Laura,” he said as he checked over his shoulder again to make sure he was still alone.

“Derek!” Her voice was gratingly chipper. “Soooo, how’s your first day at work? Everything you thought it would be? Arrest any bad guys yet?”

“Oh yeah,” Derek said, rolling his eyes even though he knew she couldn't see. He assumed she was probably envisioning the gesture anyway. “I’ve arrested all the bad guys in Beacon Hills in the… oh, five minutes that I’ve been here.”

“Touchy, touchy,” Laura said, and this time it was Derek who envisioned her rolling her eyes.

“Laura, I probably shouldn’t be on my phone.”

Laura huffed, and when she spoke again, her voice was a serious. “Okay, fine. But first, how are you doing, really? I worry about you, Derek. Especially being back there. Have you met anyone? Made any friends? Why haven’t you called me?”

“Laura, I swear I’m okay. Despite what you seem to think, I am actually a grown up. I even have an apartment and a job and everything.”

“I still don’t believe it. I keep having these nightmares of you like, squatting in some warehouse or something.”

“Yeah, you know, I did think about it. Unfortunately, I had to have an actual local address in order to get my job, so I was forced to take the plunge and find a real place to live. Ikea furniture and all. There are throw pillows, Laura. You'd be proud.”

She snorted, but he could tell in the way of siblings who were as close as they were, that she was satisfied.

“I really should go.” He looked over his shoulder for the third time. He didn’t know what the cell phone policy was around here, but today was not the day to test it.

“Okay, fine. Yeah, I guess I should get back to work, too. The boss is in fine form today. We just got a new vamp in our East End house and she's not adjusting as well as we'd hoped. Call me tonight.”

“Maybe,” he said, smiling before ending the call because 'maybe' made Laura nuts. He made sure it was set to vibrate this time, and slid it back into his pocket.

He was just stepping foot out of the break room, when he reared back quickly, narrowly missing being elbowed in the face by Sheriff Stilinski who was trying to walk and cover a yawn.

"Sorry," the sheriff mumbled, blinking a few times before recognition showed in his eyes. “Ah, Derek,” he said, smiling and patting a hand warmly on his shoulder. “Good to see you. First day, huh?”

“Yes, sir.”
“Well, we’ll try not to scare you off too bad.”

“I’m pretty sure I’ll survive,” Derek said, voice deadpan.

“You say that now,” he said, keeping the same flat tone. “But you haven’t met our dispatcher yet. Lydia’s… well. She could be an alien for all I know.”

“Wouldn’t surprise me, all things considered,” Derek responded, finally letting the beginnings of a smile quirk the sides of his mouth. The sheriff’s own face split into a grin as well, and he patted Derek’s shoulder again.

“All things considered,” he agreed, winking.

It was odd to have been winked at twice already today, and it was barely passed sunrise.

“Well, I better let you get settled for the day. I’m pretty sure we’re gonna partner you up with Parrish. Keep things pretty easy on you for now.”

“Thanks.”

“No problem, Deputy,” the sheriff gave him a loose salute, which transitioned into him motioning vaguely toward the interior of the break room. “Coffee.” And just like that, his attention moved away from Derek in a clear dismissal.

Derek shook his head and headed toward the small desk that had been assigned to him. Sitting down in his chair, he stared at his new workspace which contained all of three thumb tacks, a single pen, a stapler, and a computer with a post-it note stating his ID and password. There was also a shiny new name plate that simply read “Hale” in gold lettering over a black background. Derek couldn’t help but reach out and carefully adjust the positioning of it, a feeling of satisfaction and pride swelling.

It had been a long road to get here, living back in Beacon Hills as an officer of the law of all things, especially considering the the last time he’d been in town, he’d helped Laura kill their uncle. So he could understand her concerns. On the other hand, for the first time in years he felt sort of like he was where he was supposed to be.

New York had never been home. Beacon Hills wasn’t quite home for him yet either, but maybe it was his connection to the land, or something else entirely, because something was slowly starting to settle inside of him.

A few nights ago, he’d run through the preserve enjoying the first full moon since he’d been back, and it had only cemented the feeling. It was right for a Hale to be living in Beacon Hills.

Derek took a deep breath to center himself, and turned his computer on. He still wasn’t entirely sure what his routine here was going to look like, but it definitely seemed like a good start. Or at least it made him look a little busy, until someone came and told him what to do.

His email was just booting up when something was set down on the desk by his elbow. Derek looked up, surprised to see the sheriff again, standing there with an inscrutable look on his face. Despite the fact that the man genuinely seemed to like him, Derek hadn’t actually expected any further direct or meaningful contact that day, so he was a little surprised to say the least.

“I think this is yours,” the sheriff said, nodding down toward the paper coffee cup now sitting innocently on Derek’s new desk.
“I’m pretty sure I didn’t order anythi…” Derek trailed off when the sheriff raised an eyebrow and rotated the cup.

Derek had seen Stiles writing names on them, and though there wasn’t a name on this one, Derek knew instantly that arguing that this wasn’t his drink was probably useless.

He narrowed his eyes at the crude caricature drawn on the side of the cup in black sharpie. The face had a scratchy beard and eyebrows as thick as his pinky, drawn down in a menacing frown.

“You were saying?”

“Uh,” Derek said, a little bewildered. The sheriff rolled his eyes and without saying another word turned his back and walked away. Derek stared after him.

It was turning out to be a weird day.

He picked up the cup carefully, bringing it to his nose out of force of habit, expecting the bitter tang of coffee to assault his nose. And then he blinked in surprise, pulled the lid off the cup off and took a tentative sip.

He took another sip, and then hummed contentedly, wrapping both hands possessively around the paper cup and hunching over to try and soak in the warmth and the tantalizing smell a little better.

Tea wasn’t something Derek ever purchased from a cafe or restaurant. He flatly just didn’t like other people’s tea. Well, he hadn’t before. He’d never considered himself a snob or a connoisseur or anything. It was just that tea, to Derek, was something he made at home.

He liked using his own leaves from the specialty tea shop located a couple of blocks from his old apartment in New York-- and he’d have to rely on Laura to send him more from now on, he realized. He liked the ritual of getting the water temperature just right, and measuring out the perfect amount of leaves for his tastes.

This tea was delicate though, like the Baihao Yinzhen silver needle tea that was his favorite, if a little pricey for him to drink too often. It had the perfect balance of sweet and slightly floral, and the warmth of it as it hit his belly was welcome and perfect.

“I know that look.”

Derek shook off his daze to see Parrish standing at his desk, arms crossed and an amused look on his face.

“Can’t say I understand how he does it,” Parrish said. “But Stiles has a knack for getting it right. He knows everyone’s favorite drink, every time, like magic.”

Derek thought back to the not-so-subtle Harry Potter themes of The Leaky Carafe and wondered if they were meant to be ironic. “Crazier things have happened in Beacon Hills.”

Parrish laughed outright at that. “You have no idea.”

Only, he really did.
“Soooo,” Erica said as Stiles started wiping down the counters and machines, now that the morning rush had all but petered out. With the exception of Mr. Jacobs, who was sitting in his usual corner, newspapers spread out around him, the shop was finally empty.

At least Mr. Jacobs wasn’t likely to care about their conversation, even if he could hear them. Which he couldn’t. Stiles knew for a fact that the old man deliberately turned the sound down on his hearing aids, so that he could get away with ignoring people. Stiles sighed. It was just as well. He recognized the determined look on Erica’s face.

“So, what?”

“So, how about hottie deputy this morning? Don’t even pretend that that wasn’t your flirting face. I know that face, you can’t fool me.”

Stiles groaned. “Oh my God, Erica. That was one time. And I was drunk. You can’t keep holding that against me.”

“Of course I can!” Erica said, grinning evilly at him. “Besides, it’s not like I needed to ever have that particular look of yours directed at me to recognize it. For a while there in high school, I was sure your face would get stuck like that with all the time you spent mooning over Lydia. I’m not actually sure I realized your face was capable of more than like five expressions until you moved back from college.”

“I hate you,” Stiles said, glaring at her. “And I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Oh, don’t even pretend to pull that wide-eyed, oblivious thing on me. It’s not as cute as you think it is.”

“I’m always cute.”

Erica laughed, and punched him lightly on the shoulder. “You wish. But seriously, Deputy Sexy? Don’t pretend you weren’t ready to sip that particular hot cup of java.”

Stiles made a frustrated noise and buried his face in his hands. “His name is Derek,” he said, the words coming out muffled and a little whiny, even to his own ears.

He sort of wished the whole I can’t see you, you can’t see me thing applied to Erica. Actually, he found himself wishing that a lot. He was also fully aware that he was basically using every tell he had, and if she hadn’t been sure before, he had just given her all the ammunition she needed to be utterly certain. Denial was futile at this point.

“He was mildly attractive,” he lied, pulling his hands away from his face and running them through his hair, probably messing it up even more than normal. Truth was, Derek was ridiculous; he was hot and bearded and angry. Exactly Stiles’ type. He had a rule against dating cops, but right around the time he was drawing thick eyebrows on the paper coffee cup, he decided it was more of a guideline than a rule.

“Ha!” Erica crowed. The gleam in her eyes made his stomach twist. “So what’s the plan then?”

“Plan? What plan? There is no plan.” Stiles dropped the entire stack of cup lids he was trying to shove into the dispenser and they scattered over the floor, a few skidding under the fridge, never to
be seen again. "Shit. Stop distracting me."

“Oh, come on. You had a ten year plan in place just to woo Lydia into going on one date with you. Don’t even pretend like you don’t have a plan to at least get Derek into bed. He’d totally go for it too. I could tell.”

Stiles gave Erica his meanest look. “There is no plan, Erica.” And then after a second gave up all pretenses and groaned. “He got my Harry Potter references,” he said plaintively, like this was the most important part of his and Derek’s meeting. It sort of was. How often did guys who looked like that secretly have a nerdy side? Much less one big enough to give Stiles the kind of nerd boner he’d gotten this morning.

“I’m so totally fucked,” he said.

Erica patted his shoulder as he knelt to pick up the last of the lids he could reach. “Not yet you aren’t, but it’s not like you won’t be seeing him around. He’s got rookie deputy written all over him. I bet Parrish was probably relieved to hand the job off, too.”

"And whose fault is that?" Stiles asked, glaring.

Erica rolled her eyes. “We aren’t talking about me. And it all worked out in the end anyway. He and Lydia are adorable together and you know it.”

Stiles shook his head and tossed the dropped lids into the trash, before leaning against the counter, sighing. He’d have to make a note in inventory.

Erica gave Stiles a pitying look. “You’ve got it bad, don’t you?”

“I don’t have anything,” Stiles countered. “I interacted with him for like five minutes. And nerd thing aside, he was mostly grumpy and kind of rude.”

“Exactly! He couldn’t be any more your type if he tried!”

Stiles wanted to argue. Wanted to say that of course he hadn’t noticed the way Derek had filled out his uniform so nicely. Just like Derek’s particular cocksure attitude definitely hadn’t made Stiles want to be a little brat just to get a reaction.

He even got as far as opening his mouth to make his argument-- no words came out. He was left with his mouth hanging open for what was probably an embarrassingly long few seconds. His dad had once told him he looked like a dying fish when he did that, which was probably an understatement if the appalled look on Erica’s face was anything to go by.

“You’re disgusting, Stilinski. Close your damn mouth.”

“Says you. If you were a guy you’d think my mouth was perfect for…”

“Nope.” Erica lunged forward and slapped a hand over the offending mouth. “Really, no. Although…” She removed her hand, and gave him a considering look. “As plans go, that’s not the worst one you’ve ever come up with.”

“There is no plan!”

“Well, now you have one! Your oral fixation is bad enough, we just have to find ways for you to use that to your advantage.” She paused, and looked thoughtful for a moment. “I’m thinking-- start by fellating pens. If that doesn’t work we can move you to popsicles.”
Stiles groaned. “Oh my god, Erica. Can we please change the subject? I think I’ve reached my harassment threshold for the day, and I’m still supposed to have dinner with my dad tonight.”

Erica laughed at him, but luckily she seemed to be in a magnanimous mood. “Fine, fine. You’re no fun, but I’ll let you off easy. For now.”

“So somehow that’s not as reassuring as you seem to think it is.”

Erica smirked and tossed her hair over her shoulder with a flick of her wrist. “If you're not fucking him by the end of the week, I'll bring it up again. Anyway.”

Her face turned serious as she picked up that morning’s paper and held it up.

“Your dad mention anything to you about this? Another body! That’s the second one found in the preserve this month. Everybody was talking about it this morning, which, by the way, you would have noticed if you hadn’t been so distracted.”

“They were just regurgitating the news,” Stiles dismissed, not surprised in the least at the change in topic. Beacon Hills was a small town, and The Leaky Carafe was the home of the best gossip thanks to its proximity to the sheriff’s station. It wasn’t like there was much else to talk about. Murder was exciting news. “Dad’s been pretty closed-lipped, though.”

The downside of no longer living at his dad’s house was that it made it a lot harder to snoop. Stiles did have an old police scanner he’d stolen from the station years ago. His dad hadn't made him give it back because it made them both feel a little better for Stiles to have it. It was like a security blanket, something that harkened back to the months after his mom had died, when he’d turn the scanner on as he was falling asleep, his version of a bedtime story, just to hear his dad’s voice. He certainly didn’t need it to fall asleep now, but when he was home by himself, he would flip it on just to fill the space with noise, the way most people would listen to the radio.

Erica motioned for him to continue speaking. Because she knew better to think that that was all he knew.

“I heard the call in last night on the scanner,” Stiles admitted. “Deputy Johnson stumbled on the body-- literally, on the body -- after a report of a disturbance along the running trails. You should have heard his voice, Erica.” Stiles' stomach lurched remembering how wrecked the usually stoic senior officer had sounded. “They’re trying to spin it as an animal attack. Johnson said the body looked… half-eaten.”

Erica wrinkled her nose. “Freaky.”

“And freakier, when I was visiting my dad the other day, I overheard Deputy Lewis saying that Animal Control can’t match the claw and teeth marks on the first body to any known animal. Apparently this body looked like it had the same weird marks.”

The whole thing troubled him. Things like this just didn't happen in Beacon Hills. The strangest thing around here was Stiles’ ability to make a hot cocoa that impressed old Mrs. Schmidt, who didn't like anyone or anything. To Beacon Hills, that was as thrilling as news usually got.

“Lydia doesn’t think it was an animal attack either,” Erica said, the words thoughtful.

Stiles nodded, not surprised. “Yeah, she sounded off last time I talked to her too. Disconcerted.” It didn't sit well with him when Lydia let a case upset her. And it wasn't just him; his dad trusted Lydia's gut instincts without question.
Stiles looked over Erica's shoulder at the morning newspaper's headline: FOREST KILLER STRIKES AGAIN. “You know, those were the same trails that Coach used to take us out on for track, remember?”

“Nope. Doctors' notes were useful for some things back then, I guess.” She didn’t sound particularly glad for it.

Stiles grimaced. “Crap, Erica. I forgot.”

Erica knocked their shoulders together, but she looked a little distant. “I never will, but it’s all good, Harry. I’m doing a lot better now, thanks to you.”

They shared a smile. “I still wish I could have figured things out,” Stiles waved his hand vaguely around the shop, “sooner.” Senior year of high school felt so late to give a friend her life back, but at least the herb mixture he'd finally come up with let Erica put the dozens of pills and their side-effects behind her before she started college.

The chimes on the door jingled, and the conversation ended as a high schooler, who'd become a bit of a regular these days, entered the shop. Stiles figured the kid must have a mid-morning spare period at school, because if he didn’t come in first thing in the morning, he did during the pre-lunch lull. He’d been like clockwork pretty much every day for the last few weeks.

“Back to work.” Erica sighed and hip checked Stiles to push him away from the counter. Like magic, her expression transformed into the picture of flirty helpfulness.

"The usual, sweetheart?” She purred, because all evidence to the contrary sometimes, she actually had the whole customer service thing down to an art form, just as flirty, bitchy or shockingly nice, as the situation called for.

Right now, she was femme fatale, leaning across the counter and giving the kid a wink.

His eyes flickered for a moment to the deep V of her top, then to the newspaper's gruesome headline. He didn't seem to know where to look, shoving his hands nervously into his messy blond hair.

His eyes sought out Stiles’, like he had all the answers. And clearly, Stiles did.

Stiles gave a wave, let him know it was in hand, and started brewing the concoction without even asking the order.

“Heat up the steak?” his dad asked, coming in and standing behind him. The hopeful lift in his dad's voice was warm and familiar to Stiles, a reminder of the many nights over the last few years that they'd shared, with him feeding his dad healthy meals to varying degrees of success.

He peered over Stiles’ shoulder as Stiles flipped the piece of flank steak he had cooking in his mom’s old cast iron skillet.

“Might as well tell me what you did now, and get it over with.”

“Dad! Geez. I have the worst family and friends ever,” Stiles said. “And don’t get your hopes up too much. I’m slicing this to go over a salad. You know, a bowl of mostly green things. With a vinaigrette, not ranch dressing.” Stiles brandished his tongs at his dad for emphasis, snapping them until his dad gave him some space.
"If you're making me eat that raspberry-balsamic stuff then I’m pretty sure you aren’t the one who gets to complain about the worst family,” his dad said, although he continued to stand there, eyeing the steak with interest. It was probably only his fear of the tongs that stopped him from trying to grab the bit of gristle that had fallen off and was browning by its lonesome on the far side of the pan.

“Yeah, well,” Stiles said, “that’s your opinion. Also, I didn’t do anything, and before you ask, I don’t need to butter you up for anything either. The steak was just on sale.”

Stiles didn’t admit that he’d long ago learned that allowing his dad the occasional red meat-- on Stiles’ terms, obviously-- went a long way toward preventing even worse relapses of the McDonald’s variety. This would curb his dad’s cravings for a while, and a little meat on top of a salad wasn’t going to kill him. A Big Mac on the other hand?

“Uh huh.” His dad didn’t sound particularly convinced, but he stepped back, heading toward the fridge where he grabbed a beer. He sighed loudly when he finally collapsed into a chair at the kitchen table, legs splayed wide and body slumped.

“You look tired,” Stiles said, looking back over his shoulder to study his dad a little better. “Tough day at work?”

“Just long.” He sighed, rubbing at his temples. "And too damn much paperwork.”

“Yeah. That’s what happens when dead bodies start popping up.” Stiles hoped he sounded only a vaguely curious on the topic. There was a fine line between goading his dad into spilling the interesting details and poking too hard on sore points.

His dad was one of those people who went quiet to deal with his emotions, and that never worked in Stiles’ favor.

His dad straightened, and set his beer down on the table. “I guess it was too much to hope that the local news would hold off until we knew a little more,” he said, resigned. “Probably just as well though. Need to tell people to be careful. Stay away from deserted areas, yadda yadda.”

“Watch out for wild animals?” Stiles suggested, voice carefully neutral. He nonchalantly pulled the steak out of the pan and set it aside to rest, then headed into one of the kitchen cabinets to start sorting through some of his more specialized herbs.

His dad snorted. “I’m not stupid, Stiles. I know you’ve got that scanner on every time you get a chance. The news is sticking with animal attacks, for now at least. As for what’s really out there? Who knows. I’m hoping to have De-- some of my deputies patrol the woods for the next few weeks though.”

“Probably smart,” Stiles agreed, his putzing around the kitchen finally coming to a temporary halt as he pointedly swapped his dad’s beer for a steaming mug of tea. “For your headache.”

“Ugh.” His dad glared up at him, eyeing his beer mournfully, then grimacing down at the tea. He picked the mug up without another word though, which meant his headache really must have been bothering him; he normally complained a lot more. Not that Stiles particularly blamed him. Most of the healing teas he made tasted like absolute shit, and his mom had always insisted that adding any sort of sweetener to mask the taste would diminish the potency.

“Just be careful,” Stiles said, watching as his dad did his best to gulp the tea down as quickly as possible. “And don’t work yourself too hard, okay? The paperwork will always be there
“Yeah, yeah, yeah.” His dad shook his head at Stiles then set the mug back down on the table with a heavy clunk. His gaze was suddenly intense and proud, and Stiles felt his chest warm at the softness in his father's eyes. “When did you become the parent in this relationship, huh?”

“Dunno.” Stiles hustled back to work on dinner, dicing up some tomatoes for the salad, just to hide his flush. "But considering you’ve been asking me that exact same question for almost ten years, I’d say if you haven’t figured it out by now, you probably never will.”

His dad laughed, the sound of it amused, but also tinted with a long familiar hint of sadness. It was a long running joke between them, and while the bitterness of Stiles having to grow up too quickly had filtered out over the years, there were still remnants. Probably always would be.

Still, when Stiles looked back at his dad, there was a bit more color in his face, and his eyes were crinkled with mirth. The lines had disappeared from his forehead, and it was obvious that the tea had started working.
Chapter 3

When Derek pushed open the door to The Leaky Carafe the next morning, he was greeted with the sight of Stiles bent over and wiping down one of the tables. He was humming softly to himself--Derek vaguely recognized some pop song he’d heard over the radio at one point or another--and his hips swayed to the rhythm inside his head.

Derek felt like his strings had been cut. He stood there, frozen, one hand still on the door and the other hanging loosely down at his side. His jaw ached a little, from where it had popped with an aborted a yawn.

“Morning, Deputy.”

The voice came from behind the counter, and Derek couldn't mistake that particular tone of feminine superiority for anyone else, even if he had only met the owner of it once before. He looked up to find Erica smirking at him, her eyes a little too knowing as they flicked between him and Stiles.

Startled, Stiles did a little twirl-hop-dance until he was facing Derek. His cheeks were blotchy pink, and his hand curled over his chest. Derek could hear the rapid thud-thud of his heart.

“Uh, morning, Deputy. Deputy Derek,” Stiles stammered, blushing. He twisted the rag in his hands, dripping water onto his pants.

The silence was very quickly moving into awkward territory, but for the life of him, Derek couldn’t get his brain online enough to come up with actual words.

“Coffee,” Derek finally blurted out. “I’m here for…"

“Coffee, got it.” Stiles drew the words out like Derek was particularly slow. "That is what we serve here." Stiles winked at him to soften the words, and his grin as he headed back behind the counter was the best thing Derek had seen all morning. It made getting up a few minutes early worth it.

“Thanks, by the way. For the tea yesterday, I mean. It was perfect.”

Stiles clucked his tongue, as he started playing with his relic of an espresso machine. "Not liking coffee is sacrilege around here." "I have no idea how you knew.”

Stiles face lit, though Derek could only see the side of it as Stiles worked his way through filling the orders. Derek could tell Stiles was pleased he'd impressed him.

"It’s a gift." Stiles looked up from where he’d begun to froth some milk, and his smile turned small and teasing. "Although you are a heathen. Who doesn’t like coffee? I mean, I don’t judge. Mostly, but really? It’s coffee.” Stiles sort of moaned the word, and his eyes rolled up a little like he was feeling pleasure at the thought.

Derek had to fight his own blush. “Just, uh, never really been my thing.”

“Oh my God, please don’t tell me you’re one of those clean living freaks. I guess I can sort of see it with the…” Stiles flexed his arms like he was showing off his muscles.
“I’m not sure if that was a compliment or an insult,” Derek said, biting his lip. “But, uh, no. Just don’t really like the taste of coffee.”

Stiles sighed like he was actually in pain, but then his eyes flicked back up at Derek’s face, and Derek was momentarily struck by how long his eyelashes were. “So you liked it, though? The tea?”

“I just said I did.” Derek grinned at Stiles' attempt at flirting.

"Well, it did the job, at least. Yesterday you looked like you wanted to kill me."

"And today... " Erica set down the sheriff's station carrying box on the counter. "He looks like he wants to eat you."

Stiles nearly dropped the cup he was trying to snap a lid on. "Erica, oh my God, why don't you go, something. Take the trash out!"

Erica rolled her eyes. “How about no?” she said, examining her nails pointedly, as if the suggestion of potentially risking her perfect manicure in order to take the trash out was absurd, and Stiles should obviously know better.

A second later, her face scrunched a little. "Do I smell smoke?" she asked, all false innocence.

Derek sniffed, surprised that there was indeed smoke in the air. For a second, the scent of it caused his heart to pound in his chest, and then he was more distracted by Stiles and his cry of, "Shit, the scones!"

Stiles’ eyes went comically wide as he scrambled away from the counter. He slid along the floor and nearly brained himself on the door, before finally getting it opened. A cloud of smoke billowed out in his wake, and it was only the fact that his flailing had been more dismayed than actually worried that made Derek feel a little better.

Erica smirked, and started nonchalantly typing Derek's order into the register, completely unconcerned. "Every time."

"What?"

"Every time that boy bakes, we have to air this place out. He's brilliant with Rowena. I can't even touch her, but he goes near that oven, and he turns into Neville Longbottom."

"Early Neville."

Her eyes caught his, and she nodded her approval. "Obviously."

The weirdly companionable moment between them was broken by the sound of the door opening behind them. A blond kid wearing a BHHS letter jacket took two steps in, sniffed and immediately hightailed it back out.

"And yet another customer lost to Stiles' attempt at charcoal. Shit, he was a regular, too. He better be back during his free period." She sighed dramatically, shrugged and held her hand out expectantly for Derek’s money.

Derek handed over his card and took his time helping Erica load up the box. His eyes drifted to the kitchen door more than once, but it stayed frustratingly closed.
"I'll tell him you said bye."

Derek snapped his eyes back to Erica. "Yeah, sure."

At least Derek was early for work. It required a bit of juggling to get the door to the station open by himself this time, but he managed. He had to try not to rush, and he was grateful when he finally set the box of coffee orders down on the break room table without any issues.

Like yesterday, he hadn’t ordered anything, but it only took a moment of searching before he was pulling one of cups out of the box.

'The D' was written on the side in bold bubble letters, and the contents smelled distinctly not coffee-esque.

When Derek took a tentative sip, the flavor hit his tongue the way he could sometimes sense emotions. It was as much about smell as taste, his senses all tied up, so he wasn’t entirely sure which was picking up the strange little undertone that reminded him of Stiles’ smile, and the way his eyelashes had smudged against cheeks.

He cradled the cup carefully as he headed to his desk. Day two of being a deputy had, once again, not started off like he’d imagined at all.

Sometime after lunch, Parrish rapped his knuckles on Derek's desk, knocking him out of his boredom-induced daze. "Time to actually do something more than get coffee, rookie. Sheriff wants to see us."

Derek couldn’t help but notice that Parrish said 'rookie' with a little too much relish.

The sheriff's office was nothing fancy, not much more space than any of the deputies were allotted. It did have the luxury of walls and a door, with the wall directly across from the desk made up of glass with the option of blinds that could be drawn closed if necessary. Right now the whole back wall was a mosaic of paper, notes, multi-colored strings and several grotesque photographs. Derek had glimpsed something similar in the bull pen, but hadn't wanted to overstep his place by looking too closely at a case that wasn't assigned to him.

He'd heard cops could get as territorial as werewolves.

"Parrish, Hale." The sheriff motioned for them to take a seat. "Alright, boys. I'd hoped to keep you out of this. I know you're both chomping at the bit to get a real case, but this one-- Let's just say you don't have to be green behind the ears to lose your lunch working on this mess."

Derek's eyes went immediately to the garish picture of a man's torso that was so slashed up he was barely recognizable as human. He quickly looked away.

"The Forest Killer, sir?" Parrish said, his face stony-pale with a mix of nerves and ambition. "Is that what you're giving us? We can handle it."

"Whoever the hell started giving this thing a name deserves a steel boot in the ass, in my opinion. It just gets these crazies off, having a name. Like they're a celebrity."

"Forest Killer?" The title made Derek's stomach drop, though not for the reasons the sheriff likely expected. His memory flashed to his uncle's eyes, wide and unseeing as his blood spurted from his torn throat and onto the forest floor. Bile rose until he could taste nothing but sour bitterness, and
he cleared his throat.

"Right, Hale. You're new to town, probably aren't reading the local paper yet-- get yourself a subscription by the way, I expect every member of my staff to know what's happening in this town. Got that?"

"Yes, sir."

"Here's everything we've got on this." The sheriff lifted a box onto his desk and pushed it towards Parrish. "You'll both spend the afternoon getting acquainted with every detail of every case that's even remotely similar. Lewis and Johnson have been deep in this since the first body turned up three weeks ago, and frankly they need another set of eyes and a night off. I'll need you patrolling the preserve tonight. Don't think you'll be running into anything but a few raccoons, but some police presence out there after dark will make everyone sleep a little better."

“And deputies, don't do anything stupid. Call for backup if you even hear a twig snap, got it?"

"Yes, sir," Derek and Parrish said in unison, as if they'd been doing it for years.

The sheriff grinned. "You boys'll get along just fine, I think. Now off with you." As they stood, he added, "Hale. A word?"

Derek looked at Parrish for a clue, but he just shrugged and hoisted the box off the sheriff's desk. "I'll just get started on this."

Derek’s palms began to sweat when the sheriff stood and closed the door behind Parrish with a pointed click.

"Look, Derek-- off the record here?" he said as he turned. His voice was pitched low and conspiratorial, almost a whisper.

Confused, Derek nodded for the sheriff to continue, not really trusting his voice.

"I've been in this town all my life and I'm not dumb, blind or naïve. I know the kind of things that go bump in the night around here. There’s a reason I offered you this job, you know."

Derek knew. How could he forget the way Stilinski had helped him and Laura cover up Peter’s death. He'd been the first responder to a call about a disturbance in the woods, and he'd remembered their faces from the couple of scared teens who'd lost their family in a fire.

He'd given them a chance to explain their claws, explain about werewolves and Peter's destroyed mind. How Peter had lured them back from New York, in hopes of killing Laura to become an alpha. As the sheriff, Stilinski hadn’t liked covering up the truth, but he was a good man and he'd kept their secrets.

It had been a shitty option out of a lot of shitty options.

The sheriff looked over his shoulder at the evidence board. "I don't have a clue what the hell is doing this."

"You think that I do?" Derek asked, defensive. "Just because it happened on the preserve it doesn't mean it's a werewolf."

"Hey, relax." The sheriff's hand landed heavy and warm on Derek's shoulder. "I'm not saying anything, son. All I know is that you and your sister have a talent for, uh, sniffing out danger. So
tonight, you keep your nose keen." The sheriff tapped his left nostril. "And let me know if you find anything out of the ordinary. Off the record, if you catch my meaning."

Relief flooded Derek as he certainly did catch his meaning. The hand on his shoulder tightened before finally letting go.

"Oh, and Derek? Keep a close eye on Parrish. I think he might actually be human."

The box contained every scrap of information on the two mysterious murders this month, one from three weeks ago, and the one from two nights ago.

Parrish summarized as he handed Derek a stack of papers. "Coroner report. Grizzly shit. Cause of death for both: significant blood loss due to a gaping hole in the torso and half eaten vital organs.

"Victim profiles: Monday night's was a sixteen year old female. Sophomore at BHHS. Out jogging after dinner, never returned home."

Derek skimmed the report in front of him. "Parents say she was training. Got second place in track and field regionals for the 15k last year. Wanted first this year."

"Yeah, she might not have been easy to catch unless they caught her taking a breather."

Or they were faster than the average human, Derek thought but didn’t say.

"The first victim was a forty-three year old male. Dog walker. Time of death was near dawn. Apparently he’d been taking his dog for a morning shit on the edge of the preserve." Parrish sighed, dropping the reports onto his desk.

Derek picked up the photos they'd both been avoiding. "Other than the general location and the nature of the attack, there's no link?"

Parrish shook his head. "Animal Control was consulted and the injuries don't line up with any known animal from this area. The organs were torn up, half missing."

"Like scattered around?"

"No. Missing, presumed eaten by whatever attacked."

Nothing added up. "A hungry predator wouldn't waste a kill like this, ruining the carcass and leaving it to rot. An animal defending itself wouldn't consume bits of something that attacked it. Something rabid?"

Parrish flipped through a few more pages. "Tests came up negative."

Derek narrowed his eyes at the teeth marks on the first victims' shoulder. They appeared to be multiple rows of pin-pick-sharp punctures. Nothing like a werewolf's jaws would produce. No creature-- supernatural or otherwise-- that Derek had ever encountered could make a mark like that.

Derek dropped the photos back down, a sense of determination filling him. He would find and end whatever it was that was doing this. Purpose settled warmly in his chest as he realized a Hale once again protected Beacon Hills.

The preserve at night was one of Derek's favorite places. The loamy scent of it was familiar, even now, and it reminded him of home and family. He’d missed it, and regaining that sense of
belonging had been a big part of his decision to come back to Beacon Hills in the first place; if this wasn't taken from him after everything, then maybe there was a place from him here after all.

"God, this place is creepy," Parrish said waving his flashlight into the shadows. "Running out here after dark? That's a level of devotion to running that I do not have."

Derek snorted. "To each his own."

As it was, Derek itched to set off into a full out run. He knew the forest would embrace him, that the brambles, limbs and stumps would be no obstacle to him if only he let himself go.

But the sheriff was right. It was Derek's responsibility to look after his partner as much as it was to patrol the woods. "Let's head this way. It'll take us near the jogging path where victim two was found."

Parrish turned toward him, the beam of his flashlight temporarily sweeping over Derek's face and blinding him. "Good sense of direction," he said, sounding surprised. He looked around like he was making sure, then shrugged, and fell into step beside Derek.

"I can't tell you how many miles I did out here when I was on the track team." Derek figured it was a more acceptable answer than the truth-- the hours of play-fighting, honing his control with his sisters, safely away from the public eye until the forest itself felt like family. "I'm pretty sure Coach Finstock took particular pleasure in torturing his students out on these trails."

"Apparently still does."

They fell silent as they continued walking, although it was obvious by the nervous scent wafting off him that Parrish wasn't entirely comfortable.

Derek figured it was the dark forest where someone had recently been murdered that was making him uncomfortable though, and not because he was the kind of person who felt the need to fill every silence with words.

Stiles was probably the latter, he thought fleetingly.

Derek got that nervousness. He did. He was just socially awkward enough that he wasn't entirely sure what to say to help. He wasn't one of those people who liked to ask personal questions because he was too afraid he'd have to answer them in return. His life was his business, and he was grateful that it seemed like Parrish was willing to respect that.

They reached the path without incident though, and Parrish swept his flashlight around in a lazy arc before focusing the beam at the base of a tree. "Looks like Stiles needs to lecture his customers about not littering."

Derek squatted to get a better look and subtly inhaled. Using his pen, he picked up a paper cup with a now familiar logo. "There wasn't coffee in this."

"Tea?"

He nearly pressed his nose to the rim, trying to catch the faintly familiar scent. "It's floral, almost medicinal."

"Herbal tea, then?"

"No. It's..." Derek's nose twitched. "It's not something I would imagine you could get even at The
Leaky Carafe. I'm going to take this back with us."

Parrish peered over Derek’s shoulder down at the cup. "You know this place was combed after the body was found, right? We might be a small town, but our guys are thorough and wouldn’t have missed something like that. It's got to be from after."

"Yeah," Derek agreed slowly. He stood, frowning down at the cup carefully balanced on the end of his pen.

Something wasn’t sitting right with him, and he hunched down to sniff it again, his nose twitching at the fleeting scent that was just on the edge of familiar.

The intense way he was studying it must have been enough for Parrish, who held out an evidence bag for him to slip the cup into. “Doesn’t hurt to check it out, I guess,” Parrish mused. Once sealed, Parrish held the bag up in front of his face, shining his flashlight on it for a better look. "Shouldn't you be in school?"

"What?"

"That's what's written on the side instead of a name"

Derek huffed. "Real helpful, Stiles."

"Hey now, don't let the boss hear you say that,” Parrish admonished, mouth turned up wryly. "People round these parts get protective of him. I actually don’t think this town would survive without his coffee. ”

"What's with you guys and your damn coffee?"

Parrish laughed. "It’s like the oil that keeps this town running I guess, but I’m still not sure if that's the coffee or Stiles.” Parrish shrugged. "Doesn’t mean we don’t drink other things too. Speaking of, a bunch of us are heading to the bar for drinks tomorrow night. You should tag along. It’s a good crowd, and I think you’d like them."

"Uh," Derek hedged, but Laura's voice rang in his head, telling him he needed to make friends. She wasn't wrong. "Yeah, maybe."
Chapter 4

The bell chimed with his first customer of the day, and Stiles would be completely lying if he said that looking up to see Jordan Parrish walk in wasn't disappointing. For a moment he wondered if maybe he'd messed up, somehow.

He’d spent most of the day before trying to figure out if asking Erica to ask Lydia to ask Jordan if Derek had mentioned him would be worth the humiliation.

Luckily, Derek was only a step behind. Stiles felt his face split into a relieved grin.

"Good morning, boys," he said, tossing the towel he'd been drying his hands with over his shoulder. "Did you call for backup, Deputy Derek? Am I that bad?"

It was easy to put on a show of bravado when he hadn't just been caught singing-- badly-- to himself. And oh my God, the dancing, how awkward must Derek have thought him yesterday?

"Good morning, Stiles." Jordan leaned on the counter and gave him his best good ol' boy smile, while Derek stood back with his arms crossed over his chest. His eyes caught Stiles’ before he’d looked away. "I insisted on coming in."

Jordan shot Derek a look like maybe there'd been some discussion about it, and Derek had gotten out-ranked.

Holding up an evidence bag, Jordan explained. "We found this at a crime scene last night. It's one of your cups with 'shouldn't you be in school?' instead of a name."

"My cup was at a crime scene?" He couldn't wait to tell Scott. He looked at the cup and recognized his chicken scratches along the side. "I write that on anyone's cup who looks like they're high school age. I have a few regulars who are probably too young to be quite so addicted to caffeine."

"Well, we don't think there was coffee in this." Jordan handed him the cup. "We figured we'd ask you before we send it off to the lab."

"Was it found near some graffiti?" Stiles tried to look inside the evidence bag. "Can I open this?"

"Just don't touch the cup. It hasn't been checked for prints yet. It was out at the preserve by the running trails."

Stiles’ eyes widened at the implication that this was about the recent murders, but knew better than to try to ask about it. He could squeeze things out of his dad sometimes, but he was the sheriff. He’d learned better than to make a go at the deputies. He wasn’t the one that got in trouble after all, at least not with the law; his dad always found a way to make him pay for his meddling.

"Gotta follow every lead, huh?" he said, opening the bag and sniffing. It was one of his concoctions that was for sure. He recognized a faint hint of oregano like he sometimes liked to use in the teas he made for his dad, but otherwise not something he could place. "Yeah, I probably made that, but I can't say for who. We get a lot of people in here during a rush and it's all a blur."

"It seems like a special order. Not off the menu."

Stiles shrugged. Jordan was definitely getting better at leading questions. He'd have to mention that to his dad, later.
"You know I don't even have a menu. Half my customers don't tell me their orders, I just let the spirit move me."

"The spirit?" Derek chuckled. It was the first thing he'd said since coming in.

"You know, my muse." Stiles winked, trying to play it off like a joke. "I've had no complaints. I even managed to please you, didn’t I?"

And then Stiles blushed. He’d definitely put a little too much emphasis on the word 'please' and his thoughts were led astray for a moment.

Derek grinned like his thoughts had followed. "Your tea is good, Stiles. Don't let it go to your head."

"I guess it’s too much to hope that you would start raving about how amazing I am,” Stiles said, sighing dramatically, “and how I rocked your world with my hot beverage making skillz.”

Derek and Jordan exchanged looks.

“Do people really do that?” Derek asked, raising an eyebrow. “And are you sure you shouldn't be in school? Who says skillz?” The exaggerated ‘z’ sounded ridiculous coming from Derek.

“Dude, I’ve gotten actual marriage proposals.”

"Now I know why Erica was complaining to Lydia last night. Enough tension to choke on,” Jordan muttered, and then promptly cleared his throat.

"What was that?" Stiles asked like he hadn't heard.

Instead of answering, Jordan asked, "So you're saying this is a dead end? You can't tell us any more?"

Stiles looked at the cup again and chewed the inside of his cheek thoughtfully. "The person was in high school or looked young enough I assumed they were. And I gave them some drink that they probably didn't order, but was absolutely perfect for them anyway. But I mean, if you found that out by the running trails, that totally makes sense. It’s track season, and Coach would have the team out there like every day. I wouldn't really think much of it."

"Yeah, we guessed that,” Jordan admitted, not sounding particularly surprised at his answer and giving Derek a look like 'I told you so.’

"Sorry I can't be any more help. I'll try to keep track of any weird, herbally, special drinks that I make today, if you want though?"

"Thanks, and if you could…” Jordan waved his hand in the direction of Rowena, and gave him a hopeful expression. "I need to head out so we can get this sent to the lab, just to be sure."

“But there’s always time for coffee,” Stiles finished for him. His hands were already going through the motions of making Parrish's usual Latte, Rowena purring under his touch.

Jordan offered Stiles a messy salute with his cup when he picked it up, and he strode out the door.

Before Stiles started on the rest of the station's usual orders, he first handed Derek his tea.

Derek held his gaze, hazel eyes intense as he took a delicate sip. The quirky little half-smile he gave Stiles over the rim of the cup just about broke him. Fuck his life, but he was so gone on this
As the day wore on, Stiles was happy to lose himself in the familiar rush of his business. The cafe was busy for a Thursday, and Stiles wasn’t sorry to see the cash register getting a workout. Rent was due on the apartment he was subletting and it was nice to know there was more money coming in than going out.

During the two o'clock lull he headed to the back kitchen on a mission. Erica kept telling him that if he actually sat his butt down in the kitchen and didn't wander off, he could produce something other than charcoal.

"Cookies only take 8-10 minutes to bake," she poked her head through the door and reminded him. "Start with cookies."

Eight minutes did seem like a reasonable amount of time to stay in the kitchen. Sitting still. Not doing anything while the cookies baked. It was totally doable, and he declared this his afternoon mission. He'd create something edible.

He pulled out his mom's old recipe book.

As he flipped through the book, lovingly fingering the worn and dog eared pages, he fleetingly wondered what Derek’s favorite type of cookie was. Granted, he probably didn’t have his rather impressive physique by eating a lot of sweets, but, cookies! Who didn’t love cookies?

A whole new wave of determination washed over him. He would actually bake something today if it was the last thing he did. Then he could deliver the cookies to Derek to taste test. That wouldn't come across as desperate would it?

It was just that he felt something there. Potential. God, and the way Derek had looked at him this morning, maybe Derek felt it too? It sucked that every one of their conversations had been cut too short to really get anywhere.

Yesterday had been the worst. Derek had been early and he'd thought maybe he could've flirted his way into a date. Then stupid Erica and her stupid, "do I smell smoke?"

Derek’s face had scrunched up with so much disgust; Stiles groaned and buried his face in his hands in remembered embarrassment.

He felt absolutely justified in his decision to hide in the, frankly, quite toxic smelling kitchen no matter what Erica said to taunt him. He was just grateful she’d at least been magnanimous-- and there was that damn word again-- enough to get Derek shooed out of the shop fairly quickly. If she’d put her mind to dragging him back out of the kitchen, he would have had no hope; she was surprisingly strong when she put her mind to something.

Today hadn’t been much better. Jordan had been there and it had felt more like a police inquiry than a chance to arrange a hookup.

It was frustrating, but there was nothing he could do about that now. Now there were cookies, and maybe if they turned out well, even if they weren’t Derek’s favorite, he could drop them off at the sheriff’s station later. He smiled to himself at the thought, and rolled his shoulders with renewed purpose.

He ran his fingers down the list of ingredients for his mom’s chocolate chip cookies, careful to make sure he hadn’t forgotten anything. “Butter, sugar, eggs…” he muttered, pausing for a second
to breathe deeply when he got to the vanilla. The scent of it was rich in the air and it reminded him of his mom, of the way she’d always smelled like pastry and chocolate the way he suspected he always smelled like coffee.

She’d always had more patience than him though, just like she’d always had a gift for magic in a way he was never able to manage. The best Stiles was able to produce was a smile on a good day, maybe the occasional headache cure if he was lucky.

And okay, that wasn’t entirely true. He did have a few tricks up his sleeve, but those were mostly due to luck, endless practice, and a judicious use of the scientific method under Lydia’s watchful, if condescending, gaze. It has been years since Erica had suffered a seizure, longer still since his dad had needed to buy a bottle of tylenol.

And then there was the fact that he honestly hadn’t been lying to Derek earlier about being moved by the spirit. Or whatever force or magic it was that inspired him on a daily basis. He just did things sometimes for no other reason than it seemed like the thing to do in the moment. He’d given up on questioning it, and half the time he wasn’t even aware while it was happening.

This wasn't first time he'd desperately wished his magic might move him in other ways, but regardless he was surprised to realize that he actually had cookie batter. He looked at the neat little rows of potential goodness lining a baking sheet, just waiting to be baked. He inhaled deeply.

“Here goes nothing.”

He licked his lips and popped the pan in the oven, set the timer and then he just stood there. And he stood there some more, and then his eyes caught on the dirty dishes piled in the sink and he wandered over, guiltily eyeing the oven. But he was just going to be right there and it would be fine. Surely.

“Don’t even think about it, Stilinski,” Erica called through the door, and Stiles halted, one foot raised to take another step toward the sink. He… okay, that was a little creepy and he had no idea how she’d done that.

He guiltily jerked back, half-hopping to stand by the oven again. He stood there some more, at which point his thoughts inevitably wandered back to Derek. Maybe he’d get a chance to try with him again tomorrow? Jordan had been the rookie, and therefore designated gofer, for almost a year before Derek had come along and relieved him. That was plenty of time to make a move!

He also couldn’t help but think, once again, that maybe he shouldn’t have dismissed Erica’s whole ‘oral fixation’ plan so quickly the other day, because clearly whatever he was doing on his own wasn’t working.

Not that he would ever admit to the thought.

Her tough love and the sudden manifestation of her psychic abilities paid off at least-- "I'm not psychic Stiles, I just know you."-- and Stiles remained dutifully by the oven until the timer rang. At least the cookies, when he finally pulled them out, were the most perfect he’d ever managed. Golden brown and with that indescribable quality to them that told him they’d be perfect and chewy when he tried one.

Now he just needed to do the same for the rest of the batch.

Thirty minutes later, Stiles was heading to the sheriff’s station with an industrial sized tray of golden brown, soft and perfectly chewy cookies.
He sighed when he glanced around the station and saw neither Derek nor Jordan anywhere in sight, though. It made sense that they would be out on patrol, but it didn’t make it any less disappointing.

“Stiles?” his dad said as he wandered out of his office and stood with his hands on his hips, looking skeptical.

“Heyyy, Dad? How’s it going?”

“Just fine, son. Working. Like I thought you would be?” He raised a judgemental eyebrow in question, before his gaze drifted down to the tray in Stiles' arms.

“Just got off. Handed things over to one of the minions for the afternoon shift, but I thought I’d drop these off before I headed home.” Stiles raised the tray up for emphasis. “Didn’t really make enough that it was worth trying to sell them.”

His dad didn’t even pretend to hide his groan, which, rude. “How burnt are they? I can’t afford to have any of my deputies out with food poisoning, kid.”

“Oh my God. Thanks, Dad. And FYI, not burned.” Stiles pulled the foil off and waved the tray of enticing chocolatey goodness under his dad’s nose, and then promptly snatched it away. “And just for that, you don’t get any. I’ll just leave these with Tara and make sure she knows not to let you get near my awesome baking skillz.”

“What have I said about you saying skillz, Stiles? You can get away with using it to describe your coffee, but your baking? Don't fool yourself, kiddo.”

Stiles glared at his dad, pointedly turned his back, and marched over toward Tara’s desk.

He stopped short before he got there though, back peddling a step. The once empty desk over in the corner now had a shiny new name plate with “Hale” written in black lettering. He’d never caught Derek’s last name, but the cup sitting on the corner of the desk? That, he recognized. He blushed when he saw the awful little sketch he’d done that first day when Derek had wandered, all grumpy eyebrows, into his shop.

He didn’t know what it meant that Derek had kept his two day old cup, but it made something clench, low and tight, in his belly. Heart in his throat, he carefully ripped off a piece of the foil covering his tray, wrapped up a couple of his cookies, and set the little bundle on Derek’s keyboard.

Task completed, he glanced over his shoulder and saw that his dad was watching him, arms crossed. Stiles felt his face flame, but he covered by shrugging awkwardly, his unspoken and sarcastic “what?” clearly understood.

His dad shook his head slowly and turned on his heels, heading back into his office and closing the door behind him.

Stiles stared at the door for a second before continuing on to Tara’s desk. She was looking at him too, her dark eyes speculative. “Don’t,” Stiles warned.

She raised her hands in surrender. “Not a word,” she agreed, smiling knowingly.

Stiles groaned in relief when he finally pulled up in front of his apartment.

The lock disengaged with a rusty click, but Stiles still had to roughly shoulder the door in order to
He’d barely taken two more steps inside when he was assaulted by a large ball of grey and white fur winding around his legs and putting a valiant-- and actually sort of impressive, considering he only had three legs-- effort into trying to trip him up.

“Damn cat.” Stiles side-stepped a little to keep from actually crushing him as he toed off his shoes. He wandered into the kitchen, not bothering to turn on the light, and threw down the paper plate of cookies that he’d kept for himself. The plate made a dull, crinkly, thud against the surface of his little two-seater kitchen table, and the edges of the plate brushed against the police scanner that took up permanent residence there.

Without thinking about it, Stiles reached out and flipped the scanner on, his shoulders instantly relaxing as the staticky chatter filled the air.

That done, he beelined toward the pantry where he blindly measured out a cup of dry cat food to the sound of desperate mewing-- because he starved his cat obviously-- and then set about searching for his own food. A task that, apparently, was doomed to end in failure; he opened his refrigerator and promptly winced, the blinding blue light doing nothing so much as highlighting his pitiful lack of anything resembling actual food.

He stood there staring for a minute though, like his brain thought that if he just stared long enough, food would magically appear, before finally sighing in resignation and just grabbing the milk. He figured he would survive one day on the diet of the teenage boy that he no longer was.

Besides, he deserved a little celebratory junk food.

He collapsed into one of the chairs at the kitchen table and grabbed his plate of amazingly unburned cookies. He munched aggressively, and then more slowly as the cookie practically melted on his tongue.

“Huh, not bad,” he said, looking down at his cat, who was still scarifying down his own food with an amount of enthusiasm that Stiles could appreciate. “Asshole,” he mumbled at the cat, just because it was something to say.

Gimpy glanced up at him superiorly, then went back to his food. “I get no love,” Stiles sighed, and then, “Case in point,” he mumbled as his phone started to blast Blink 182 at him. He abandoned the rest of his cookie, letting it fall back to the plate as he thumbed the answer call button.

“Yo, Scotty. What’s up?”

“Hey! You still coming tonight?” Scott asked, his voice tinny like he had his phone on speaker. “I wanted to double check if I was still picking you up or not?”

Stiles could hear the sound of barking dogs in the background. “Ugh. The mind is willing, Scott, but the body? Not so much. It’s been a long day.”

“Oh, come on man! It won’t be the same without you. It’s good for you to socialize.”

“Dude, unlike some people I could mention, I actually do socialize. All day. With beings that can do more than growl to communicate their displeasure.” Actually, that wasn’t entirely true. Stiles had a couple of customers where, before they’d gotten their morning coffee, growling might be considered a generous accomplishment for them.

There was the sound of running water in response.
“Please don’t tell me you were talking to me in the bathroom. Gross, dude.”

"Like you've never. Anyway, you have to come. Even Kira's going to show tonight."

"Fine, but I’m not gonna stay out all night,” Stiles said, and then before he forgot quickly added, “And hey, maybe you could mention to Deaton that the stupid door is sticking again? I thought I wasn't going to be able to get it open today.”

“Uh, sure, I can mention it, but I probably won’t see him again until next week. Anyway, not gonna be a late night. We’ve been crazy busy all day too, but I want to see you, man. It's been ages.”

Ever since Deaton had cut his own hours and mostly handed the business over to Scott, their schedules had been obnoxiously incompatible. “Being an adult sucks.”

“Tell me about it. So, I’ll pick you up at seven?”

“Fine. Fine. I’ll see you then.”

“Later, buddy.”

Stiles hung up the phone and clomped upstairs to his bedroom. 4am alarms still sucked even three years after opening the coffee shop, and a nap sounded like an excellent idea if he was going to be required to be social later. He collapsed on top of the covers, unsurprised when the mattress dipped again a second later and a warm body settled over his chest.

Stiles scratched behind the cat’s weirdly shaped ears, smiling when Gimpy started purring loudly and kneading at his shirt.

“I still don’t know how Scott managed to convince me that I should adopt your ugly butt,” he mused. “Probably the same way he convinced me to go out tonight.”

As he lay there, mind drifting, he half contemplated doing laundry and then promptly fell asleep before he got past the thought that he'd be covered in cat hair when he woke.
Chapter 5

It was ten minutes after the time he was supposed to meet Parrish for drinks and Derek still hadn't decided if he wanted to leave the house. It was a little tempting -- Parrish and his girlfriend, a few other locals who liked to meet up when their various schedules allowed. Super casual, no pressure, Parrish had said.

A phone call from Laura sealed the deal. He'd answered her call and immediately said, "Can't talk, Laura. I'm meeting friends for drinks." He toyed with his watch band. "I'm already late."

Which he was, now that he was going.

He took a fast shower, threw on the only pair of jeans he'd unpacked, his least wrinkly t-shirt, and left without thinking about much more than seeing Parrish in a non-work context and meeting his girlfriend.

He'd be able to tell Laura he was trying to make a life here.

The bar was pretty much exactly what he'd expected: low lighting, pool tables, and lots of ripped vinyl booths.

The music wasn't too bad, and definitely not as loud as it could have been. Derek relaxed a bit, unzipping his leather jacket to relieve the burst of sudden heat, and looked around for Parrish.

His gaze swept toward the far right corner opposite the actual bar, and it was someone else entirely that he recognized. He instantly realized who a 'few locals' might include. His stomach started to knot up because where Erica was, Stiles wasn’t likely to be far away.

And sure enough, Stiles was there, sitting beside a gorgeous redhead. Derek recognized her from the photo on Parrish's desk as his girlfriend.

They’d noticed him by now too, and were all looking directly at him so he couldn't even slip away to compose himself, or even look down and double check the state of the shirt he'd put on.

He clenched his fists, plastered on a smile and headed over, hoping he looked less nervous than he felt. It helped a little seeing Stiles' eyes widen, the look of surprise saying clearly he hadn't anticipated this any more than Derek had.

"Derek!" Erica said, her smile almost predatory. It was nothing compared to the way the redhead perked up though, her gaze going intense in a way that made Derek’s palms inexplicably sweaty.

“Uh, hi,” he said, his gaze catching on Stiles who was blushing, the red flush of it obvious even in the low light of the bar.

“Derek, glad you could make it,” Parrish said, coming up behind him. He had two pitchers of beer in his hands and he set them on the table with a clatter. “I guess you know Stiles and Erica. And this is Lydia and Scott. Scott’s girlfriend Kira should be here in a few minutes."

"Nice to meet you," Derek said, holding out a hand to Lydia, because werewolf or not she had the look of the alpha of the group. Also because it seemed like the polite thing to do. He was learning that people were actually polite around here, a big difference from New York where people were as likely to run you down as shake your hand.
She didn’t take it though. Instead she picked up her wine glass-- she was the only one not drinking beer-- and swirled the red liquid around the glass, somehow making the gesture look threatening. "You keep Jordan safe. You go where I tell you to go, and we’ll get along fine."

“Oh my God, Lydia!” Stiles slapped his hand on the table and the glasses rattled.

“Oh, honey, do be quiet. Your man is new and hasn’t learned how things are yet. We need to remedy that.”

Stiles glared at her, his blush deepening. Derek… mostly felt an uncomfortable combination of lost and confused.

Thankfully Parrish came to his rescue. “Hey now, no traumatizing the rookie.”

“And no shop talk either, remember,” Scott added, the only one who looked about as confused by what was going on as Derek, if a lot more long suffering about it.

Erica lifted her glass to toast. "I second that. Let’s get drunk.” Then she was pulling Derek down to sit beside her in the booth.

“Shop talk?” Derek asked Erica.

"Lydia's the dispatcher for the Sheriff's Station.”

"Ah," Derek muttered, remembering the way the sheriff had spoken about her, not to mention Parrish’s warning not to get on her and Erica’s bad side.

“Although, hey, speaking of...” Stiles took a swallow of beer mid-sentence, drawing Lydia’s disconcertingly calculating eyes away from Derek. “Before we move on to infinitely more interesting topics, I should at least tell you that I didn’t make any weird herbal drinks today. Sorry.”

“No worries,” Parrish said, speaking up before Derek could. “It was a long shot anyway.”

The focus shifted with the arrival of one more person, a pretty girl who squeezed into the other side of the booth and practically sat in Scott’s lap. As Kira and Scott were newly engaged, they easily monopolized the conversation for the next half hour, talking about wedding plans.

Derek mostly sat there nursing his beer and trying not to feel out of place. Everyone was nice, but there were enough inside jokes that Derek never quite felt comfortable.

"Move it, deputy," Erica said a little while later, poking Derek in the side to get him to stand up.

Stiles, who had been on her other side, slid from the booth, stumbling into Derek as Erica pushed passed him to sit back down. “Bathroom,” he said, standing a bit closer than necessary. His voice took on a little bit of a drawl from the beer he’d been drinking.

Then, as if realizing how little space there was between them, Stiles took a step backwards, pointing with his thumb across the bar. "I'll be right back."

Derek stared after him, admiring Stiles’ gangly limbs and his weird mix of grace and clumsiness that he knew wasn't entirely to be blamed on beer. If he happened to focus a little too intently on Stiles’ ass, well, it was a good distraction from the discussion about china patterns that was happening around the table.
The entire time Stiles was gone, Derek’s gaze kept travelling to the other side of the room as if drawn by a magnet, and when Stiles finally reappeared, he sat up a little straighter despite himself.

Now that Stiles was walking toward him, Derek stole the opportunity to study him a little better; the shirt he had on was worn and soft, frayed at the collar. It clung to his shoulders like he'd grown broader since he’d first bought it -- which was probably true, since the words 'Neville would have done it in four books' were peeling and barely legible now.

When Stiles reached the table again, Derek started to get up to let him back into the booth, but Stiles shook his head. “No worries. The booth’s not really big enough for all of us anyway.” And he snagged a chair from a nearby table, pulling it up beside Derek, close enough their knees bumped when Stiles sat.

Stiles set a full glass of water down on the table in front of him instead of the beer he’d started the night with, and started rolling it back and forth across the table along its bottom rim.

When Derek gave it a questioning look Stiles gave a self-deprecating little shrug. "I don’t really handle alcohol well,” he said, to a chorus of enthusiastic agreement around the table.

Derek nodded sagely, and when the conversation around them started up again, he leaned in and whispered, “Thank you for the cookies, by the way.”

Stiles immediately blushed. “Oh my God, I don’t even know why I did that.”

“No. I liked them.”

Stiles looked up at him from beneath his lashes and smiled. “Good, I mean, don’t get used to it or anything. I still burn things more than I don’t, but, uh, glad you liked them.”

Derek sat back in his seat, and didn’t ask if anyone else at the station had received their own little gift of Stiles’ cookies. He was thinking no, if the tray in the break room had been anything to go by.

He was pulled back into the moment by another sharp jab to his ribs by Erica, who was making moves to escape the booth again. "We're playing pool," she explained.

"Pool!" Stiles said, perking up and expression brightening.

As Derek stood, rubbing his side, Erica slid from the booth and pointed a painted nail in Stiles' face. "No. You are not invited."

Kira gave him an embarrassed and apologetic grin. "Sorry, Stiles I still haven't recovered from last time."

Derek frowned at yet another reference he didn't get, but he could guess at why Stiles was mournfully watching his friends wander over to the pool tables. A moment later Parrish patted Stiles on the shoulder as he got up to join them, Scott and Lydia remaining behind to continue their discussion on the merits of an outdoor wedding.

“You guys all suck,” Stiles said, glaring but not looking particularly surprised.

“That bad, huh?” Derek asked, trying to be nice about it. He could sort of see how Stiles, with his long fingers and strangely flexible -- but just on the edge of being clumsy -- limbs might have trouble with the fine motor control required for pool.
“Ugh,” Stiles snarled. “It’s not my fault if they’re afraid I’m gonna whip their asses,” Stiles said, shouting the last bit so his friends could hear him.

Erica flipped him off over her shoulder, not even bothering to look back at them.

“I could show you how to play?” Derek offered, the words out of his mouth before he could really think about it.

Stiles froze, his glass halfway to his lips, before he set it down slowly. Lydia and Scott had surprisingly gone still as well, and were watching them curiously.

“Not that you need help,” Derek said, his anxiety rising when Stiles just stared at him.

And then Stiles grinned. “No. I’d like that. You should definitely show me. Lead the way, o’ pool playing guru!” Stiles said, although he didn’t actually wait for Derek, instead starting off on his own toward the pool tables. And yeah, okay, Stiles’ ass looked really good in those jeans, despite the… was that cat hair clinging all over them?

“Coming?” Stiles asked, looking back over his shoulder at him.

Derek took the last swig of the beer he’d been nursing for the last hour and got up, stripping his jacket off and hanging it on the back of the chair Stiles had been sitting in.

“Coming,” he agreed, and then immediately felt his face go hot.

Stiles mumble something that sounded suspiciously like “not yet,” but Derek couldn’t be sure over the music, which was louder on this side of the bar.

“So, Derek here is going to teach me how to play pool,” Stiles announced as he approached the girls and Parrish, who were watching them curiously. “He thinks he can make an honest man out of me.”

Erica barked a laugh at that, and feeling like he owed it to Stiles to defend him, Derek said, “He can’t be that bad.”

“Bad doesn’t even come close to describing what he is,” Erica said, but she shrugged. “Fine, but it’s a five dollar buy in.” She gave Stiles a pointed, and particularly evil smile.

"I've got it," Derek said, handing Erica a ten. It wouldn't be fair to make Stiles lose money because he'd insisted on this lesson.

"You didn't have to do that." Stiles bumped his shoulder, grinning up at him like he'd hung the moon.

"No, it's fine." Derek's cheeks hurt from his returning smile. "This way you aren't stressing about losing money. Just focus on me." The girls giggled behind him, but it was easy to ignore as Stiles chalked the tip of his cue.

"Don't think that will be a problem," Stiles said, his eyes flickering over Derek's face, then to his shoulders and downward.

Derek was suddenly struck with how bad of an idea this was. He tore his eyes from Stiles and shuffled under the too rapt attention of the rest of the group. "Right. Who breaks?"

"Oldest," Parrish decided and lined up for the first shot.
It was a good enough break, nothing earth shattering. The trash talk with Stiles had Derek wondering if Stiles' friends were all sharks, but after a few rounds it was clear they were barely average players. Kira was the best of the group, looking more natural and calm with a cue in her hand then she looked without it.

Stiles was, undoubtedly, the worst. He was clearly embarrassed by it too, his face flushing every time Derek stepped in behind him to adjust his stance, going ridged the moment Derek's hands touched his hip to stop him from leaning too far onto the table. It certainly didn't help Derek's nerves either.

It was hard enough to try to shake off the looks the others were giving them, like Derek was taking advantage of their friend. Even harder to not, in fact, take advantage of the freedom that instructing afforded by getting his hands all over Stiles under the guise of helping.

As the night wore on Derek started to question Stiles' motivation to learn pool. He was actually getting worse, taking longer to set up a shot, making Derek get handsy in order to help him find the right angle.

It wasn't so much that he minded, but they had an audience and Derek was really enjoying it a bit too much. He was pretty sure, even with the low lighting, everyone could tell just how much in fact, as he attempted to subtly adjust his pants. Again.

It was a relief, when in the middle of the third game, thirty dollars of Derek's money stashed in Kira's wallet, Parrish decided he need another beer. The girls took the opportunity to head the the bathroom, casting wicked glances back at Derek and Stiles who had been left to watch the table.

"Maybe you can help me with my grip, again?" Stiles suggested when they were alone, bending himself over the table and displaying the perfect swell of his ass.

"Shit." Derek rubbed his neck, wondering for the millionth time tonight if Stiles was trying to kill him. Laura always called him oblivious, but maybe Stiles was just a flirt?

Taking a deep breath to steady himself, Derek stepped up close behind him and leaned in, curling one hand at Stiles' hip while the other went around to Stiles' misplaced hold. Stiles' body was hot against his chest, both of their breaths gone ragged as he corrected the placement of Stiles' fingers on the cue.

"Your grip should be steady, but loose." His voice came out low and deep, and he felt Stiles shudder for a moment. He might be oblivious, but he was pretty sure they were moving right past flirting and straight to propositioning. He couldn't seem to stop himself though. "The cue needs to slide between your fingers smoothly so your aim doesn't slip off target."

Stiles turned his head, his cheek brushing Derek's. "Maybe it needs lube."

Derek lost it then, the tension of the moment making the lame joke funnier than it should have been, and a laugh burst from him.

Stiles bent his head low in a fit of giggles, backing his ass up and brushed against Derek's crotch. Derek inhaled, fingers tightening on Stiles' hip. Stiles looked over his shoulder, gaging Derek's reaction.

He must've liked what he saw because he said, "Fuck it," and straightened up, turned and crowded into Derek to whisper, "Do you want to get out of here?"

"We're in the middle of a game," Derek said, and wished the words back because, yes, he really
wanted to be out of here.

Stiles snorted, turned, and proceeded to pocket every last remaining ball with ease. "Done."

Derek just stared, speechless.

"Sorry, I might've been, uh..." Stiles turned and gave a little wave to the grizzled bartender. “Frank over there? He’s one of my dad’s best friends and also happened to be one of the various people conscripted into the 'babysit Stiles' army when I was little. He might have taught me a thing or two?"

"You’ve been playing me all night." Derek said, biting his lip to keep from smiling, although he couldn’t help but feel a sting of embarrassment.

Stiles gave him an exaggerated shrug. "But in an honest and genuine attempt to get in your pants? Look at you, dude. You can't hold that against me."

"Maybe I want you to make it up to me."

"Oh, I can do that." Stiles grinned, a bit wild and devilish, already tugging Derek toward the door. "Mine or yours?"

"Yours. I'm still unpacking. Let me get my jacket." Derek pulled out of his grasp, making his way back to their booth, only to figure out that everyone had gone back there instead of the pool table. Parrish was standing there already holding out his jacket. "You guys were in on that, weren't you?"

Erica's smile turned smug. "A car wreck's not your fault if you just stand there watching it happen."

"You made your own bed, man, offering to help poor clueless Stiles like a knight in shining armor," Parrish said. Derek was pretty sure he was never going to live this down. "Hint: never underestimate Stiles."

"Do we have to give back his thirty dollars?" Kira asked, looking like she'd already spent her share.

Scott rubbed her shoulder. "No, babe. That's like an early wedding present." He looked at Derek and said with sincerity, "If you come to the wedding you don't need to give us another gift."

Derek wasn't sure if that meant Stiles' friends all thought he was stupid, or if he'd been accepted into the bosom of their gang. Across the bar, Stiles was making an impatient gesture.

He looked around awkwardly, not sure how to exit the conversation, but Scott just shook his hand, saying, "Good to meet you, Derek. Thanks for driving Stiles home."

"Yeah, sure. Anytime," he muttered, then, with a wave, he followed Stiles out the door.

Stiles' apartment was in a neat, if older and slightly run down, duplex. His front door stuck weirdly as Stiles unlocked it, slamming his shoulder against the wood.

"Sorry, I'm just subletting this place from Scott's boss.

Derek toed off his shoes. "Hey, no worries," he said, “Laura's happy I actually have furniture and I'm not squatting in an abandoned warehouse or something."

"Laura?"
"My sister. She's still in New York." Derek inhaled, acclimating himself to the unfamiliar place. The entire apartment held an almost overpowering scent of herbs, more like an exotic tea shop, rather than just the remnants of last night's dinner.

"Oh."

Somewhere between the bar and his front door, Stiles had gotten fidgety, tugging at his hair until it was a wild mess that Derek wanted to bury his hands in. He wanted to catch those fingers, hold them still, kiss his knuckles and squeeze his wrist until he was calm again.

"You want something to drink? Water, or..." Stiles trailed off as Derek stepped in close to press a kiss to his lips. It was a gentle graze at first, but Stiles pushed forward, deepening it until they were both hot and breathless. "Or sex? Sex is my favorite."

"You're ridiculous." Derek smiled into another kiss. "But I knew that from the first moment I saw you. Your name tag was written in glitter."

Stiles laughed, tugging Derek up the stairs. "That's me, you get what you see."

"No secrets?"

Stiles heart thumped, loud enough for Derek to stop and listen. But it was steady when Stiles stripped off his shirt and said, "I'm an open book," then he pulled Derek in by the belt loops. "But you, Deputy Derek, are a mystery I'm going to enjoy uncovering."

The threat -- promise? -- should have chilled him. Derek had plenty of secrets he had no interest in sharing, but this dorky, small town coffee shop owner felt like anything but a threat. He felt... normal. Comfortable.

Stiles managed to do what no one-night stand had managed since Kate; he made Derek feel safe.

Stripping down to his skin, enjoying every moment of Stiles nervously doing the same, it felt so very easy. Beneath his hands, Stiles was warm and soft, letting Derek take the lead as they explored each others bodies and tumbled their way onto the bed.

"Can I fuck you?" Derek whispered, capturing Stiles earlobe between his teeth and nipping gently.


Derek pawed inside for a moment, not quite ready to stop sucking the tender skin of Stiles' neck to look properly. Then his fingers closed on the crinkly foil of a condom wrapper and a half-empty tube.

Stiles' scent spiked, like the appearance of his supplies suddenly made it all real; Derek helplessly buried his nose in the crease of Stiles' neck, soaking in the hint of coffee and herbs that constantly surrounded Stiles.

Growing restless, Stiles rolled his hips up off the matters, his cock finding a home nestled in the curve of Derek's groin. Whining, he thrust harder, chasing the friction, impatient for more.

Derek mouthed at the spot he'd been sucking, just above the clavicle. His teeth prickled to bite down and he forced himself away from the temptation. Kneeling, he sat back on his heels, and popped the cap from the lube.

It was unscented, and though Derek usually didn't care, he was grateful he'd be smelling nothing
but Stiles and himself, their sweat and come. It's what he wanted to remember when this was done.

Stiles spread out for him beautifully, opening up easily as Derek slid in the first slick finger.

"I like -- I don't need much," Stiles said, breathing deeply. He dug his heels into the mattress, tilting his hips to improve the angle. Derek's finger slipped in further and the sound that came from Stiles throat had Derek adding a second.

"I'm good. Shit. Yes." Stiles gasped. "Fuck, your hands." His hips were working now, fucking himself on Derek's fingers as Derek fought to keep up.

He'd be tempted to just do this all night, stare at the tight squeeze of Stiles' ass clenching greedily at his slick fingers. But Stiles had the condom in hand already, ripping open the pack and handing it off to Derek with grunt that he was pretty sure meant, 'now, asshole.'

Derek wasn't practiced enough to manage the task single handed, and he pulled his fingers out. It earned him a hiss from Stiles, who half arched off the bed to follow him, as if he wanted to reach for Derek and forcefully pull him back into place.

Derek wasn’t immune to the feeling of loss himself, and he regretted more than just the little bit of necessary distance between them.

He had to physically fight the urge to toss the condom on the floor. Every cell of his body yearned for the skin on skin contact that the little bit of rubber was going to deny him.

Even if he could have found the words to do so, however, Derek wasn’t sure he was willing to explain that protection wasn’t necessary. Not with Stiles. Not yet.

Stiles watched him with heavy-lidded eyes, stroking his own dick slick with lube. “Let me,” he murmured, when Derek continued to hesitate. He reached out, the muscles of his stomach clenching with his movement as he helped Derek roll down the condom.

Their eyes met, for a second, and then Stiles was falling back against the bed, one of his hands reaching out for a pillow that he tucked under his ass. “Like this,” Stiles said, mouth curving into a smile that was that same combination of self-deprecating and flirty that Derek was coming to recognize as distinctly Stiles.

"Comfortable?"

"Will be in a sec," Stiles said, spreading his legs until his ass was on display. "Come here."

Derek crowded over him, kissing messily at his abs, his nipples, before finally finding his mouth. Stiles opened to the kiss, making raunchy, needy sounds as Derek's cock dragged along his wet rim. With a snap of his hips, the head pushed in, and Stiles' mouth dropped open. The breath that punched out of him was wet and needy, tinged with the barest edge of a whimper.

"Okay?"

"Yeah, perf..." He gasped as Derek rocked in further. "Yes. Fuck."

Derek watched, transfixed as Stiles' expressive face told him everything, his eyes fluttering shut and mouth seemingly unable to close as he let out the most delicious moans. He just kept rolling his hips, memorizing every gorgeous reaction as he worked deeper, pulled out and went deeper again.
The feedback was unbelievable, as stimulating as the tight clench on his cock. Every sound, every drop of sweat on Stiles temple, the intoxicating scent of arousal in the air. Derek devoured it all, with his eyes, his tongue, with every inhal. He fought to keep his thrusts steady, changing his angle only to gage every reaction until they were both panting and desperate.

Stiles was frantic beneath him, tilting to meet every jerk of his hips until their pace was impossible to sustain and their rhythm faltered with exhaustion. Derek raised himself to his knees, lifting Stiles' ass so he could fuck fast and hard. A rumble, barely human, started in his chest as he got closer and closer to the edge.

"Almost-- Shit." Stiles' hands scrambled toward his cock, tugging roughly a half dozen strokes before he was painting his own chest with come.

On instinct, Derek pulled out, tugging off the condom. He leaned over Stiles, one arm supporting himself, the other pumping his cock viciously until he was spilling onto Stiles, adding to the mess until Stiles was filthy with it.

It was a sight Derek wanted to keep in his brain forever.

He kept himself braced over Stiles for a moment, his head hanging low between his straining shoulders. Stiles had gone boneless beneath him, head thrown back, revealing the long line of his pale throat. His chest rose and fell in shallow breaths, and his eyes were closed, lashes fanned out across his cheeks.

"I should get something to clean up," Derek said, hating the thought of leaving Stiles even as he said it.

“Mm,” Stiles agreed, reaching up to twine a hand behind Derek’s head and pull him into a lazy kiss, his eyes never opening. After a moment, Stiles gently shoved at Derek’s shoulders, and Derek let himself be moved, rolling to his side.

Stiles waved a hand blindly toward the door. “Bathroom’s across the hall.”

Derek groaned but nodded, gathering up the used condom and stumbling out into the hallway on legs that still felt like jello, his nerves buzzing with the intensity of his orgasm.

When he emerged from the bathroom a few moments later with a clean towel for Stiles, he was confronted with the unexpected presence of a cat—Derek honestly had no idea how he’d missed the creature before, but he blamed his still sex muddled senses. The grey and white animal froze when it saw him, surprised, and then immediately tensed, its fur standing on end and its back arching defensively as it hissed at him. Derek absently realized that it was missing one of its front legs, but that didn’t seem to bother it at all, as it continued to stare him down.

It didn’t move, standing between Derek and the door back into Stiles’ room.

They stood there frozen for a minute before Derek finally said, "Fuck it," and he flashed his eyes at the cat, who promptly fluffed up even more if it were possible, and then took off back down the stairs, letting out an ear splitting yowl.

“Derek?” Stiles mumbled, when Derek finally slid back into the bed. Stiles had turned onto his side while he was gone, the blankets loosely twined around his legs.

Derek didn’t answer right away; he pulled Stiles into his arms, burying his nose into Stiles’ neck and revelling in the smell of them on his skin.
Instead of handing Stiles the towel, he used it himself to wipe up the mess they'd both made on Stiles' chest. The drying come looked tacky, and the patch of hair between Stiles' pecs was matted and starting to flake; Derek almost felt guilt for aiming for it.

Stiles grimaced as the cleaning became futile. "I'll shower later," he said, stealing the towel from Derek, giving a last wipe between his legs and tossing the towel onto the floor.

After a few minutes of just holding each other, some of the sleepiness of a good orgasm leaving him, Derek said, “I think your cat hates me.”

“Hmm? Gimpy?”

“You...named your three legged cat Gimpy?” Derek asked, incredulous.

Stiles turned to look at Derek over his shoulder, his eyes shining mischievously in the low light.

“He was a rescue,” Stiles explained, voice low in that way that pillow talk always seemed to be. “Scott found him hiding under the dumpster behind the clinic a couple years ago. Had really bad frostbite. Scott thinks he must have stepped into a puddle or something for it to have gotten so bad on his leg, but he had to amputate it. They didn’t really have a lot of room in the shelter at the time, so he asked me if I could foster him while he recovered.”

Stiles wiggled his ass and snuggled deeper into Derek’s hold. “I never gave him back.”

“But you named your three legged cat Gimpy,” Derek reiterated, still stuck on that point.

“I never said I wasn’t an asshole. To be fair though, that wasn’t supposed to be his name, it just sort of...” Stiles shrugged, his raised shoulder brushing against Derek’s chin. “Stuck.”

Derek nipped at the offending shoulder, and then pressed a smile into it when Stiles sucked in a breath. Low grade arousal hit Derek’s nose, but there was nothing urgent about it. Yet.

“So what about you?” Stiles said. “What’s your story, how did Derek Hale, hater of coffee, end up in small town Beacon Hills.”

Derek snorted. “That’s a loaded question, don’t you think?”

“I did promise I’d uncover what made you tick.”

“You can try,” Derek teased, coaxing Stiles to turn over in his arms as he said it. He pressed a kiss to Stiles’ mouth when they were face to face. “My family is from here originally.” If Stiles didn’t already know about his family, he figured this was not the time to bring it up.

“As for the coffee hating--” He shrugged. “I’ve never really liked it. Honestly, I’ve never liked other peoples’ tea either. It’s always been something I’ve made for myself and no one else ever seems to do it right. Except for you, apparently." "Yeah?"

Derek hummed, debated whether or not to explain, but the words came out easily.

"Laura and I... we had a shit time in New York, at first. It was so different to here. Our first Christmas she found this quaint little tea shop just on the outskirts of Chinatown, and she bought us a box of something. I don't even remember anymore what kind of tea it was. She said it was just what we needed. At the time I laughed."
"Why?"

"I figured she must have picked it out of the clearance bin when she couldn't figure out what else to get me."

Stiles snorted, but his expression was fond as he watched Derek talk.

Derek felt his mind drift off for a second, remembering that one frigid February night when he'd wanted something to warm his hands, and he'd put the kettle on and pulled out the box.

"You look like Mom," Laura had said when she’d walked in on him curled around his cup. "She used to drink tea like that."

"It turned out to be the best Christmas present anyone ever gave me," Derek finally said, coming back to the moment and focusing on Stiles again, who was smiling gently at him.

It was one of the reasons Laura chose to work in a halfway house that supported supernaturals after trauma. She always had a way of knowing what people needed after the worst moments of their lives.

Derek grinned, becoming aware of the nonsensical patterns Stiles was tracing over his chest. He shuddered a little at the intimate sensation. "Your teas… well, I guess they feel like that. Just what I need in that moment."

Stiles eyes widened, a bit like he was seeing Derek for the first time. "Yeah, you know. My mom always acted like making food for someone was like… I don't know. Nourishing someone's soul. I try to always remember that. It's why I opened the shop."

"To nourish people's souls?"

"Something like that." Stiles grinned wryly. "My dad tries to understand. But you know him, mostly he just likes that he gets discounted coffee."

Derek blinked. "Your dad?"

"You know, John Stilinski?"

Derek felt his whole body go stiff, and the hand on his chest instantly felt restricting instead of comforting. Had he really just slept with his boss's son? "You mean Sheriff Stilinski, my boss?"

Stiles pulled back a little, half sitting up in the bed. "Yes? Is that a problem?"

"I…” Before he could even really think about it, Derek found himself getting out of bed, searching for his clothes. "I should go actually. I just remembered…"

"So it is a problem," Stiles said, voice going sharp, but sounding more hurt than confrontational or angry.

"I'm not--" Derek turned to look at him, and leaned forward to press a chaste kiss to Stiles mouth. "This was good, but I really should--"

The truth was, he didn’t know what to think. He was determined to do well here in Beacon Hills. To find a home here, maybe a career, and fucking his boss's son? That could only end in the exact kind of trouble he wanted to avoid.

The sheriff knew about Derek, about werewolves. He didn't seem to hold any prejudice against him
using supernatural means to do his job better, but that didn't mean he would be okay with his son being fucked by someone less than human. Derek knew all too well there were many different levels of 'acceptance' out there.

Finally fully dressed, he turned back to Stiles, who had pulled his legs up to his chest. He looked vulnerable and a lot younger than he had an hour ago, when he’d been writhing on Derek’s cock. And fuck. He could not keep thinking like that. This was probably unprofessional of him in a hundred different ways.

The truth was that running away felt as familiar to him as shifting.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “It’s just late, okay? I have to get up early.” Derek scratched at the back of his neck. “I mean, I guess you do too and you just reminded me of that. Even if it was nice to be here with you for a while and forget.”

Stiles nodded. “I guess, yeah,” he agreed. “I’ll see you tomorrow?”

“Sure.” Derek refused to watch as Stiles slid out of the bed and searched for his boxers.

“I’ll walk you out then.” Stiles tone was flat, like he'd moved past hurt to something that made Derek's face burn with shame even as he scrambled to catch up with Stiles.

Lips pressed white, Stiles opened the front door.

“I’m... ” Derek's throat closed up when Stiles' expression hardened. He just stood with the door open, waiting for Derek to leave, only stiffening further as Derek brushed past him.

The slamming of the door a second later shook him from his stupor. He was being an asshole, he realized. A complete, socially inept jerk. But then again, it had been so easy to fall back on old habits. Back in New York, those months after the fire when he hated everything, and everyone, especially himself, asshole had been his default.

Tonight, he'd panicked and defaulted.

“Fuck,” he cursed, running his hands through his hair. He breathed deeply for a second, wondering how such a great night had gone downhill so quickly.

Being with Stiles… it hadn't been like being with anyone else.

He’d been so easy to talk to, and more amazing than that, Derek had actually wanted to talk to him. It had felt good to open up to him about Laura. More than good, if he was honest with himself.

He groaned at his own stupidity and knew he had to be mature about this. He owed it to Stiles to at least try to explain. Swallowing his pride, he resigned himself to do what he had to.

He raised his fist to knock, and then blinked as his fist stopped a bare centimeter from actually connecting with the door, blue light flaring bright and almost blinding.

“What the hell?”

He brought his hand up more slowly, and sure enough, his hand once again came up against an invisible barrier.

“Mountain ash,” he muttered, his heart pounding in his chest, almost choking him. His blood turned to ice. What the hell was Stiles doing with a door made of mountain ash?
Derek could barely think past the sudden crippling fear that he’d been trapped inside, and he hadn’t even known it. Visions of his family, trapped and dying, flashed through his mind and Derek reeled back.

He'd shared himself so easily, made himself vulnerable.

He’d opened up to Stiles, even had thoughts of a potential relationship, but the door was a visceral reminder as to why he couldn't. He was too broken for this. Would he never learn? His skin itched for a shower, as though he could claw away at Kate's remembered touch.

He'd joked with Parrish, his first day at the station, that he wouldn’t be surprised if Stiles was magic. The joke wasn’t so funny anymore. Of course he was magic, and his father being the sheriff only reinforced the idea that Stiles must know about the supernatural. About werewolves.

As Derek's head cleared, he decided that he couldn't blame Stiles for protecting himself. Maybe it was just as well they’d made a mess of everything, because bad things happened when Derek let himself get involved with people. He'd come back to Beacon Hills to do a job, to protect people-- to atone, if he were being honest with himself.

He couldn't do that if he was compromised.

He pressed against the barrier one more time, just to feel the sting of it, the ghost of Kate’s laugh echoing in his head as he did.
“Sooo?” Erica said, coming up behind Stiles. She poked him in the side and hopped up on the counter to watch as Stiles went through his normal opening duties.

“You know, you seem to forget that I’m paying you to actually help around here.”

“No. You’re paying me because I’m awesome, and I’m great with customers.”

Stiles rolled his eyes, and started wiping down the counter a little more aggressively. He was bone-tired, his muscles protesting after last night’s athletics and the restless sleep that followed Derek’s abrupt escape. If he hadn’t owned this place, he wouldn’t have even dragged his ass out of bed this morning. Unfortunately, the downside of owning your own business was that it made it hard to call in sick. At least it was for him. He’d always put every ounce of himself into this place.

Erica let him be for about thirty seconds before she got impatient. “Oh, come on,” she crowed. “So, how was it? We all saw you go home with Derek. If you tell me you didn’t tap that, I’m going to officially consider you a lost cause and a disgrace to all humanity.”

“Geez, Erica.” His head was seriously pounding, and talking about it was the last thing he wanted at the moment. He only hoped he could banter her into distraction. “Harsh much?”

She flicked a strand of hair over her shoulder. “You wouldn’t want me any other way.”

“There must be something wrong with me.”

“Obviously. So? You look like someone who got laid, don’t even try to pretend otherwise”

Stiles looked at her, and couldn’t help his small, bitter smile. “Yeah. Fine. And it was…” He trailed off, fully aware of the fact that he was blushing. “Good, I guess. Really, good. I think he might be like some sort of sex god, actually.”

Erica smirked, and there was a glint in her eyes that he knew well.

“Before you ask, I’m not giving you any details, you harpy.” They were not going there.

She humphed, but then her expression turned sharp again as she studied him. “Something’s wrong.”

Stiles felt his shoulders deflate, and he hated her for a second. She was too damn observant.

“I thought you said the sex was good.”

“The sex, yes. And I mean, it was all going well. Really well. I thought…” He wasn’t sure what he’d thought actually. Derek had been so wonderful. The way he’d touched Stiles, the way he’d opened up to him? That had felt like something. And then Derek had fled like a fucking bat out of hell, and honestly he was still reeling from the whiplash of it. He couldn’t explain that to Erica though, even if he could have gotten the words out around the lump in his throat.

“Oh, honey.” She slid off the counter and braced her hands on his shoulders, looking up into his eyes. “What did he do?”

“He walked out.” Saying it out loud suddenly made it feel more real, and for the first time he felt something other than disappointment. He felt kernel of anger begin to swell inside his chest. “He
fucking walked out after telling me all these really private things. It didn’t feel like just a hook up, but then he treated me like some one-night stand. He could barely look me in the eye, just because my dad’s his boss.”

“You think that’s why?”

“Yeah,” Stiles said, voice hoarse. ”He didn't know.”

“Well, fuck him then. He doesn’t deserve you.”

“I’m pretty sure you’re supposed to say that whether it’s true or not.”

“Well, this time I actually mean it.” Erica stepped back from him, took the rag from his hands and started wiping down the counters herself.

“Great. Now I can say I know what it looks like when Erica Reyes pitties me.”

“I always pity you, Batman. You just look particularly pathetic today, and I’m proving I can be a good friend. When I want to be.”

Stiles snorted, finally smiling a little despite himself. “Thanks for that.”

“Any time! Now, shoo. Off you go. I can handle this for now, why don’t you see if you can replicate your cookies. Maybe we can actually try selling them today!”

“Don’t get your hopes up too much,” Stiles joked back, but figured it would be worth a try at least. “Hey, um… When Derek comes in…”

“You aren’t here, got it.”

“No, I mean. That would be… I should probably talk to him.”

Erica peered at him.

Stiles groaned and ran a hand through his hair. “It was really good sex.”

“Oh huh.”

“I’m just gonna…” Stiles jerked a thumb over his shoulder and headed back into the kitchen, where he started gathering cookie ingredients. He’d done this once, he could do it again, dammit.

“Or not,” he muttered to himself ten minutes later, and then he added a “fuck” for good measure as he fished another piece of eggshell out of the batter.

He couldn’t decide if the progression toward profanity was an improvement over his increasingly detailed monologue of all the things he wanted to say to Derek when he saw him again, or not.

He sighed and wiped flour from his cheek with his forearm. “What the hell am I doing?”

His toe throbbing in sympathy from where he’d stubbed it on the edge of the prep table was his only answer.

Still, he could feel his stubborn streak kicking in with a vengeance; this was personal now, and he finally managed to get something resembling cookie dough plopped in awkwardly shaped dollops on a couple of cookie sheets.
“Okay. You little fuckers are gonna cook, and you’re going to be awesome,” Stiles said. He bit his lip and slid them into the oven, and then he was promptly distracted by the bell on the door chiming for the first time that morning.

He almost slipped as he hurried out into the main cafe; the only person to ever come in this early was the deputy picking up the orders for the station. Maybe Derek would…

“You’re not Derek,” he blurted before he could stop himself. His heart fell somewhere into the vicinity of his stomach, and the aborted expectation of seeing Derek almost choked him.

Tara raised a judgemental eyebrow at him, and then shared a meaningful look with Erica. “Our boy’s got a crush, doesn’t he?”

“It’s kind of pitiful,” Erica agreed.

Tara looked back at Stiles and clicked her tongue. “Now, chop chop, honey. I’m on a schedule here. The boys got called in early, but I’ll be damned if I’m gonna miss out on all the fun just because I was pickin’ up the damn coffee like a rookie. I haven’t been a rookie since you were a snot-nosed, know-it-all little shit, who didn’t even stand taller than that counter right there.”

Stiles chuckled, despite himself. “Yeah, yeah. I love you too, Tara.” He pointedly ignored Erica's muttered comment about him still being a know-it-all.

Tara sniffed, but looked pleased for a few seconds, before shooing him back to work.

He was almost done with the orders when he realized he’d begun measuring out the loose leaf tea he’d taken to calling “Derek’s blend” in his head, without even realizing he was doing it. He paused and just stared down at the tea. Everything was so confusing, his emotions all twisted up in a combination of hurt and anger and bitterness.

He bit the inside of his cheek, shook his head and finished making the tea, adding it to the rest of the order and simply writing “Derek” on the outside of the cup.

“Alright,” he said, pushing the box of drinks bound for the sheriff’s station a couple inches toward Tara. “Erica, you wanna get this rung up?”

“I can handle that. And you can get back to work on your cookies.”

“Cookies?” Tara asked, looking simultaneously hopeful and a little skeptical. She’d been around long enough to know Stiles’ track record with baking.

“Oh my God, the cookies!” Stiles cursed and bolted back to the kitchen toward the bitter smell of charred sugar.

The burnt cookies pretty much set the tone for the rest of Stiles’ morning.

The day was grey and rainy, and normally those were his busiest, but the world seemed to know what a bad mood he was in and matched in sourness. Not even Old Man Jacobs had come in.

Stiles had a sinking suspicion that the rain clouds that had been emptying their contents for the last six hours were somehow huddled only over his little shop, and all he’d have to do was walk across the street and there would be sunshine.

The door didn’t chime again until ten, and Stiles perked up a little from where he was still sulking.
from having burnt his second batch of cookies.

It was his Free Period BHHS student.

“Morning,” Stiles said, pushing away from the counter and tossing his cleaning rag down. He couldn’t quite bring himself to add “good” to his greeting.

The kid nodded at him, fidgeting a little with the hem of his letter jacket.

“The usual?” Stiles asked, already going through the motions of putting the kid’s drink together without really paying attention to what he was doing. “Didn’t see you yesterday,” he added absently.

That got him a shrug.

Stiles peered at him, for the first time really paying attention to the kid. He had Jackson-type douchebag jock written all over him -- over-styled blond hair and a naturally smug quirk to his mouth -- but it was at odds with the nervous way he shuffled his feet and refused to meet Stiles’ eyes. He looked almost jittery actually, and Stiles could see the dark circles under his eyes even from a few feet away.

“You're a little young to be able to afford coming in so often,” Stiles commented, then wanted to kick himself when the kid flinched. It wasn’t exactly good business to go around offending his customers.

The silence turned awkward after that, and Stiles hurried through completing the order.

“What’s your name?” Stiles asked as he finished up, momentarily guilty for not having asked before. The kid had been coming in almost like clockwork the last month.

The kid ran a hand through his rain soaked hair before finally looking up, and yeah there it was, some of that jock posturing that Stiles had been looking for. He was intense, seemed older, now that he didn’t look so nervous. “Sean.”

“Well, Sean.” Stiles handed over the drink. “Consider this on the house. You look like you need it, and I need to rack up some karma points.”

That got him a small smile, and then Sean took a careful sip of his drink and finally seemed to relax, his shoulders losing their stiffness and his eyes slipping shut for a second. “Thanks.”

Around noon, and a third batch of burned cookies later, Erica finally had enough.

“Out.”

“What?”

"I am kicking you out,” Erica said, pushing him toward the door. “You’re driving away all the customers.”

That wasn't fair. There had only been the one mom and toddler who'd turned around when the little boy started complaining about the 'icky smell'.

"I own this place, you can’t--" Stiles dug his heels in, but after another strong shove he gave up and let her push him the rest of the way out the door. “This is under protest!”
“Noted. I’ve got this. Go and burn things somewhere else now, please and thank you.”

“Ugh, fine. Oh my God, I’m going.”

Which is how Stiles found himself standing outside the sheriff’s station fifteen minutes later, a couple of takeout boxes from Sarah’s Sandwich Shoppe in hand. Tara had said there was an early call, which meant his dad had probably been called in too, and had therefore been working too hard. He suspected his dad hadn’t had time for lunch, healthy or otherwise. So maybe he could actually be helpful with his unexpected day off.

Besides, even at twenty-seven, he was still drawn to his dad whenever he was miserable. He’d outgrown thinking his dad could fix everything, soothe every hurt and solve every problem, but sometimes he wanted the comfort of pretending it was that easy. Today was one of those days.

He didn’t even think about the fact that Derek might be at the station until he was already walking through the doors. He froze, one foot in the door, and then decided fuck it, he’d be damned if he’d let Derek keep him from his dad.

Luckily, it wasn’t an issue. Derek and Jordan’s desks were both empty.

His dad’s office however, yielded success.

“Stiles,” his dad said, not bothering to look up from the papers spread out in front of him. He had his glasses on, which meant he’d been at it for a while.

“Hey, Daddy-o,” Stiles said, wincing at the noticeable wobble in his voice.

His dad looked up then, frowning. He pulled his glasses off and tossed them carelessly down on the desk in front of him. “Everythi… Is that lunch?”

“It might be.” Stiles didn’t bother to be coy, promptly setting his boxes down on the desk, glad to have an excuse not to talk about it.

His dad grabbed his box, and only grimaced a little when he realized it was vegetarian. “Thanks, kid. I needed this.”

“Sure. Tara came in this morning and said everyone got called in early, and I know how you get.”

His dad eyed him for a moment, not hiding the obvious suspicion. “I’m not telling you anything.”


"Right, well. Don't get underfoot. Everyone's on edge." It was obvious by the tone of his voice and the lines at the corners of his mouth that the call this morning had been anything but routine. Considering the slew of murders recently, it didn’t take a rocket scientist to guess what the call had been about.

He knew better than to push his dad while he was like this, and honestly was just as grateful to let the subject drop himself. He’d come for a distraction, and getting his nose into a case and pissing off his dad wasn’t at all what he was in the mood for.

"Lunch. That's all. No questions. I'll even do some filing, if you need help.”

"Is that so?” His dad looked skeptical, narrowing his eyes at Stiles as he suddenly switched into
full cop mode. It was a look Stiles had seen often growing up. “Anything you need to talk to me about?”

"I… no. Nope," Stiles said, taking a pointed bite of his burger before he could start babbling. "Just… stuff," he said through a muffled mouthful when his dad didn’t look satisfied.

"Alright," his dad said after a pause, and then his eyes caught back on the mountain of paperwork on his desk and he deflated, switching back to overworked sheriff in the blink of an eye. "After you wash that mustard off your hands, you can file that stack there. Maybe I'll even get home early tonight." He sounded wistful, and they both knew it would never happen.

There was no question where Stiles had gotten his work ethic from.

Spending time with his dad helped him feel better, despite the papercuts making his fingers throb. When Stiles left his office an hour later, the inky-black feel of rejection had started to seep away.

It was still pouring rain when he peeked out the main door and he sighed, but he figured at that point he’d just give up on the day as a lost cause and go home. He was just putting his head down to make a dash for his Jeep when he collided with someone trying to dart in out of the rain.

“Excuse m-- Fuck. Derek.”

Derek was soaking wet and frowning, the lines of his face severe. He started to reach out to Stiles to steady him, but as soon as he realized who he’d bumped into, he jerked his hand back like he’d been burned.

“You should watch where you’re going.”

Up until this moment Stiles been hoping that maybe Derek had just gotten a little scared at how much they’d seemed to click, or embarrassed that he hadn't known Stiles was his boss's son. He could understand that. But this? He didn’t know what this was, and Derek did not appear interesting in explaining or apologizing for last night's disappearing act. Stiles felt his anger surge bright and hot beneath his skin.

Fuck, this man that Stiles had thought… It didn’t matter what he’d thought, because clearly he’d been wrong. The man who stood before him now felt like a complete stranger.

“What the hell is your problem?” Stiles said, voice going high and sharp with his anger.

“Excuse me?”

Derek seemed to have dismissed him completely, his attention drawn elsewhere. It grated at Stiles. He wanted to jump up and down and wave his arms to get Derek's attention, wanted to punch him-- wanted to kiss him too, and that just made him angrier with himself. “So that’s how it’s going to be then?”

Derek turned back to him, and his gaze was intense as it focused in on him; Stiles immediately regretted wanting his attention. “It’s not going to be anything.”

"Is this about my dad? Even if he knew, he wouldn't care." Stiles tried to keep his voice low, knowing it was all too easy to start screaming with the outrage building inside him. His dad was only twenty feet from them.

Derek looked like he was about to argue, but just shook his head, looking defeated; the literal exact opposite reaction Stiles was expecting. "I'm not doing this."
Before Stiles could make any sense of the words, Derek pushed passed him, knocking Stiles’ shoulder.

Stiles stared after him, his vision blurry from tears that he refused to let fall. His hands were clenched into fists at his side, and it took a force of will to uncurl them. He felt like the universe had stuck a cosmic 'kick me' sign on his back and he was supposed to just stand there and take it.

And then he shook his head, still frozen on the threshold.

Fuck this, he was a Stilinski and he’d grown up a lot since the Lydia years of high school. He’d be damned if he let anyone, no matter how stupidly gorgeous, get him so twisted up.
Derek hated dead bodies.

His uncle hadn’t been dead long, body still warm and limbs still pliant, when Derek had carried him through the preserve while Laura dug the hole behind their old house. It had been disgusting and messy and heart wrenching, but also surreal.

Despite the fact that he’d helped Laura kill his own uncle, the fact of it hadn’t really sunk in until days afterwards, and even with Peter’s blood soaking into his shirt he’d still seemed alive to Derek. Like all Derek had to do was step back into his room at the hospital and he’d be there, catatonic and dead for years already, in all but name.

That was the only dead body Derek had ever gotten close to, until this morning.

He’d gotten the call from dispatch -- from Lydia -- around 5am, only a few hours after he’d gotten home from Stiles’ apartment. At that point he’d only managed a short, too-hot, shower and a few hours of staring at the ceiling cursing his life, when his phone rang. No actual sleep, though.

If Peter’s body had been unsettling, this one was repulsive. It took everything Derek had not to recoil at the sight. He cursed his senses, the stench of blood and the beginning of decay; the silence of the body without breath or heartbeat. Every cell of his being wanted to revolt against the bone-deep feeling that this lump of flesh was just that, and definitely not a person any longer.

“You alright, son?” Sheriff asked, hand on Derek’s shoulder.

Derek resisted the urge to pull away. The sheriff was the last person he wanted comfort from right now. “I’m fine,” he said, voice flat.

“Can you... Is there any--” Sheriff motioned with his hands towards the underbrush, the air around them. “Clues?”

It was no coincidence the sheriff had called Derek in before the rest of the team, then.

Derek tried to focus on being useful, to swallow past the self-pity that was bitterly gnawing at his insides. This was a murder investigation and he was a cop. He wanted this job.

Centering himself, he inhaled, trying to catch any scents before the preserve was teeming with officers. He shook his head. “Teenagers, hormones, fear... sweat like they’d been running.” He looked down at the body – what was left of it – and the hair behind the ear was curled like it had been wet. “Maybe he was chased?”

The sheriff nodded, patting Derek on the back. “Why don’t you see if you can find the path he took. See if it has the markings of a wild animal, or something else, chasing after him.”

“Yes, sir.”

The path was easy enough to find, only about a quarter of a mile away from the main trails and marked with fresh blood that shone like little beacons, even in the dim predawn light. The foliage was thick in this part of the woods, the branches and underbrush tearing at Derek’s clothes and skin.

A human against a wild animal-- much less something supernatural-- wouldn’t have stood a chance
here. Unfortunately, the thick underbrush also made it difficult for Derek to pick up anything particularly useful; everything was too muddled, overpowered by the damn scent of mold and the loamy tang of early spring thaw. The path, while obvious, was too chaotic for him to make much sense of anything, much less determine what had been chasing their victim.

His searching wasn’t a total waste of time though, and Derek paused at a particularly dense tangle of tree roots and knelt down, using a stick to brush aside some leaves to uncover an iphone. The home screen flashed on as he jostled it, revealing a smiling teenage couple. The boy, the body—god—was twirling a pretty blond in a prom dress in the photo, both of them looking so happy and in love the way only teenagers could manage.

Derek didn’t know how long he stared down at the phone, even long after the screen blacked out again. Maybe a half an hour, although it was hard to tell. The sun had never come out; the grey of dawn turned into the rainy grey of morning without him realizing it. When Parrish finally found him, he just stood at Derek’s shoulder and offered an evidence bag, not bothering to say anything until the phone was secured and carefully labeled.

"Tara did the coffee run this morning," Parrish explained as he handed Derek a familiar paper cup, once the phone was dealt with. Derek took it, more out of force of habit than anything else. "Sheriff said you were busy with this."

“Thanks,” Derek said absently, blinking down at the cup and only belatedly realizing what it was. Who it was from. Not that there was anything he could do but hold onto it without Parrish getting suspicious.

Derek stared down at the cup, where 'Derek' was the only thing written on the side in sharp, bold letters, like they were etched in annoyance. He'd never seen an actual name written on one of Stiles' cups before.

Parrish laughed, clearly misunderstanding his reaction. "Please tell me Sheriff didn't call you in while you were in bed with Stiles?" When Derek whipped his head around to stare at him in shock, and Parrish only laughed harder. "Oh, God. He did?"

"No! No, I… I'd left already," Derek stammered, thrown by Parrish talking so casually about Derek sleeping with the boss's son. Stiles was the last thing he wanted to talk about now or ever. And especially not while on the job. "I-- I didn't… stay."

"Well, glad you guys hooked up anyway. You're good together."

It was impossible to reply to that. The thought of Stiles' face as he'd slammed the door in Derek's face made his stomach turn, and Derek took a sip of tea to settle it. Only that turned out to be a mistake. Instead of the delicate tea Stiles had been brewing for him the last few days, Derek's mouth filled with strongest, most bitter drink he'd ever tasted. The flavor was sharp and offensive instead of the subtle sweet, floral he'd been expecting.

He held it in mouth for second, unsure if he should spit it out, before finally choking it back. His eyes prickled as it caught in his throat, harsh and unfamiliar. He tried to hide his reaction with a cough.

"I wouldn't worry about it. The sheriff's reaction, I mean. He's a good guy and he wouldn't give you a hard time… Well, he wouldn't actually do anything at least." Parrish grinned. "And Stiles is his own person. The sheriff respects that."

"It's not--" Derek stopped himself. He couldn't very well tell Parrish about the mountain ash, about
everything. It would be better if he let Parrish draw his own conclusions. "I don't want to talk about it."

Parrish shrugged. "Anyway, it's nearly noon. Sheriff's already gone back. He sent me out here to tell you not to catch pneumonia."

Derek stared down at his bitter tea, hating the smell, the after taste, and most of all the comfort the warmth gave to his hand. "Yeah, I'm done."

Parrish must have sensed that Derek's mood matched the weather, because he offered to buy him lunch. By the time they finished in the preserve and picked up food, it was mid-afternoon and the rain still hadn't let up.

Derek had been awake for about thirty-six hours now. He was chilled to the bone, soaked through every layer of his clothes and was about as miserable as anyone would be after searching a forest for traces a dead teenager's blood for hours.

He darted from his car in a fruitless attempt to keep his bag of sandwiches from becoming as sodden as the rest of him, and wasn't looking where he was going. He jerked up as he barrelled into a warm body that was blocking the door to the station.

Reaching out instinctively, he grabbed for the man's arm to stop his downward momentum, only to have his senses filled with the familiar scent of coffee and herbs. He drew his hand back instantly, not mentally prepared to see Stiles.

He took a deep breath and it took a force of will to gather the strength to throw up his defenses and school his face into a mask of cool indifference.

"You should watch where you’re going," Derek found himself saying. He was defaulting again, he knew that, but he had no reserves left to fight off the defense mechanism.

Stiles' face fell instantly, hurt and confusion radiating from him as soon as Derek's words sunk in. Derek felt a pang of guilt until Stiles recovered and snarled back; Derek barely heard the actual words, just focused on the tone. In the face of Stiles' bitterness it was easy to bite back, let the frustration of everything that had happened in the last few hours out.

Laura had always said that he didn’t hold back when he argued, and Derek had the sneaking suspicion that his face was showing something ugly inside him.

His only hope for salvaging even a the most pathetic level of good rapport with Stiles, was to get away before it got any worse.

He pushed passed Stiles, ignoring the feel of their shoulders knocking together. It made everything worse that even that brief contact sent his heart racing, that Stiles' scent still made his head swim with pleasant thoughts. He hated that he now knew that Stiles’ eyes were even more attractive when they flashed hot and fierce with annoyance.

God, he really was an idiot.

The sandwiches were soggy. The fact that Parrish ate them without comment was more than likely due to the scowl permanently etched on Derek's face. He tried to shake off the conversation with Stiles but he'd never been good at compartmentalizing his issues.

Even the pleased look the sheriff gave him when he was told Derek had discovered the victim's
phone only reminded him of Stiles’ words, 'Is this about my dad? Even if he knew, he wouldn't care.' And Derek couldn't wrap his head around either Stilinski.

Derek looked the sheriff in the eye, trying to read him. "It's what you had me out there for, wasn't it?"

The sheriff frowned, his eyes going sharp, obviously catching on to the bitterness in Derek's tone. His eyes travelled over Derek's wet hair, rain-soaked uniform, and then zeroed in on what Derek knew was a broken grin on his face.

"Why don't you head home for a few hours, Hale," Sheriff said, not unkindly. "Get yourself a hot shower and some dry clothes. You did good work today, son. But the day’s not over yet."

He was tempted to be an asshole about it, childishly refuse the offer and sit in his slowly drying clothes, uncomfortable and belligerent, but he wasn't a sulky teenager and he refused to act like one. His, "Yes, sir" was stiff, but he left as ordered.

He was glad he did, honestly. He always felt more centered in his own space, and the heat of his shower and the rasp of a freshly laundered uniform against his skin turned out to be exactly what he needed.

Feeling a little better, he settled onto his couch and pulled his phone out. He needed to be back in an hour so there wasn’t time for a nap, but he figured it was a good time to call Laura. She might have some suggestions about the murders. Her work with the halfway house gave her access to all kinds of supernaturals most people had never heard of. She was the closest the department would get to an expert on 'animal attacks.'

Of course she didn’t answer. Derek groaned and hit the 'end call' button a little too forcefully, not bothering to leave a message. He’d try her again later.

With nothing else to distract him, he gave in and decided he’d just rest his eyes for a few minutes after all. However, just as he was settling in, his phone chirped from where he’d set it, face down, on his chest. Lifting it to eye-level, he checked the text and sighed. So much for that nap.

*Stop off and get coffee - Everyone.*

Erica gave him an unimpressed look and put her hands on the cocky jut of her hips the moment he walked into the Leaky Carafe. "I'm not making you anything."

Derek fists clenched at his side as he counted to ten. "I--"

"Stiles is home. You can find him there." Erica smirked like she knew very well Derek would rather be combing the forest for more dead bodies. "The only thing I'm serving you is a kick in the balls."

"It's not even for me." Derek waved the crumpled list of coffee-orders that he always kept in the uniform pocket. He was lucky it had survived the drier.

Erica's eyes narrowed as she crossed her arms over her chest as though she was settling herself in for a fight she was never going to back down from. "Does it look like I care?'"

"This town's a pain in the ass," Derek spat, banging the door open empty-handed.

The look the sheriff gave him as he handed him a cup from Starbucks made him want to bury
himself out behind his house with Uncle Peter.

Derek was still in a bad mood the next morning.

He’d barely gotten any sleep, and as far as he knew he was still responsible for the morning coffee run.

Given how things had gone the night before, he had his doubts about how well this was going to go over, though. He wasn’t sure what it meant that the best case scenario was probably that Stiles would be there, because if it was just Erica again, he had the distinctly bad feeling he’d be making another coffee shop walk of shame.

He shuddered as he remembered the looks he’d gotten when he’d handed over the carriers of Starbucks coffee the night before. God, he was probably never going to live that down.

On the other hand, he’d have to see Stiles again.

He’d been psyching himself up all morning to see him, but now that it was becoming an imminent reality, he could feel his heart starting to pick up, the rhythm fast and unfamiliar in his chest. He was flustered, and angry that he was flustered, and the closer he got to the station the more his hands clenched at his steering wheel, his knuckles going white.

He was tempted to text Parrish and see if he’d be willing to make the run for him, but he ultimately dismissed the idea. He wasn’t a coward. Besides, Stiles wasn’t exactly going to be going away anytime soon, and the sooner they learned to live with each other, the better.

Which is why he found himself pulling into the sheriff’s station employee parking at the very early time of 5:45 am, despite not having left the station the night before until almost 11.

The Leaky Carafe was a couple of blocks away, but he found it easier to park at the station and walk to the shop, especially while there were decent spots available. It was the only perk of getting in so early, as far as Derek could tell. He might have said the better perks were eyes that turned caramel-coloured in the sunlight and the flirty potential of shared Harry Potter knowledge, but that was a couple of days ago.

It said something about how tired he was that he didn’t notice the sheriff already standing in the parking lot next to his car until he cleared his throat. Derek was just getting out of his car, and he jerked at the sudden noise, bashing his elbow against the door jam.

“Fuck.”

“Sorry, didn’t mean to startle you.” The sheriff’s mouth quirked a little. “Honestly, didn’t think you could be startled.”

“Oh,” Derek said smartly, rubbing at his sore elbow as the ache turned to a tingle and then vanished altogether.

The sheriff shook his head, but his smile was gentle. He’d come closer to Derek as he spoke, and he clapped his hand on Derek’s shoulder, firm but companionable. “Don’t worry about it, son.”

Derek blinked. No one had called him “son” like that in… it had been a long time. He swallowed around the sudden lump in his throat. “Thanks, sir. It’s been a long couple of days.”

The sheriff nodded. “Which is why I figured you’d still be home. What are you doing in so early?”
Suddenly Derek was reminded very strongly that this man was Stiles' father, and he felt his cheeks heat. “Coffee. I figured I was still supposed to--”

“Ah. About that--”

There was something intense in the sheriff's gaze as he studied Derek, like he could just tell all the things Derek had done to defile his son. Like he knew that things had gone bad too.

“I think it’s best if you maybe… don’t. For a while.” It was the sheriff’s turn to look awkward, but after a pause he continued, eyebrow raised. “Starbucks? Really?”

Derek was just settling in when he heard a now familiar throat clearing. He looked up to find the Sheriff once more looking at him intently.

“Can I help you, sir?”

“I’m not gonna ask and I don’t want to know,” the man said, setting something pointedly down on Derek’s desk before turning smartly on his heels and walking away.

Derek stared down at the cup in surprise. He’d…. sort of been wondering if Stiles would make him anything today, and this certainly answered that. The cup definitely looked innocent enough sitting on the edge of his desk, but the bitterness of yesterday's tea was still a distinct aftertaste on his tongue, so he was wary as he picked it up.

And then he just stared. His mouth hung open in shock, and something not quite anger and not quite annoyance lit like a wildfire beneath his skin. He could feel himself blushing and he hated that Stiles had once again surprised him into such a visceral reaction.

Where yesterday’s cup had simply had his name on it-- and that had certainly felt like an accusation all on its own-- Stiles had resorted back to caricatures now.

Drawn in crude black sharpie was… a penis. A penis with a face that looked remarkably similar to the grumpy face Stiles had drawn on that first cup, thick eyebrows and all.

"That little shit," Derek said, a laugh bursting out of him unexpectedly. Derek was instinctively competitive, and growing up in the Hale household taught him never to back down from a challenge. Stiles had no idea what he'd just started. If he’d thought Derek was a dick before, then Derek was going to do everything in his power to prove just how much of one he could be.
Stiles woke the next morning to thin watery rays of sunshine slicing through his bedroom window and right across his eyes. He groaned and rolled over to get away from the piercing light, noting through slitted eyes that it was about five minutes before his alarm was set to go off.

He yawned and stretched, figuring there was no point in trying to go back to sleep. One of his hands inched out from beneath the covers to scratch absentely behind Gimpy’s ears, and the cat, who’d been curled up on the pillow by his head, stretched and arched into his touch.

“Slut,” Stiles muttered, giving the cat one more quick belly rub before forcing himself out of bed. He scratched at his own belly as he wandered into the bathroom.

Despite everything with Derek and how bad his day had been yesterday, he felt surprisingly good now. He’d managed to sleep for over twelve hours, which never happened, and as long as he ignored the ache that was still heavy in his chest, he knew he’d be fine.

He was determined to have a good day, dammit.

In contrast to the disaster that had been the day before, he made it through his routine pretty quickly this morning, slipping into his Jeep at a few minutes to five.

He’d never actually minded the early wake up call, even if it had taken some getting used to at first. He loved the hush of the empty streets of Beacon Hills, and the fresh clean feeling of stepping into his shop had always been one of his favorites things. Early mornings felt full of potential, and he found it soothing and familiar as he unlocked the front door.

There was still a vague tension in his shoulders that he knew came from the fact that he’d probably see Derek for the station's morning coffee run, but he was determined not to let the asshole get to him. If Derek wanted to be a jerk? Well, Stiles would give as good as he got. The thought cheered him up as he went through his morning opening duties.

“You look surprisingly chipper this morning,” Erica commented, as she walked in a few minutes after him, tossing her purse onto the counter for the moment.

“I guess I just slept well.”

“Oh huh. So you’re not gonna burn anything today, right? Because I swear I’ll kick you out again.”

“Yeah, about that,” Stiles said, “not cool.”

Erica snorted, the noise morphing into a yawn as she started restocking their cup supply. “Don’t act like that didn’t do it for you. I know how you like your women.”

Stiles bumped her shoulder playfully. “Just like I like my men.”

Erica rolled her eyes, but was obviously not awake enough to really keep up the bantering. As fun, and often infuriating as it could be to talk to her sometimes, there was no denying how well they worked together. They moved around each other with the ease of long familiarity, going through the opening routine like it was some sort of dance, both content to just enjoy the easy companionship.

At a few minutes to six, the door chime rang, and Stiles looked up, heart in his throat. He’d known
Derek would be coming in eventually, but he didn’t think he’d ever be ready for it to actually happen.

“Der--dad?” Stiles blinked, frowning at his dad.

“Morning, son.”

“What are you doing here? What happened? Everything okay?” Stiles felt bad enough that he’d missed the murder the day before, too distracted to turn the scanner on after Derek had left. He really hoped he hadn’t missed something else important happening.

His dad, obviously used to Stiles’ particular brand of inquisitiveness, huffed and said, “Which one of those questions would you like me to answer first?”

Stiles gave him an exaggerated shrug, enjoying the gentle teasing. “I get no love around here,” he muttered, throwing his cleaning rag over his shoulder as he began going through the motions of getting the coffee orders for the day ready. He was glad to have something to focus on besides Derek— he wasn’t sure if he was relieved or disappointed to see his dad instead.

“Why can’t I just want to see my son?”

“Dad, you never come in here. I’m pretty sure you just expect me to magically know what you need and show up in your office at the perfect moment.”

“Hasn’t failed me so far.”

Stiles rolled his eyes, finishing up another order and writing 'momma' on the side, knowing Tara would know it was for her. “Your faith in me is flattering, I think. I mean, I’m probably gonna disappoint you one day? But I appreciate the sentiment.”

“Stiles, you couldn’t disappoint me if you tried. I am, on the other hand, wondering why one of my deputies thought he could get away with delivering Starbucks to the staff yesterday.”

“What?” Stiles spluttered, almost slipping as he spun around to face his dad. "What a dick!"

His dad did not look amused.

“Uh, I guess, I mean, was it Derek?”

“Maybe,” his dad replied, face carefully blank and not giving anything away; his cop face. “Does it matter?”

“Nope! Definitely not. Just, you know, wondering. Which is a thing. That I… do?” Stiles trailed off, the words turning into a question. Because he was twenty-seven and he liked to think he had some idea when to shut up these days, but that didn’t mean his mouth didn’t sometimes run away on him.

His dad stared at him for a long minute, and then gave up. He huffed, his facade cracking as he shook his head in long suffering exasperation. “Just…” he waved his hand meaningfully at Rowena. “Please.”

“Sure thing, daddy-o,” Stiles said, all false bravado, even as he was left reeling from what his dad was telling him. Because, oh my God, Derek hadn’t. Except, apparently he had, and wow. Stiles had totally underestimated Derek’s level of dickery.
He consoled himself that at least Derek’s little stunt obviously hadn’t gone over particularly well, especially if his dad was here now instead.

As for Derek? Well, as far as Stiles was concerned, getting booted from coffee duty was not nearly punishment enough-- and okay, maybe Stiles was a little relieved by that fact too, but he’d never admit it.

He very carefully ignored the little ache that still resided stubbornly behind his breastbone as he went about finishing up the order for his dad.

He froze when he came across Derek’s tea, though. He was sorely tempted to just throw the damn leaves out, even went so far as to grab the tin and hold it over the trash can, but he couldn’t quite go through with it. Stiles sighed and set the tea back down on the counter, the tin cannister echoing against the granite like an accusation as he did so.

Stiles stared at it like it was a particularly challenging puzzle he had to solve, when suddenly an idea struck him. He grinned, already reaching for his black sharpie.

Stiles was still jittery, even hours later, from the adrenaline rush he’d got creating the doodle for Derek’s cup. His stomach twisted with the delicious high of petty revenge. He’d always been a vindictive asshole, but this felt different; this felt like playing with fire, and it was thrilling in a way that felt dangerously close to arousal.

The extra boost of energy served him well, though. The shop was as busy today as it had been absolutely dead the day before. Stiles didn’t even have time to attempt to bake anything, and figured it was just as well. He couldn’t fail if he didn’t even try.

Still, he was grateful when things slowed down for the afternoon and it was time to head out, the shop left in Erica’s capable hands until the late shift staff took over.

“Later, dork,” Erica called, waving over her shoulder at him as she flipped a page of the magazine spread out in front of her on the counter

Stiles rolled his eyes and didn’t bother waving back. She wouldn’t see it anyway.

It felt good to slip behind the wheel of his Jeep, the leather cool and welcoming from where the seat had long since conformed to his body. There were days, and they were growing in number, where he seriously boggled at the fact that the damn thing still ran at all, but he was glad for every day that she turned on without too much fuss.

“Good girl,” Stiles praised as the engine rumbled to life, sounding eerily like Rowena first thing in the morning. And like Rowena, she always worked for him. More or less. Sometimes it was less or more, but Stiles wasn’t going to think about that, not when she seemed to be in a good mood today and it was time to go home.

The last few days had been an absolute roller coaster, so a return to a normal-- predictable-- schedule was nice. Nothing exciting, but that was okay. Who liked exciting, whirlwind romances with devastatingly hot deputies anyway? Not Stiles, no siree.

And speaking of… Stiles blinked, his jaw dropping open as he stared in shock at the flashing red and blue lights reflecting accusingly in his rear view mirror. He was barely a block from the station though, so maybe it was just coincidence? An officer on their way to another call.

Stiles pulled his Jeep over and the cruiser pulled up behind him, lights still flashing. His brain went
This had never actually happened to him before, was the thing.

Being the son of the sheriff had a way of discouraging the local law enforcement. It was honestly about 50/50 whether they genuinely liked Stiles -- he had a way of growing on people, and some of the deputies had been around since he was a kid-- or they were just too terrified of making a bad impression on his dad.

Whoever was behind the wheel of the cruiser obviously didn’t fall into either of those categories, which pretty much only meant one person. He was therefore pissed, but not surprised, when Derek stepped out of the driver's side looking obnoxiously smug.

Parrish got out of the passenger side a second later, but hung back behind his door, gripping the frame of it like he was about to witness a bomb go off, and the door was a shield. He looked grim, and maybe shocked? It was hard to tell. He wasn’t interfering with Derek, who prowled forward.

Derek who was still stupidly gorgeous, his hair shining under the bright sun. He was actually even more appealing with the whole sexy dangerous I’m-gonna-rip-your-throat-out, vibe. Stiles… maybe had a problem.

“Can I help you, officer?” Stiles asked through gritted teeth after rolling his window down.

“License and registration.”

“What?” It seemed like Derek was taking his cues from Stiles and pretending at being professional, even if the tone of his own voice was anything but. Derek’s eyes seemed to glint in the sun and his lips stretched into the type of smile that Stiles was more accustomed to seeing from Jackson, blinding and full of teeth.

“Were you aware that you had a brake light out?”

Stiles blinked, taken off guard. “Yeah, I mean…” he started, his mouth running away from him before his brain could catch up. “Shit. You can’t be serious, Derek.”

“It’s Deputy Hale,” he said, his tone dripping with charm. His lips ticked upwards for just an instant-- Stiles wondered if he’d had that same look on his face as he’d drawn the dick on Derek’s cup that morning-- and Stiles realized Derek was enjoying this. A lot.

And okay, Stiles kind of was too. Derek actually trying to be charming? He was a deadly force. Stiles had to remind himself why he should be pissed off.

Derek cleared his throat, eyes wide in fake innocence. "License and registration, Mr. Stilinski.”

Stiles glared at him, his mouth working as he tried to think of something to say. He had nothing though, and he finally rolled his eyes and jutted his hips off the seat to paw at his back pocket for his wallet.

He felt uncoordinated, but managed the task with a minimum of flailing. Although there was definitely a moment where he was certain he saw Derek staring, gaze riveted at his raised hips.

Their fingers brushed as he handed over his license, and Stiles shivered.

Derek stared at it for a moment, his eyebrows furrowing, and Stiles braced himself.
“There is literally no first name here. Is that even legal?”

“I dunno. You tell me, officer.”

Derek’s eyes flashed hotly at the title, his cheeks darkening as he met Stiles eyes. He tapped the plastic edge of Stiles’ license against the door to the Jeep, the hollow sound ringing like the opening shots of a battle. “I’ll be right back.”

Stiles jerked the door to the sheriff’s station open ten minutes later. He’d literally turned right around after Derek had handed him the slip of paper, determined to get the ticket dealt with as soon as possible. Stiles was not going to let Derek think he could get the better of him.

As he walked through the station, it immediately became obvious that the other deputies all knew. They backed away as he stalked through the halls. Even Tara ducked her head and avoided eye contact. Parrish must have radioed from the car while Derek was writing up the ticket.

"Come on in," his dad said, sighing as Stiles burst in without knocking. He flopped himself in the visitor's chair and slammed the blue copy of his ticket onto the desk.

"I'm not paying for that." He felt himself pout. It was mortifying to turn into a toddler over this, but he couldn't seem to hold back. "Fucking dick."

His dad slowly took off his glasses and tossed them onto the desk beside the ticket. Without even glancing at it-- yes, Parrish had obviously called in a warning -- his dad carded his fingers and sat back in his chair. The springy back arched until he was nearly reclined.

Shaking his head, his dad finally met his eye. "I'm not getting involved, Stiles."

"Fine. Don't get involved. Fine. Just…" He picked up the ticket again, waving it. "I'm ripping this up."

"It's a thirty dollar ticket. You rip it up, it's a hundred and fifty dollar fine."

"What?" He slapped it down again. "Nun-uh. This ticket does not exist."

"Do you have a broken brake light?"

"That's not the point."

"I've been after you to change that for weeks."

"And I will. Deputy Dick McAsshole only gave me the ticket to live up to his name."

His dad's lip quirked. "I'm not getting involved."

"But--"

"No. Son, pay the damn fine. And deal with this because Hale isn't going anywhere and I'm not going to the fetch my own coffee every morning." He put his glasses back on and picked up the file he'd been reading earlier.

Stiles continued to pout, as much annoyed by Derek as his dad’s dismissal.

“And Stiles?” His dad sounded distracted, not even looking at him as he continued, “I'm not handing my employee another coffee cup that might as well say, 'do you like me? Circle yes or
Stiles jaw fell open and he launched himself out of the chair, glaring at his dad. “Oh my God. That's not what that was!”

"Right," his dad said flatly, still studiously focusing on his paperwork.

"Ugh," Stiles huffed, stalking out of the office.

There wasn't a soul to be seen as he stormed through the station. If he were Moses, the Red Sea would have jumped the fuck out of his way, just by the force of his ire.

He cursed bitterly and creatively as he walked from the station back to the cafe, too frustrated to get back in his car just yet. Technically he was off for the day, but the shop had always been his safe place. It was his, and right now it felt more like home than anywhere else he could think of. He debated outside the front door for a moment, though; as much as he wanted to be there, he also couldn't stand the idea of facing Erica right now.

He knew she always had his back, but there was no way she wouldn't laugh in his face if he told her about the ticket and his conversation with his dad.

The build up of emotion over the last few days meant he'd very much enjoy punching a wall, or maybe Derek's stupid, perfect face. Needing a moment alone, he finally decided to head toward the alley behind the shop.

Ignoring the smell of the dumpster -- it was mostly cardboard and burnt cookies, anyway -- he sat against the wall, the rough scratch of the brick giving him something to focus on as he pressed into it.

Noticing an empty can that had fallen out of one of the trash bags, he kicked it, sending the can further into the alley, where it clattered against the far wall and then rolled beneath the dumpster.

Stiles stared at it forlornly, immediately regretting the action because he knew he'd inevitably feel the need to crawl under the dumpster to get it, now that he knew it was there.

That thought was interrupted by movement at the head of the alley, and he looked up startled, his heart rate picking up again. No one ever came back here.

"Stiles? Are you alr..."

Crap. It was Derek, because of course it was Derek. He was panting, like he'd been running, and he looked frazzled as his eyes darted around the alley like he was looking for danger.

‘Well, fuck him’, Stiles thought. Derek could take his concern somewhere else.

"Oh, look! It’s Deputy Dickface.” The words came out like milk gone sour. Stiles felt his face scrunch up as he looked at Derek.

Derek blinked, and his posture straightened. "Nice. Real mature, Stiles."

"Don't even talk to me about maturity."

“You had my boss hand me a cup with a dick on it.”

“And you gave me a ticket for something every single other deputy would have ignored. So. Pot. Kettle.” Stiles waved his hands at Derek in a way he hoped emphasized his point. “They're both,
you know, black."

“So, I guess we’re both a couple of dicks. Good thing we found out before it was too late.”

“Too late. Right. God, what’s your problem?” Stiles stood up, brushing the stray gravel off his ass. He stepped right into Derek’s space. "Yeah, we might have actually had something if you hadn’t run off. Wouldn’t that have been awful."

A feral sound rumbled up from Derek’s chest, like some sort of growl. He lunged forward and grabbed Stiles’ shirt, fistling the material in warning. “I’m no good for you, Stiles.”

"Fuck you, you don’t get to decide that,” Stiles said. He brought his hands up to Derek’s chest, shoving until Derek stumbled back against the wall. The momentum, and the fact that Derek was still clutching Stiles’ shirt, meant that Stiles practically fell against him.

They stood like that, bodies pressed close, panting breaths mingling in the space between them. Adrenaline still pounded through Stiles' veins, hot and angry, and he could feel all that pent up energy morph into something else entirely.

He caught and held Derek’s gaze, watching Derek’s pupils dilate as the moment stretched on.

“We’re just going to hurt each other,” Derek whispered. "That’s what happens when I get involved with people.”

He didn’t struggle to break free from Stiles' hold, even though Stiles knew that he could, but instead went pliant, wrapping his arms around Stiles’ waist, pressing his palms right into the small of Stiles’ back and urging him closer, hiking him up onto his toes so that Derek could get a thigh between his legs.

All Stiles could think about was that this push-pull bullshit was going to drive them both to the edge. Rationally, Stiles knew that he should shove Derek away, that he hadn't forgiven him. Hell, Derek hadn't even bothered to apologize. And yet, Derek's body pressing in so close to his felt too perfect to ignore.

“I don’t want this either.” With a whimper of an internal battle lost, Stiles lunged forward in direct defiance of his words, biting more than kissing Derek's lips. “You’re a dick.”

Derek gentled the kiss, smirking against Stiles’ mouth. “Yeah, I am, but you seem to like me that way.”

Stiles huffed, biting at the smug quirk of Derek’s mouth. He couldn’t find the words to argue, though.

Derek’s free hand snaked between them, his fingers tracing the denim covered outline of Stiles' cock. Stiles cursed even as he rocked into the touch. Derek's fingers curled, cradling Stiles' balls like he owned them.

Derek’s eyes focused on Stiles’ open, panting mouth. "Do you really hate that you want this?"

Stiles pointedly tilted his hips so he could feel the hard outline of Derek's cock. "About as much as you do."

They kissed, angry, wild and messy, biting at each other’s jaws and necks-- whatever was within reach of their teeth. Derek's nails scratched at Stiles' back as their bodies pressed together, the chafing, perfect friction of frotting with jeans on.
Stiles rocked hard against Derek, turned on by the roughness of it, the ease with which Derek manhandled him. The closer he got, the more frustrated he grew with himself for wanting this, with Derek for not wanting more. At both of them for giving in when they were just hurting each other, just like Derek had predicted.

He hissed as Derek's nails broke skin. Derek shuddered in Stiles' arms, messing up his pants and their rhythm, gasping as his face pinched in orgasm.

"Fucker," Stiles said, snapping his hips helplessly against Derek's softening erection and damp uniform. He tumbled into his climax, exhausted emotionally and physically, clinging to Derek's limp body through the aftershocks.

They held each other up with a tenderness that had been absent between them since Derek walked out the door of his apartment. Stiles held on a little longer, hating that he didn't want to let go.
"I fucked up," Derek blurted the instant Laura answered. 

There was silent pause, then Laura huffed a laugh. "Hello to you, too."

"This is serious, Laura. I fucked up." He eyed the wrinkled uniform he'd tossed in the bottom of his closet. He could smell the spunk and sweat on them from across the room like an accusation. "I am fucked up."

Laura snorted like that wasn't any news to her, but she was his sister and his alpha and she was sincere when she asked, "What happened?"

Running his hands through his shower-damp hair, Derek sighed and tried to figure out where to start. "There was this guy--"

Laura groaned. "Oh, no."

"Shut up."

"How long did this one last? I think your record stands at a weekend."

"You're not funny." He already regretted calling, but couldn't get himself to hang up. Laura had always been there to get his head screwed back on straight. And he needed her opinion, even if it came with attitude.

"I'm pretty sure I'm not the problem here, Derek. So, talk to me," she said, prompting him like she was playing at being his psychologist.

"You're not helping," Derek sniped.

Laura huffed, but when she started again she sounded suitably chastened. "Fine. But if you want my advice you have to actually tell me what happened."

He started to pace, the mindless movement helping him to focus and think. "The first time we were together it was… good."

Laura made an encouraging "hmm," the sound a little muffled like she was holding the phone between her ear and shoulder, and the speaker wasn't quite picking her up clearly.

There was a soft clanking in the background, and Derek realized she was emptying the dishwasher while he was having a crisis.

"Really good?" Laura asked distractedly.

Derek thought back, listening to the quiet clinking of Laura tossing utensils into the drawer.

He remembered the way they'd held each other afterwards, whispering short bits of each other's selves. Stiles and his three-legged cat story had been endearing and a little ridiculous-- exactly everything he liked about Stiles. It was easy to open up after that, share a little piece of himself like a rare gift. He couldn't imagine ever talking about those first years in New York with anyone else he'd hooked up with. With Stiles, it had been more than good.

"Amazing," Derek said quietly. "Like maybe I'd found, you know, someone."
He could hear nothing but silence on the line for a moment, all the busy-noise of Laura's cleaning halted. She cleared her throat. "Oh."

"Yeah." Derek groaned, hating to share the rest of the story. "Then he told me he was the sheriff's son. And I -- Fuck. It took me by surprise, you know? I want to do well here, and… that just seemed the quickest way to fuck things up." Derek paused for a second, remembering the look on Stiles' face as he'd started getting dressed in a hurry. "I'm so stupid."

Laura snorted, obviously agreeing, but when Derek made a frustrated noise at her she added, "Look, Derek, you know I've been talking to the sheriff on and off since we left. He's proven he's fine with werewolves. Shit, he wanted you on the force bad enough to pay for your transfer from NYC. I don't think you need to worry about him being upset about dating his son."

"No. That’s… you’re right. I know all that. I realized it as soon as he slammed the door in my face. The problem, was that when I tried to go back to talk to him, I couldn’t even knock because his door is made out of mountain ash. I'd been trapped inside the apartment, Laura. Do you even know all the ways that could have gone wrong?"

"Shit, Derek," Laura said, for the first time sounding actually worried, and not just like she was humidoring him.

"I got scared. Everything, Kate, it all came back to me."

"He didn't hurt you did he? If he did I’ll--"

"No. I mean, I should have guessed that he knew about the supernatural-- about me, considering his dad, but I had no time to process it all. It confirmed to me why I can’t trust people."

"Right. You got scared. Because Kate." Laura sounded exhausted with the name. "Derek, not everything comes back to Kate Argent. This guy is not her."

"I don’t think he’s…. I know he’s not."

"Derek, you haven’t trusted anyone since you were sixteen. You can’t blame everything on her. At some point you have to take responsibility for yourself. So no, I’m not buying it. I think you realized how much you actually liked him, and like an idiot, you ran from what might have been a potential relationship."

"Maybe," Derek admitted. "I don’t know anymore. Everything is so confusing right now."

"Maybe you just need to give him some space. Get your head on straight, and try again once you've figured out what you feel?"

"Space." Derek snorted.

The idea of keeping out of Stiles way was certainly laughable. Even if he'd wanted to go days without seeing him-- which he certainly didn't-- Stiles wasn't someone to be ignored. He was everywhere, mixed up in everything, big grins and mischievous eyes like a beacon. Derek felt the pull from the moment they met, and fighting it was getting exhausting.

"That's not going to work. We're already--" He didn't want to admit how petty he'd been, how juvenile they'd both become, lashing out at each other with dick drawings and tickets. "We're complicated."

"Ah." Laura paused again. "Complicated like…"
"Like we just had ill-advised back alley sex?"

It sounded so much worse than what had really happened. He'd been genuinely worried that he'd gone too far with the ticket, and it seemed he had unintentionally created a rift between Stiles and his dad. He'd even gone to apologize when he'd found Stiles in the alley. He'd been equally drawn by the racing of Stiles’ heart, a sound that Derek realized he could recognize at a distance, but also a sudden and irrational worry when he’d heard the crashing noise coming from the alley. There was a murderer running around town after all.

In that moment, standing there and staring at Stiles’ flushed face, seeing the way his eyes had flashed, it had been hard to remember what had started everything going sour between them. Derek only knew that Stiles made his blood boil and travel south at the same time.

"God, you are fucked up." Laura's voice was muffled, this time by the sound of water running in the background. There was a rustle of clothing.

"Are you taking a shower?"

"In about thirty seconds, yes."

"Laura!"

"Well, now that I'm caught up on your love life…"

"That's it? No advice?"

"I said to give yourself time. A bit of space for you both to cool off. Stop fucking him next to dumpsters if you want a real relationship. You don't need me to tell you that."

"It's impossible! He's everywhere in this town. I turn around and he's there, constantly. And he makes me feel… I don't know. Stiles just gets under my skin." Derek still felt the lingering touch of Stiles hands as they'd held each other in the alley, sweaty and worn out. He never wanted that to fade. "He makes me crazy."

"Ah."

"Stop saying that!" Derek groaned. "What does that even mean?"

Laura laughed. He heard the drawing of a shower curtain. "I guess you'll have to figure that out. Call me back when you do! I have a date."

"Not helpful!" Derek grumbled. Into dead air.

Of course.

He let himself sulk over a bowl of cereal and some mindless TV before getting his ass off the couch to do laundry. Letting his uniform stain with come wasn't exactly professional.

Loud, urgent banging on his front door interrupted his sorting. He could hear the heartbeat of the visitor even with the door shut between them; it beat as frantic as the knocking. Flinging the door open, Derek didn't give himself time to conjecture who he'd find. Even if he had, he'd never have guessed correctly.

Lydia Martin stood in his doorway. Her face was pale, her red hair -- which had been immaculate the day he’d first met her -- was now a wind-blown mess. Her eyes were blank and panicked.
Haunted.

She opened her mouth wide and screamed.

Derek staggered back from the sheer force of it, ducking his head and clamping his hands over his ears. The sound was like nothing he’d ever heard before. The ear-piercing wail echoed through the hallway, through his apartment, seemingly unending until Derek felt it calling to him through his entire body, down to his very soul.

The air around them was eerily silent in the wake of Lydia’s scream, like the sudden absence of noise had created a sound vacuum. Lydia started to collapse and Derek bolted forward to catch her, lowering her gently to the ground.

"Banshee." Derek said the word as it came to him, and he wasn’t sure if he was relieved or not when she nodded, still trembling in his arms.

“Yes,” Lydia whispered, and then more forcefully said “Yes,” again. Her fingers gripped hard at Derek’s arms, perfectly manicured nails digging painfully into his skin and drawing little crescent moons of blood. “It’s the sheriff. You have to get to the woods. He’s in danger.”

"The preserve?"

Lydia nodded, a far away look in her eyes. "The running trails."

"But--" Derek wanted to ask if the sheriff was already dead. He didn’t know how banshees worked, but he couldn't bring himself to ask, fearing what she’d say.

"Go," she begged, looking him in eye for the first time, and Derek felt a chill run down his spine. "You might still have time."

The morning’s rain showers had left the Preserve washed clean. The scent of soft earth, sodden leaves and wet animals permeated, and Derek cursed what was usually familiar and comforting. He fought through it as he made his way deeper into the forest, inhaling deeply for any clue to the mystery Lydia had dumped on his lap.

'It’s the sheriff,’ echoed through his head over and over, and even if he hadn't known she was a banshee, the words alone, combined with the haunted look in her eyes, would have had him running anyway.

The canopy above dripped fat, icy drops on him as he dodged through the trees. He was tempted to call out, see if the sheriff was within earshot, even if Derek couldn’t find a trace of his scent. He stopped for a moment, panting and trying to calm his racing heart so he could focus on the sounds of the forest.

On his left, a tell-tale shuffle of leaves caught his attention. He closed his eyes to focus and there it was, too heavy-footed for a coyote, too clumsy. There were three sets of running feet, at least. No more than a hundred meters off to Derek’s right and getting closer, louder as they tore through the underbrush. Without a second thought, he headed straight for the sound of broken branches, and harsh, rasping breath.

A gunshot rang out before he got close enough to even make out a single shadow in the darkness.

"Sheriff?” he shouted, the word out before he could pull them back for his own safety.
A loud cry was the only response, and Derek's stomach dropped. He darted forward, toward the sound. His thoughts whispered, *Forest Killer*, like a warning.

The cloudy night meant he was nearly on top of the action before he could make out the three distinct figures. One, a tall skeletal figure, was knelt over a prone body. Inhuman sounds rumbled drily from the creature’s emaciated chest. A supernaturally elongated jaw distorted a face that might have once been human into something grotesque and horrifying, and rows of bloody, razor sharp, teeth glinted in the moonlight. In the back of his mind, Derek started matching the previous victims' wounds to what he was seeing now, and he knew instantly that they’d found their "wild animal."

Derek raced forwards. His eye caught on the tan shirt and glint of a silver star that identified the sheriff as the body on the ground. The shirt was stained dark with blood, and the sight of it set Derek’s rage off as if it was his own family laying there.

He pounced on the creature without another thought, claws out. Roaring, he slashed across the thing’s chest, not daring to hold back, and he was gratified when he felt the sensation of flesh parting beneath his claws like dry parchment. The creature screamed, a haunting birdlike cry. It waddled backwards on spindly limbs before rallying and throwing itself at Derek with a strength that was stunning despite the creature’s frail appearance.

They met in a tangle of gnashing teeth and slashing claws, and it was all Derek could do to match each blow. The creature moved oddly, unlike anything Derek had ever fought before. It’s movements were stilted but quick, almost spider like. There was definitely a learning curve to fighting this thing. He was pushed back as a hit landed, a deep slice across his chest, tearing his shirt. He bellowed his outrage and lunged again, ducking and feinting to his left.

The thing was fast, but it was also wearing out, and Derek used that to his advantage, dancing away instead of forward, trying to keep the creature moving, instead of going for more direct attacks.

It was vicious, but he was making progress, even if everything was made more difficult by the fact that Derek had to actively try to keep it away from the bodies already on the ground -- the sheriff’s and a second that looked to be a teenage boy, although Derek didn’t exactly have the time to check for certain.

Finally Derek managed to get a good strike in, his teeth catching in the rubbery flesh stretched across a bony shoulder. He used the leverage, and the creature’s distraction at the pain, to his advantage and flung it to the ground, not hesitating to kneel down on top of its heaving chest. Derek held it in place with his thighs as he drew back a clawed hand and slashed across the creature's throat without hesitation. The wailing cries cut off like a switch being flipped, leaving only Derek’s panting breaths and the unnatural silence.

There was no noise to accompany the creatures’ monstrous features slowly bleeding into the visage of a middle aged human male, dead blue eyes staring blankly up at the sky.

Derek shuddered and jerked away, crawling to where the sheriff lay on the forest floor several feet away. He could hear the steady beating of the man’s heart, but he still reached out to feel for a pulse, just for the satisfying thud of it against his fingers, vital and strong. Derek slumped over him, letting out a breath, before expanding his senses to the edge of the clearing, relieved when he picked up the ragged breathing of the boy as well.

Assured that everyone was alive and not in immediate danger, Derek reached for the radio on the sheriff’s belt with trembling fingers.
He focused on his training -- calm, cool, detached. "This is Deputy Hale. I've found two victims. Seriously injured. One's the sheriff." His voice shook as he tried to relay all the important information. "We are in the preserve. Near the running trails." Be clear, he reminded himself. "About 3 miles north from the main road. They need medical attention immediately."

"Copy that." The crackle of the station replying echoed through that quiet forest. Derek could hear the shock in the tiny voice across the radio. "Hale?"

He wasn't sure who was doing dispatch tonight, with Lydia walking around screaming at people's front doors, but the voice was mature. Calm and experienced, and just what Derek needed at the moment. "I'm here."

"We're on the line with the EMT now. They're not far. You're doing fine."

"He's lost a lot of blood. And the boy. I need to check--" Derek dropped the radio so he could get to the unconscious boy, stumbling to his side. A quick once over looked bad. "He's… he's been shot."

It wasn't at all what Derek expected to find. Bite marks, claw marks, severed limbs… all likely. This was a gunshot wound through the meat of his shoulder, tearing a hole right through his BHHS lettered sports jacket. It didn't make any sense, unless the sheriff was trying to shoot the creature and the kid got hit instead.

"We'll pass that along so they know," the dispatcher said, and Derek was grateful he wasn't asked to speculate on how the kid got shot. "You got a road flare out there? Light one in a few minutes. It'll lead them right to you."

Derek would have thought of that, of course. If his brain hadn't been scrambled by the strangeness of the creature that had attacked him, the pain of his still-healing chest and the panic of maybe losing one of the few people on earth he respected. The gunshot wound that didn't make any sense.

Before lighting the flare, he ripped his sleeve to tie a tourniquet around the sheriff's thigh a few inches above a large gash that didn't want to stop bleeding.

The Sheriff stirred as he tightened the strip.

"There's another," the sheriff rasped, breath barely making it past his throat. He reached out, grasping Derek's wrist, eyes wide in warning. "A-- Another."

"It's alright, Sheriff," Derek's eyes flicked over the the boy, still out cold but he could clearly hear that his heartbeat was strong. "I found him. The ambulance will be here soon. You'll both be fine."

Sheriff shook his head for a moment, but the pain was too much. He passed out again.

Derek lit the flare, held it high with one hand, and with the other held tight to the sheriff's wrist, feeling his pulse beneath his fingertips while he waited.
Chapter 10

Stiles rushed into the hospital, almost knocking over at least two nurses, plus a middle aged woman holding a wadded up clump of dirty tissues to her nose; the tissues went flying as Stiles grabbed at the woman's shoulders to keep from outright running her over. He moved her to the side, pushing forcefully away from her to keep up his momentum down the hall.

His thoughts were a blur. They had been from the moment he'd heard the crackle of the police scanner and Derek's breathless, panicked, 'I've found two victims. Seriously injured. One's the sheriff.' Stiles had become hyper-aware of the strangest things in that moment, like the calm tone of the dispatcher's voice echoing in the background as Stiles searched for his keys, and the strong rumble of his Jeep as it thankfully purred to life without much trouble.

He had no memory of the drive to the hospital.

When he was ten, he'd caught a call in about a car wreck his dad's vehicle was involved in. He could still remember bursting into tears because he couldn't tie his shoelaces, because his hands had been trembling so badly. He couldn't recall what injuries, if any, his dad had sustained in that accident; nothing serious enough to remember. But he still had a vivid picture of not being able to hold a loop, and thinking he'd never be able bike to the hospital without his shoes tied.

He'd had nightmares for months about those shoes, about running barefoot to the hospital and getting lost in the halls. Being too late.

Every one of those nightmares came back to him now.

The stuffy, outraged cries of the woman he'd pushed off from followed him down the halls, and they were still echoing behind him where he all but collided with another body.

This one refused to be moved.

“Let me by, Derek!” Stiles tried to dart past, but was pulled up short by an arm that felt more like an iron band clamping around his chest, holding him back. He had no time, no space in his brain at the moment, to worry about the complicated mess that were his feelings towards Derek.

“Stiles!”

“I need to--”

“Stiles!” Derek shook him a little, and that finally got Stiles’ attention. He deflated and his arms dropped down by his sides as he blinked up at Derek. His breath huffed out of him, rattling and painful from where he'd been near hyperventilating without even realizing it.

“Where’s my dad?” Stiles finally managed to ask, breathless and pleading. “I heard-- over the police scanner--”

“The doctor is in with him,” Derek said, apparently realizing that Stiles was actually going to listen now, and not just bully his way through the hospital like a bull in a china shop. Derek let go of him, and continued, speaking slowly, “I don’t know anything right now, but you need to calm. The fuck. Down.”

Stiles’ first instinct was to argue with Derek. To shove him, to do something to him. The man infuriated him, and right now he was standing between Stiles and his dad.
“Stiles.” Derek shook his shoulders again, less violently, but with enough force to demand attention. It had the benefit of shocking a little bit of clarity into him, and Stiles let out a long breath, the tension bleeding out of his shoulders.

He slumped into Derek’s hold, glad for the support of Derek’s arms wrapping tentatively around his shoulders. He didn’t let himself think about how comfortable it felt, or how the embrace reminded him a little too much of their moment in the alley.

“You okay now?” Derek’s voice was soft, worried, and the warmth in it was something Stiles had almost thought he’d imagined before. It felt good to have it directed at him again, like the sun peeking out behind the clouds. For just a moment, it was like all the shit between them had been forgotten. Stiles bitterly wished it was really that simple. Unfortunately it wasn’t, and it was with a pang of regret at the loss, Stiles extricated himself from Derek’s hold.

“No. Yes. Maybe. My dad’s really alright?”

Derek straightened, his face closing off again. “His heartbeat was strong when the EMT’s got to him. He’s going to hurt for a while, but he should be fine.”

“You-- I heard you on the scanner. Thank you.” Stiles couldn’t bring himself to add ‘For saving him.’ The words held implications that he just couldn’t bring himself to think about.

“Look, whatever you think of me,” Derek said, “your dad’s always been good to me. I-- of course I did everything I could for him. Although, you might owe your friend Lydia some thanks as well.”

Stiles jerked his gaze back up, and was momentarily light headed as the blood drained from his face. If Lydia had pulled her ‘do what I say, it’s a matter of life and death’ routine on Derek, then that was going to be a fun thing to try to explain. It also drove home how close his dad must have come. God.

He could only be grateful that Derek had trusted Lydia, and had done whatever she’d asked of him. He noticed for the first time that Derek's shirt was ripped and bloody, like he’d literally pulled off whatever animal had attacked his dad with his bare hands.

Derek had gone above and beyond for his dad, and it had almost certainly saved his life. Meeting Derek’s eyes, Stiles repeated, “Thank you, Derek.”

“You’re welcome,” Derek said, accepting the thanks with the grace of someone who understood exactly what it meant to lose a family member to violence, and who would have been willing to do a great deal more to save Stiles from that same loss.

“I really need to see him now,” Stiles said.

Derek started to nod, then abruptly went still. He held up a flat hand in Stiles’ face and tilted his head to the side like he was listening to something that Stiles couldn’t hear. His lips had turned down in a stern line. “Something’s wrong.”

The way Derek said the words, utterly certain and serious, sent Stiles immediately back on alert. His heart barely had time to pick up again, before Derek was taking off down the hall, launching away from Stiles much the way Stiles had done to the woman in the hallway a few minutes prior.

Stiles called after him, but didn’t bother to wait for a response before taking off as well.

His feet skidded as he came to an abrupt stop just inside the doorway of the small hospital room at the end of the hall, and he had to grab at the door frame to keep his balance.
The scene that greeted him was basically the last thing he was expecting. It was, in fact, so far beyond anything he could have ever even imagined, that his brain short circuited for a second, everything going completely blank with his incredulity.

His dad was propped up in his hospital bed, holding his IV stand raised over his head, his fingers wrapped around it like a baseball bat. Stiles just had enough time to think his dad looked well, alive and flushed with color as he defended himself.

A creature-- a boy, the BHHS letter jacket gave that away if nothing else-- stood over his dad. The thing looked almost familiar, so long as Stiles ignored the glowing silver eyes and the teeth like a sharks. His mouth was open, but not attacking yet.

Stiles wasn’t sure if that was due to the IV stand his dad was wielding, or something else entirely. *Something else entirely* being the second monster in the room. In the moments between the hallway and now, Derek had grown some impressive side burns. Also fangs. Also, holy shit, some seriously wicked looking claws. He was making an odd rumbling growl, body crouched like he was preparing to pounce on the boy, who was just barely managing to stand his ground. Still hunched over Stiles’ dad, his gaze was riveted on Derek. His clawed hands kept making little aborted clenching movements, like he wasn’t sure what to do with them.

“What the fuck?” Stiles said to no one in particular, the words sounding on the verge of hysterical even to his own ears.

Derek half turned to him, his profile silhouetted and strange against the bright fluorescent lights of the room.

“Stiles, get out of here,” Derek said, the words a little slurred because… fangs. Which were apparently a thing. A thing his dad wasn’t reacting to, his attention solely on the boy. Monster. Boy monster? Who was also clearly not the same species of crazy as whatever the hell Derek was. “Like hell I’m getting out of here.”

“Do it, Stiles,” his dad said, speaking slowly out of the side of his mouth, voice firm but strained. Stiles couldn't even spare the time to appreciate the strength in his dad's voice.

They stood like that for what felt like a long time, stuck in a stalemate that was finally broken by the boy’s face bleeding back into a more recognizably human form with over-styled blond hair and a naturally smug quirk to his mouth. He stumbled back, the abruptness of it making Stiles’ dad tense and half lurch forward with his IV stand.

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“Can’t you even hear me? Can’t you even see I’m begging you? Don’t kill me.”

“Hey, there,” Stiles held up his hands in the universal sign of ‘I’m totally harmless, please don’t eat me’, and attempted to take control of the situation. Because his dad clearly wasn’t in any state to do it. The color that had been in his cheeks was slowly being replaced by something a lot more uncomfortably ashen.

As for Derek? Stiles couldn’t deal with Derek, so he figured the best thing to do was to ignore him, because *what the fuck?* That goal in mind, he started doing what he did best when he was stressed. He started talking.

At least he recognized the kid. That was helpful. “It’s Sean, right?”

Sean nodded. He huddled against the wall, arms hugged around his chest as fat tears started to roll
down his face. “I didn’t-- I didn’t want to hurt anyone. I’m just so. I’m so hungry all the time.”

“Um, right. Hungry. Of course you are,” Stiles faltered. His plan to ignore Derek went out the window with one frantic look, and he was grateful when Derek stepped in without hesitation.

“What are you?” Derek asked, the words a little slurred around the threatening glint of his fangs.

“Wendigo. My family-- we’re all--”

“Wendigos. Got it. Awesome,” Stiles said, feeling like he was losing his mind.

“I never wanted to hurt anyone.”

“But you did,” Stiles’ dad said, speaking up for the first time, his voice raspy and pained. He’d put his IV stand down and was sitting on the edge of his hospital bed, clutching his injured side. “I heard your… the other one of you. I heard him praising you for killing that kid the other day. You would have killed me if I hadn’t shot you.”

Sean collapsed further into himself, sliding down the wall. “I didn’t mean to. I swear I didn’t. The tea was helping me control it. It helped me feel better.”

“Wait a second.” Stiles held up a hand. “Tea?”

“Whatever was in that tea I kept buying from you. It’s the only thing that’s ever helped. You’re the only person who’s ever helped.”

“Oh my God,” Stiles said, “That’s…” He trailed off, unable to figure out how to end the sentence. Part of him thought it was kind of awesome, the other part was torn between pity and outrage that this kid, this part-beast, part-child, had almost killed his dad.

“I’ve been relying on you. But then--” Sean looked away. “My family wanted me to be more like them. They wanted me to kill like them. I didn’t-- I tried to resist, I did resist. For a few weeks. Until the werewolf starting coming around.” Sean looked away, sniffing. “I got scared.”

“Werewolf.” Stiles turned to look at Derek. He’d lost his side burns, but that didn’t make his expression any easier to read. “Of course you are.” Stiles couldn’t help but notice that no one else in room seemed at all shocked by the names of fairytale creatures being tossed about.

“This is not the place for this.” His dad interrupted, grunting as he laid himself back in bed. "You need to get out of here.” He exchanged a look with Derek. "Take Mr... What's your last name, son?"

"It's Walcott. Sean Walcott."

“Right. Cuff Mr. Walcott here, and take him somewhere safe. And for heaven’s sake, get him some of my son’s magic tea before someone else gets hurt.”

“Tea,” Sean echoed wistfully, his voice sounding distinctly inhuman, although his teeth looked like they were still blunt.

“Yes, sir,” Derek said.

“So…” Stiles said after they’d been on the road for a couple of minutes. Sean was huddled in the back of the cruiser, still cuffed and muttering occasionally about being hungry. It was grating on his nerves. “Werewolf.”
Derek slanted his eyes at him. “Don’t pretend you didn’t know.”

“How the hell was I supposed to-- Oh my God, does this have to do with why you turned into such a raging dick? Did the moon come out that night and ‘poof’ instant stereotypical asshole? Thank you, supernatural genetics?”

Derek pursed his lips, then forcefully hit the brakes and put the cruiser into park, the headlights illuminating the brick side of The Leaky Carafe. “Go use your magic on someone else, Stiles.”

Stiles stared at Derek, mouth hanging open in shock, before he clamped it shut. “You know what? Fine.” He got stiffly out of the cruiser. “I’ll be right back,” he said, not bothering to look back at Derek before slamming the door closed and marching up to the back door of the shop.

It was late by now, and the shop was closed, everything cleaned up and prepared for the morning. Which, thank God, he wasn’t responsible for opening tomorrow. He couldn’t remember which one of the various college kids he employed was scheduled for the morning shift, but they would just have to deal with whatever mess he was about to make.

He approached the counter slowly, automatically reaching for various ingredients off the shelves and assembling them in front of him without thought.

And then he stopped. He stared at the oregano and a few other herbs and teas laid out before him, and couldn’t for the life of him make sense of any of them. It was like trying to catch a speck out of the corner of his eye, and the moment he tried to actively focus on what he was doing it just wasn't there.

Stiles braced himself over the counter, head hanging low between his shoulders and it took everything he had not to have a panic attack.

’I just let the spirit move me,’ he’d said to Derek what felt like an age ago. It had always been a bit of a joke, even if the results were anything but.

The thing was, whatever little spark of magic he possessed, whatever talent he had for making people feel better, it had only ever seemed to be good for mundane things. Maybe he could cure a headache a little more efficiently, but it wasn’t like his dad couldn’t pop a couple of Tylenol to the same effect. And yeah, Erica had never found anything that came close to helping her seizures as much as Stiles' special blend, but that didn’t mean there wasn’t something out there that could help her.

Curing a wendigo’s hunger for human flesh though? That was fucking huge and so far beyond anything he could ever have imagined, that he was left reeling.

The responsibility of it all was terrifying too. Another person-- a supernatural person, holy shit, he still wasn’t over that-- was relying on him right now, and if he failed people could die.

“What the hell is taking so long?”

Stiles jerked his head up to glare at Derek, who had come inside after him.

“Stiles?” Derek said, and there was an inquiry in his name, the word coming out a little more gently than the first question. Derek came up next to him, cautiously, like Stiles was the wild animal.

“All fucked up?” Derek finished for him, the faintest of smiles quirking his lips like he was trying really hard not to be amused, but he couldn’t entirely help it.

“Something like that,” Stiles agreed. “I… don’t actually know what I’m doing.”

Derek was looking at him, really staring hard at him like he was trying to see into his soul. His gaze was unwavering, but something in his regard had softened.

“You’re thinking about it too hard.”

“No shit,” Stiles snipped, regretting it as soon as the words left his mouth. Derek was actually trying to help. His dad was right, Derek wasn’t going anywhere. They were going to have to learn to live with each other, and that meant having actual civil conversations.

"Look, a lot’s happened in the last few hours and my head’s still spinning from, you know,” Stiles raised his fists to his temples and splayed out his fingers like his brain was exploding. "Werewolves.”

"Werewolves,” Derek said, then spread his own hand out, motioning to the tins in front of Stiles. "Magic potions. What you do-- You're a druid or a witch. It’s really not that much of a stretch.”

Stiles barked a laugh. “Oh my God. Druid? Witch? I don’t-- No! I’m just me. This--” He nudged one of the tea tins. “It’s just something that my mom taught me. I guess it’s weird, but it’s a long way from…” Stiles poked at Derek’s chest. “You.”

“Your mom…” Derek trailed off, and when he spoke again the words were muttered and distant, like Derek was trying to remember them exactly. “Nourishing people’s souls.”

Stiles flushed as he remembered the context in which he’d said that to Derek. Still, ‘nourishing people’s souls' was exactly why he did this, and that reminder, more than anything, was what he needed to hear. He tried to ignore the way the words twinged at his heart.

“Yeah,” Stiles agreed, closing his eyes and taking a deep breath to center himself, letting his hands move of their own volition. This wasn't something he could memorize, and it wasn’t a recipe to be read and followed exactly. It was a tingle in his fingers, and he just had to listen.

So he did, and it was easy. Easy to settle into the familiar rhythm of his work, to pinch a few ingredients from each tin-- just the right amount of oregano, a little of the candied ginger to balance it. And when he was done, he knew in his gut that it was exactly what Sean needed.

After he'd been watching Stiles for a while, Derek said, “You really didn't know about werewolves,” as though he'd finally just accepted that fact. With a slight shake of his head, and sounding more confused than ever, Derek added, "I honestly can't figure you out."

Stiles focused on the steaming cup that he now held, the warmth of it seeping into his hands. It was safer than looking at Derek. "Feeling's mutual."
A deep, empty gnawing grew in Derek's chest as he drove through the overgrown drive of what used to be his childhood home. To see it again, his once majestic house brought to cinders and decay, made his stomach lurch. His gaze slipped to Stiles, watching his eyes trace over ruins, haunting in the misty dawn light.

All Derek's youthful mistakes were laid bare and he grit his teeth against the humiliation.

It was safe and secluded though, and the basement had a cage and manacles that he was pretty sure had survived the fire. It was the only place he knew of to bide some time with a wendigo, at least until they could figure out what the hell to do with the kid.

Derek parked the car a little ways from what had once been the front drive, close to the secret tunnel entrance to the basement. The stone tunnel had held up better than the rotting wood of the house, and he figured this would be the safer way in.

They made a grim procession, Derek keeping a tight hold on Sean’s shoulders, pushing him ahead in little jerky shoves as they made their way through the tunnels. Stiles was a fidgeting presence following behind them, alternately falling behind as he examined the moss covered concrete walls, and then jogging quickly to catch up to Derek’s side. What he was looking at, Derek had no idea.

When they finally reached it, the basement smelled of burnt wood, rat dropping and cat piss. At least there was a draft coming from somewhere, a welcome upgrade from the stale air of the tunnel, making it somewhat more bearable; the medicinal tang of the tea Stiles held wafted on the current, mixing oddly with the charcoal and rot scents that were prevalent around them.

Derek refused to uncuff Sean until he was locked in the cage they’d used to learn control in, during first full moon transformations. Stiles silently watched Derek double check the lock and test the sturdiness of the bars like he was deferring to Derek's expertise.

When he was done, Derek turned to Stiles. "Stand back," he said, before reaching through the bars to remove the handcuffs.

Sean glowered at him, rubbing his wrist. His face was pale, damp with sweat and tears. "Can I have the tea now?" he asked, sounding more like a snarky teenager than a killer. His eyes flashed silver.

"Yeah, man." Stiles stepped forward, heedless of his own safety, before Derek could offer to make the exchange. Sean reached through the bars, but only grabbed the cup.

He muttered a quiet, "Thank you," and curled in on himself in a filthy ash-covered corner of the cell.

Stiles’ eyes never left Sean as he emptied the cup, gulping the now cooled tea. Derek itched to move, to get Stiles away from the predator, but it was important to know he’d finished the drink. Besides, he doubted he could convince Stiles to leave until it was done anyway.

Stiles gnawed at his thumb nail, like he was half-worried he'd made something poisonous and then handed it to a child. Derek couldn't find the words to reassure him, so they stood there watching, and watching longer, until Sean finally dropped the empty cup.
He blinked at them and nodded. Beside Derek, Stiles let out a deep exhale and in the next moment, Sean let his exhaustion overtake him. Face buried in the crook of his arm, he passed out on the filthy basement floor.

"What are we going to do with him," Stiles asked softly, keeping his eyes trained on their sleeping charge. "We can’t just keep him in here forever and I..." Stiles trailed off, “I mean, making tea for him every day is fine in theory, but I miss a day and he, what? Eats someone? That's more responsibility than I'm capable of. I can barely remember to feed my cat some days."

"No. This isn't on you, Stiles." Derek checked his phone. It was almost five AM. "There are support houses; people who help supernaturals when they have no one to turn to." He tugged on the door to the cage, testing the lock again, just in case. "Let's go upstairs. I’m not getting service down here."

Stiles following him up the rickety stairs to the main floor, muttering nervously the entire way as the wood creaked and groaned beneath their weight. "Who ya gonna call?" he asked when they finally made it upstairs in one piece.

"Ghostbusters," Derek snarked, and then he grimaced, offering Stiles a sheepish, "Sorry."

Stiles let out a startled laugh and shook his head. "Dude, it’s all good. You’ve got jokes, who knew?"

Derek shot a grin over his shoulder and caught Stiles' smile. The mood lightened for the first time in hours, and the tightness in his chest loosened a little as Stiles bumped his shoulder.

Dusting off a spot on what used to be a bay window he placed his phone down on a ledge that gave him the best reception. He dialed Laura and hit speaker.

Stiles eyebrows rose in question, but the tinny ringing coming from his phone had stopped and it would be easier to let Laura explain, anyway.

Laura answered with a growl that implied her alarm wasn’t scheduled to go off for another hour. "Please tell me you didn't have another back alley hook up. It's only been twelve hours since your last crisis, Derek." And Derek regretted everything in his life that had led to this point.

"Laura! he barked over Stiles', "Oh my God."

"Is Stiles there? Put him on!"

Derek looked at Stiles, and it was obvious by his red face that he was wondering what Derek had told her.

"You're on speaker, Laura."

After a maniacal laugh, Laura said, "Even better. Stiles, if you hurt my little bro, I'll tear your throat--"

"Laura, enough! We don't have time for this. We have an actual situation here that needs your professional opinion."

There was a momentary pause, and then a sigh. “What have you gotten yourself into, then?”

“Wendigo. He's trying to fight his instincts, and he's looking for support.”
"Hmm. What trouble is he in?"

"He attacked the sheriff."

"Father in law, hmm?"

"Could you be professional. Please."

She cleared her throat, and when she spoke again, he knew it was Laura, the supernatural social worker speaking.

"Will there be any legal charges we'll need to make disappear?"

"He killed a couple of people, but…” Derek trailed off. “I’m pretty sure we can pin the charges on someone else.”

"Dead?"

Derek was quiet for a moment, before answering. “Yeah.”

Laura made a thoughtful noise. "I'll talk Stilinski through how best to report it,” she said. “How old is this wendigo? Will we need to start a school transfer process?"

Stiles had perked up at the mention of his last name, though it was clear he knew Laura was referring to his father. "What's going on?" Stiles mouthed at Derek, who ignored him to reply to Laura.

“High school age. I’m guessing he’s new to the shift.”

"So, underage. He might only have felt the pull to feed in the last few months,” Laura said thoughtfully. "London House should be able to take him on, but I’ll have to make some calls. We don’t get a lot of wendigos, much less underage wendigos. Do you have any word on the rest of his family?"

“Nothing that I know of, right now. I’m pretty sure it was his father that I…” Derek trailed off.

Laura’s “hmm” told him that he probably didn’t need to finish his sentence, anyway.

“I think I can make it happen,” Laura said around a yawn. Derek could hear her drawing her curtains. “And our staff have worked with enough vamps that hunger management and alternate food supplies are pretty much mainstream adjustment strategies, even if we’ll have to alter them a little in this case.”

As he and Laura talked, Stiles paced nearby. He kept giving Derek curious looks, like he was desperate to ask questions, but was trying to not be obnoxious about it. Finally his curiosity won out, though, because he suddenly stepped closer to Derek’s phone and piped up, "So what exactly is London House, again?"

“Halfway house,” Derek answered curtly.

“My dear brother is oversimplifying things,” Laura said, her eye roll obvious by the tone of her voice. “More specifically, it’s a halfway house for supernatural creatures. We help them through rough times, or, as needed, we can work with them to make sure they aren’t a danger to humans. London House is a good place.”

Laura barked a laugh. “I like you, Stiles,” she said, and then added thoughtfully, “Warren Zevon’s a little obvious. I always figured they were going for more of the White Fang vibe.”


Derek rolled his eyes, but he couldn’t help the surge of affection he felt for Stiles in that moment. But more than that, it also felt oddly right for Stiles and Laura to get along so easily. Stiles always seemed to fit neatly into the corners of Derek's life; it was Derek who fought it tooth and nail. His reasoning didn't seem to hold water at the moment, fears and insecurities forgotten at the pleased smile on Stiles face as he looked back at Derek.

"We'll need to get him to New York, if he's willing to move," Laura said, oblivious to the intimacy of the look being shared on the other end of the phone. "There's only Eichen House on the West Coast and you don't want him anywhere near that place."

“Eichen house?” Stiles asked.

“Let’s just say they have a different philosophy when it comes to the treatment of their patients. London House will actually help your baby wendigo with coping strategies, not just lock him in a cell and call it a day. This is a good thing Stiles.”

“We trust you,” Derek said, relieved when Stiles nodded his agreement.

“Good. OK, I'll call Alan to arrange the transfer. But after I get some coffee. Really Derek, did we have to do this at such an ungodly hour of the morning?”

“It’s even earlier here,” Derek snarked back to empty air and a blank phone screen. He grimaced and gave Stiles a chagrined look. "Sorry, she's not a morning person."

"But she is a werewolf, right? Like you? Because no offense, but I feel like I'm living in a horror movie here. Have there always been werewolves in Beacon Hills?"

Derek lifted his eyebrows in reply, lips pressed tight. He raised his hand to show off the ruins of what was once his family's kitchen. "Look around you, Stiles.” He didn't bother to hide the bitterness in his tone. "This was where my family, my pack lived."

Derek watched Stiles’ face closely as he processed the words. His brow furrowed and then the tension eased and his eyes widened as he took in the blackened wood, the broken windows, the melted plastic of a barbie doll only feet from where they stood. "Shit. What happened?"

"Hunters."

"Hunters… like, werewolf hunters? Jesus." Stiles went sheet-white and he clamped a hand over his mouth. "Derek Hale. I remember when this fire happened. God, you were just kids. I'd forgotten until right now, I'm sorry."

Derek shrugged. "It's been sixteen years. People move on and forget." He let the I don't go unsaid. Stiles would understand, he thought; the sheriff was a widower. "But now you understand why I reacted that way in your apartment."

"Um." Stiles face flowed through a complicated series of expressions in rapid order, settling on wide-eyed, open-mouthed outrage. "What?"
"Your door."

"My. Door," Stiles repeated, like he was waiting for Derek to finish his sentence. But Derek had nothing else to add. "Okay, buddy. In a day full of unbelievably crazy shit being said, you just topped the list. My door."

"Stiles, look, I get that you might not realize exactly how your magic, or your muse or whatever works, and maybe you honestly didn't know I was a werewolf before now. But how do you accidentally have a mountain ash door? Accidentally magically place an impenetrable, werewolf-proof seal around it."

“Mountain ash? Dude, I don’t know what that is. If you’re talking about my weird ass front door? I’ve been complaining about that since I moved in. Because it was already there. Before I moved in. As in, it’s not mine. Capisce?"

Derek stared at him, listening as much to the words as to the steady, if slightly outraged, pounding of Stiles’ heart. “I can tell you aren’t lying.”

Stiles made a disgusted noise, and turned his back, stalking a couple of steps away from Derek. “Your werewolfy superpowers tell you that?"

"Yes. They also told me that, for whatever reason, you protected your apartment from me that night! You sealed it with magic so I couldn't even knock when I wanted to apologize for being an idiot about you being the sheriff’s son," Derek ranted. "And you used the same method that the hunters used to trap my entire family in this house."

"It’s just a stupid door! I'll get Deaton to change it. I had no idea it was somehow related to--" Stiles stopped and waved his hand around at rubble "This. Whatever. To your traumatic life, to werewolves… that I didn't know existed until a couple hours ago."

"Deaton?"

"That's who I sublet from, Scott's boss."

"Shit. I--" Derek cleared his throat, his cheeks burning as he tried to process the implication of his misunderstanding. "I might owe you an apology and an explanation. Remember that night...

They stayed silent as dawn approached, each processing the reveals of the last few hours. Stiles was curled up on the window seat, one knee drawn up to his chest as Derek paced nearby.

Stiles hadn't looked at Derek since he'd finished his explanation, confusion radiating off of him in waves. The scent of his emotions settled bitterly on Derek’s tongue and in his nose, reminding him of the tea Stiles had made for him a few days ago that he’d wanted to spit out.

Derek didn't engage him, giving him space to think, although he kept expecting Stiles to lash out. God knew, Derek deserved it. He’d been such an ass.

So he was only a little surprised when Stiles finally did speak. “You freaked out, I get that.” Stiles said, speaking slowly. He turned to look at Derek, focusing on him. “But not scared of me, right?"

Derek met his gaze, even though it almost physically hurt to do so. He understood what Stiles was really asking. Knew that he’d reached a point where he couldn’t make anymore excuses.

“The truth is,” Derek started. He stopped and licked his lips, but made sure that he continued to
hold Stiles’ gaze. He wanted Stiles to understand that he was being as honest as he knew how to be. “I was scared of how much I liked you. The stupid door? It brought me back to bad times, and it made it easy to rationalize why I couldn’t have a relationship.”

He paused, considering his words and looking absently around him. The sun had risen enough that rays of light were just beginning to creep through the missing wall of the dining room, brightening the whole first floor until every death soaked secret was in plain view.

"The last time I let myself trust anyone…” Derek motioned around him, to the ruins of his old life. “I’ve never let myself trust anyone like that again. I thought that, if I made the choice to hurt us both, at least it was my choice. Better to get it over with before you could.”

Derek’s stomach roiled. He was laying everything out before Stiles, and it hurt in the best way. He felt lighter and more liberated than he had in a long time, innocent and stripped bare like he hadn’t known since his family died.

He realized now that he did trust Stiles. Seeing him in the shell of his family’s house brought that home to him in a rather striking way. Kate had destroyed everything he’d ever loved, literally torn his life down to the studs, but here Stiles was helping Derek to build a life. Helping him save a life. The contrast was striking now that Derek actually let himself see it.

Stiles slowly slid to his feet, walking toward Derek as if he was approaching a wild animal. “Thank you. Thanks for being honest with me.”

“I owe you that much. I get it if you don’t forgive me.”

Stiles tilted his head, and there was a tenderness in his eyes that Derek hadn’t seen since that night in the bar. “Not gonna lie, you were a dick, but--” red flushed into Stiles’ cheeks, and he shuffled his feet. “So am I. Apparently, that kind of does it for me.”

Derek smiled tentatively, hope brightening in his heart even as sunlight slowly filled the room, no longer highlighting all the darkest corners but bathing everything in the warm golds of a new morning.

The moment was broken when Derek’s phone started to ring, and they startled away from each other. “Shit,” Derek cursed. He lunged for the phone, swiping at the screen to answer it without picking it up, afraid of and losing service if he moved it.

"Sheriff?” he answered, reading the display, focusing on the phone with an intensity that meant he didn’t have to look at Stiles.

"Hale, you all sorted there?"

"We have the kid contained. He’s not a danger to anyone at the moment. I called Laura and she’s making arrangements to have Sean transferred to the supernatural halfway house where she works. They’ll be able to help him.”

“Good. I’ll be honest, I was worried. We can’t just put him in the system. I’d like to think I’ve got a pretty good imagination, but even I can’t imagine all the ways that could go wrong.”

“Yeah,” Derek said. “She’s contacting Alan Deaton to make arrangements on this end,” Derek gave Stiles a long look as he spoke, already knowing the reaction his words were going to get. “He’s got the experience and connections to take care of this. Make sure Sean gets to New York without any issues.”
"Deaton," Stiles blurted, like an accusation. "Dad, did you hear that?"

"Hello, Stiles."

"Deaton, as in, the guy I’m subletting my apartment from," Stiles continued, as if his dad hadn’t spoke, “Was there something you wanted to tell me about our home town veterinarian? Or do I have to hear all the important information about Beacon Hills from our very own local werewolf? Jesus, Dad.”

Derek was embarrassed to realize Stiles' snarky little shit voice really did it for him.

The sheriff made a noncommittal noise. “I didn't want to drag you into all this stuff, kid. I was just trying to protect you.”

Stiles stammered to find his words. “What the hell? So you knew about freakin' werewolves and didn't tell me?”

“Son, I don't think now's the time.”

Stiles made a frustrated noise and glared at the phone, then at Derek, and back to the phone. "We're not done with this conversation."

"Fine." The sheriff sighed, but went on as though Stiles hadn't just scolded him like a five year old. "Derek?"

The sheriff saying his name was like drawing a spotlight on him, and Stiles whirled to point a finger at him.

“And you! Don’t think you’re off the hook either.”

The sheriff chuckled weakly. “Sorry, Derek. If it makes you feel better, this is how my son shows his affection.”

Stiles spluttered, even as Derek felt his face flame. Thankfully Stiles refused to dignify his dad’s words with a response.

“But back to business, I sent a squad car to Sean’s house, but the place has been cleared out. Not sure how they knew so fast. If they know Sean's still alive, or care-- well, I can't say. It looks like they cleared out of town, but just in case they come looking, you stay alert.”

"I will," and then after a thoughtful pause, Derek added, “It’s possible they felt when I killed the father. I don't know enough about wendigo or their pack structure to be sure though."

"I'll ask Alan to update us on what he knows about these things.”

"You need to be resting, Dad!"

"Don't worry about me, Stiles. Doc refused to sign off on my escape, so I’ll be in this hospital bed for a couple more days. I'm just making phone calls, I promise. We need to get this kid in the hands of people who can help, and get him away from my town."

"When you get out, you're taking a week off. A week. At least."

The sheriff snorted, but Derek was sure he'd comply. "Keep my son safe, Deputy."

"Of course."
At the echoed sound of clanging, Derek's head snapped up from where he'd been resting against one of the sturdier sections of wall. "Our Forest Killer is done with his nap."

"Don't call him that," Stiles said, jabbing the heel of his hands in his eyes. He'd fallen asleep about ten minutes after they'd gotten off the phone with the sheriff. Derek had kept watch. "He's just a kid."

Derek got up, dusting off his pants even though the ash was just smearing into his jeans. "I still have your dad's blood caked to my shirt from that kid."

"I haven't forgotten, okay? But he's trying to fight it." Grunting, Stiles stood, taking a moment to lean against the wall and shake blood flow back into his legs.

"He's scared. I get that." Derek headed towards the stairs, knowing Stiles would follow. "I wouldn't have called Laura if I didn't think he could beat this eventually, but that doesn't mean he's not a murderer. That doesn't go away because he's trying."

Wood creaked threateningly behind him and Derek shot out an arm to catch Stiles just as the stair beneath his feet gave way. Stiles made an aborted little yell that he muffled into Derek's shoulder, both of them just standing there and breathing for a second.

"These stairs are scarier than your sideburns," Stiles joked, voice brittle, when he finally pulled away. "You sure this place is up to code?"

"You mean you think it’s not?" Derek asked sarcastically. He rolled his eyes. "I never would have guessed."

"I should never have laughed at your joke earlier. It went to your head."

Derek smirked at him. "You sure? I thought I was being funny."

"Oh my God, why do I like you? You're such an ass."

"Yeah," Derek agreed. He desperately wanted to comment on Stiles’ use of the present tense. He’d said 'why do I like you,’ like the possibility of something between them was still on the table. The thought made Derek’s heart pound and his palms sweaty with anticipation. Maybe… just maybe he hadn’t ruined things to the point of no return after all.

They made their way the rest of the way into the basement without issue, although Derek was careful to stick close to Stiles just in case.

When they reached the basement again, they found Sean awake and standing at the door to the cage, hands white-knuckled as they gripped on the bars.

"We think we've got a place that'll take you in. Help you out," Stiles said.

"Just me?" Sean's frowned, looking anxiously between Derek and Stiles. "What about my family?"

Stiles took a step closer to the bars, shaking off the hand Derek put out to hold him back. "I'm so sorry, Sean. My dad sent people to your house but..."

"They're gone, aren’t they?" Sean asked, stumbling back a couple of steps when Stiles nodded. He coughed wetly and then turned away, wiping his eyes. "Of course they are. Of course," he repeated to himself like a broken mantra. He rocked himself with quiet sobs, looking barely old enough to
drive, let alone to be a murderer.

Stiles caught Derek’s eye, his expression grim, and Derek felt a pang of guilt. He wished they could have softened the blow.

Looking away from him, Stiles started to take a step toward Sean, but Derek stopped him with a hand on his shoulder and a shake of his head. He’d made a promise to the sheriff, and he wouldn't let his guard down for a few tears. Broken teenagers were dangerous beasts.

He would know.

Stiles pursed his lips and pulled away from Derek’s touch. He didn’t try to move any closer to the cage though.

"Can you tell us about the murders?" Derek asked, turning his attention back to Sean. Even if they could pin everything on the boy’s father, it would still be helpful to have as many details as possible.

Sean sniffed, wiping his nose on his torn and bloody shirt. "There's a ritual. When you come of age," he began, his voice trembling over every word.

"On my birthday, my dad took down this guy who was out walking his dog. He wanted something easy. We, together, you know. Ate. But Karen. That was all me."

"The second girl, the runner?"

Sean nodded, his lips pressed white. "Yeah, Karen. I didn't want to. I knew her." He faced the wall as he spoke, unable to meet their eyes. "She was in my Chem class. But my family knew I was fighting my instincts, and they said it might help if she was… running, you know?" Sean doubled over and gagged with the memory. "I woke and there was so much blood."

Derek's stomach lurched in sympathy, and he pressed his lips together. It was different for werewolves, of course, but he understood what it was like to lose himself to his instincts, to the blood lust and the animal; the pull of the moon was something he never stopped feeling.

"But the ritual, it's like-- the first kill triggers our blood lust. I was barely able to hold it together until I went to your cafe and instead of giving me coffee, you handed me--" He shook his head. "I don't even know what was in the cup. But I drank it."

"It helped?" Derek offered.

"It's still there." Sean knuckled another tear away from his eyes. "The blood lust… It's part of me. I'm still a… beast. The tea helps me control it though. At least as long as I don't miss a day. I missed the day before Karen. And then a couple nights ago, I was out training for a track meet with Tommy, and I hadn't had the tea. When he started running-- I couldn't resist."

"We'll get you help, Sean," Derek said with conviction. Stiles caught Derek’s eyes and smiled at him, an acknowledgement of using the kid's name finally. There was something like approval in his look.

Before he could say anything else, Derek looked to the ceiling, head tilting in order to better hear the purr of a car engine. “Someone's coming.”

Stiles tensed, and jerked his head up to look toward the ceiling as well. “Who is it?” he asked, shifting nervously. They both looked down and focused their attention on each other almost
simultaneously, like they’d choreographed it, their gazes meeting with a heat that fizzled down Derek’s spine.

Derek had to force himself to look away, and he shrugged noncommittally. He suspected it was probably just Deaton though, and he placed a hand on Stiles’ wrist. He meant the gesture to be calming, but if anything it was a mistake that caused his low grade arousal to flare even brighter.

He coughed and schooled his expression back into something he hoped came somewhere close to “back to business.”

“You know, that’s the reason I drew that grumpy face on your cup that first day at the shop.”

“What?” Derek automatically brought a hand to his face. It drew a little laugh out of Stiles, who turned toward him. He was standing just outside the boundary of what might be considered intimate, but even with that small distance between them, the sheer physical presence of him was almost overwhelming.

Stiles brought a hand up to Derek’s face, hesitating for a moment before gently knocking Derek’s hand away. When Derek held his ground and didn’t immediately jerk back, Stiles smoothed a long thumb over Derek’s eyebrows, smiling softly as he did it.

It took Derek’s breath away; he found himself taking that small half step forward, closing the distance so that only a hair’s breadth remained between them.

Stiles visibly swallowed and his head tilted to the side, angling just so. His hand was now fully cupping Derek’s face, and it would take nothing at all for one of them to lean forward and just...

“Ahem.”

Derek jerked back, the moment broken, to see Deaton standing at the entrance to the tunnels. He was his normal placid self, seemingly completely oblivious to the moment he’d just interrupted.

“Derek. Mr. Stilinski,” he acknowledged.

“Alan,” Derek said, voice sounding suspiciously hoarse even to his own ears. For his part, Stiles was currently looking anywhere but at Derek. His cheeks were stained red, and his long fingers, fingers that had so recently been cupping Derek's face, were tangled in the hem of his plaid shirt.

Deaton smiled and approached Derek, offering him a solid handshake, the contact breaking Derek the rest of the way out of the spell that had fallen over him and Stiles.

“Your sister is quite the spitfire, isn’t she?” Deaton said conversationally, “She takes after your mother that way, I suppose.”

Derek allowed a small smile. “She’s a good alpha,” Derek acknowledged. “And she’s very good at her job.”

“Thankfully for you, so am I.” Deaton turned his attention to Sean. He’d come to the front of the cage again, and was clutching the bars. He refused to meet Derek’s eyes, obviously embarrassed at having witnessed the intimate moment between him and Stiles.

He peered back at Deaton curiously, though. “Who are you?”

“You can call me Dr. Deaton.”
“And you can help me?”

“Well, I’m just a vet. I can, however, get you to people capable of giving you the help you need”

Sean frowned, and then his face hardened in obvious determination and he nodded. “I think I’d like that.”

Chapter End Notes

Hey everyone! We really hope you are loving this story as much as we’ve enjoyed writing it! However, we wanted to pop in with a quick note that we will be posting the last chapter next Friday. We want to make sure we do right by this story, and by you, our wonderful and faithful readers! So you can plan to look out for our last and final update June 19 (and no new chapter on Tuesday).
Chapter 12

The sound of hospital gurneys had to be among the ten worst sounds in the world. The rattle of the wheels as nurses whipped patients through the halls, like it was some sort of deadly game of Mario Kart, always felt urgent and terrifying to Stiles. He knew better than most how that game could end.

He gnawed his thumb as he watched another gurney trundle by him, a white, wrinkled hand jostling over the side. Stiles looked away and checked his phone for the third time in the last last five minutes.

He really hated hospitals.

Thankfully he was distracted by a familiar face peeking around the corner of the waiting room. Scott’s face disappeared a second later, and was replaced by a disembodied arm holding out a grease stained bag of food.

“I come bearing gifts,” Scott said, still hiding around the corner.

Stiles snatched the bag, fighting a chuckle. “Oh my God, I love you.” He opened the bag and inhaled the unique salty-grease aroma of Mel's Diner's Hungry-man combo.

Cautiously stepping into the waiting room, Scott said, “I know how you get when you’re hungry, dude. I’m not taking any chances on losing a hand.”

Stiles rolled his eyes and munched aggressively on one of the curly fries. The string of fried and battered potato was so long that the end of it still resided in its cup inside the bag.

"So, how's your dad? I mean, what the hell even happened?" Scott asked, flopping into the chair next to Stiles.

"Haven't you talked to your mom? We had a mountain lion hunting in the preserve. Dad bumped into it when he was patrolling.” Stiles bit into his burger to avoid his face giving anything further away. "He’ll be okay. Nothing a few weeks of bed rest can’t cure."

He'd been trying not to think too much about the length of the recovery. His dad did not make a good patient.

Scott nodded, but his attention was focused on Stiles’ open-mouthed display, and he didn’t ask any more questions. Even if he got more curious, Stiles figured that at least Deaton would back up his story.

"Mom said she's been checking in on him."

"I'm pretty sure that means slipping him packs of M&M's. I keep finding the wrappers in the trash," Stiles said, but his ire was muted by his yawn. "I'll be glad when he's home. It's been a couple days longer than they expected. He doesn't heal like he used to. They said today for sure. But that was six hours ago."

Scott nodded, and patted him on the shoulder. “That’s good. But I’m worried about you too, buddy. When was the last time you slept?"

"Last night. For about…” Stiles grimaced and ducked his head when Scott gave him his patented
‘I’m preparing to not believe whatever comes out of your mouth next’ look. “Three hours,” Stiles admitted.

It wasn’t for lack of trying, but, nightmares of Derek not getting to his dad on time has been haunting him since they’d sent Sean off with Deaton.

"Stiles."

Waving off Scott's concern, Stiles nodded. "I know, I know. I'm just here to drive Dad home, then I'll crash too. I promise. Probably gonna stay at his place though, at least for a few days."

“You mean, until you piss each other off and he kicks you out?” Scott suggested.

Stiles grinned. “Probably.”

“Dude, I know you,” Scott nudged their shoulders together, then held out his hand and coaxed Stiles into reluctantly completing the secret handshake they’d come up with when they were six. It did the job of making Stiles laugh a little though. “Anything I can do to help?”

“You’d be my best friend if you’d go and check on Gimpy for me. I put out plenty of food for him this morning, but I’m not sure when I’ll be able to leave my dad to get back there.”

“Sure. I can swing by on my way home. You know I love that little guy.”

“Thanks, seriously.”

Scott leaned across the arm of his chair to give Stiles a side-hug. "I know how hard this is for you."

"Yeah. But he’ll be okay," Stiles said, reaching for another fry out of the bag. He'd missed lunch. Actually, he couldn't remember the last time he'd eaten. His head had been in such a fog. "You're the best. And this?" Stiles rattled the bag of food. "This was perfect. Thanks for coming to my rescue."

"Honestly, I figured maybe you'd call in your new deputy for food delivery."

"Derek and I... aren't even the same species. A hysterical giggle bubbled up inside him. "We're complicated.

Scott's nose scrunched up. "That sucks. Thought you guys would work out." He thought a moment, then he smirked. "Actually, I thought you guys might hook up right on the pool table that night."

Stiles groaned and covered his eyes in belated embarrassment. "I might've thought about it." He might still be thinking about it, honestly. Derek was preternaturally good at sex. He supposed it went with being unfairly attractive and drawn to the moon once a month.

He'd once dated a guy who would use a glass, then put it back in the cupboard without washing it; Derek's furry problem needed to be taken in perspective, Stiles figured.

"So you two? It's not happening?"

"Ah, I really don't know. Everything’s so crazy right now with my dad. I haven't had time to deal with whatever is going on with me and Derek."

Scott gave him a considering look. "When this is all over, you think you might call him?"
"I dunno, he kinda he makes me crazy."

Scott snorted. "Am I a bad friend if I say that he sounds perfect for you?"

“Oh, dude, I think that earns you probation at least."

“I think I can handle that. Especially because…” Scott jerked his head, forcing Stiles’ attention down the hall where Derek was just stepping around the corner. Stiles didn’t think he’d spotted them yet, but he was proved wrong when Derek immediately looked up, catching his eyes.

Derek’s gaze, like that rainy day back at the station, was intense. Unlike that day, it lacked that cold dismissal, and instead was cautiously warm.

Scott nudged him, drawing Stiles’ attention back. Scott stood, looking down at Stiles with a faux serious expression on his face. He leaned forward and, like he was imparting some ancient wisdom, he dramatically whispered, “When opportunity knocks, grab the bull by both horns.” He flicked a look over to Derek. "Or the balls."

"Oh my God, what?” Stiles caught Derek’s gaze again, this time fleetingly, before Derek looked away and instead looked extremely interested in his phone. Stiles realized with horror that Derek had probably heard Scott’s advice.

Scott just winked, and in a normal voice said, “I’ll just go check on Gimpy, then. Let me know if I can help with anything else. Tell your dad I hope he feels better.”

“I’ll tell him. And, um, thanks, I think.”

“Dude. You’re my brother. You know I’ll always be there for you. Even if that means kicking you in the ass when you need it.”

“Um, did everyone in my life get that same memo?”

“Oh, shut it. You wouldn’t want us any other way. Also--” Scott looked thoughtfully down the hall. “I’m pretty sure there’s a reason Derek fits in with us so well.”

“That’s what scares me,” Stiles muttered to Scott’s retreating back.

Stiles watched as Scott headed towards the exit. He stopped when he reached Derek’s side, chatting with him for a minute. At one point, they both turned to look back at Stiles, and he pretended not to notice, immediately turning away from them even though he had a feeling it was probably an exercise in futility. After a few seconds, Stiles peeked over his shoulder anyway, just in time to see Scott disappearing around the corner and Derek resuming his trek toward him.

The few seconds it took for Derek to reach the waiting area felt interminable, and Stiles had to fight not to fidget with restless anxiety. He wasn’t sure where to look, if he should watch Derek walking toward him, or not. The truth was, when it came down to it, it was almost impossible to look away. Derek looked mouth wateringly good just about all the time, but the way his uniform fit him, the air of professionalism that he exuded? It did things to Stiles.

If anyone had asked him a few months ago if he’d ever find a police uniform attractive, he’d have resolutely denied it. Police uniforms were something his dad wore. Apparently, Derek was the exception to that rule, though. Derek was the exception for him in a lot of ways.

“Hey,” Derek said when he was still a few steps away.
“Hey,” Stiles said back, fiddling with the hem of his shirt. He figured they’d reached their quota of direct and meaningful eye contact for the day. “Scott didn’t, um…"

“He’s a good friend,” Derek interrupted. “He cares about you.”

“Yeah, I know. I’m lucky to have him.” Scott had a bad habit of not buying Stiles’ BS, much less letting Stiles buy his own BS. Scott had always done a good job of balancing him out that way.

They stood there awkwardly for a few minutes, neither of them knowing what else to say. The potential between them felt like it was just out of reach, and even if they were both willing to try again, Stiles had no idea how to salvage it, how to cross that chasm.

“So, uh, what are you doing here?”

Derek looked a little panicked at the question, like he wasn’t expecting to have to justify his presence. He shrugged and looked at his boots. “Just got off shift and I wanted to check on your dad.” As an afterthought, he waved a crisp white rectangle, the words ‘Sheriff Stilinski,’ written in fancy and outrageously loopy letters on the outside. “Brought this too. Everyone at the station signed it.”

“That’s, uh, cool.” Stiles stared at the envelope somehow caught on the pretty lettering, wondering if it was Derek's writing. He'd never seen it before. "He’ll appreciate it.”

Derek looked down at his boots again. “Yeah.”

They stood there like that for another interminable minute, but were thankfully saved from any more awkward moments by a nurse approaching Stiles. It wasn’t Melissa, although she looked vaguely familiar, her bleach blond hair swept up into a high ponytail. Her nametag said 'Amelia', with a heart dotting the i, and Stiles figured she was probably one of the younger nurses that Melissa always seemed to be complaining about.

“The doctor just finished with your dad, honey. His paperwork is all taken care of and he’s free to go. We’ve got a wheel chair waiting for him as soon as you're ready to take him.”

“Thanks.”

She smiled a little too brightly, and her attention shifted to Derek, who was eyeing her nametag a little too intensely. She flushed under the attention, and reached up to tuck a fly away lock of hair behind her ear. "Nice of you to come see the sheriff, deputy.”

Stiles narrowed his eyes and shifted closer to Derek, hating the girl’s flirty tone. Amelia needed to learn to focus on her job, and he found himself agreeing with Melissa's annoyance at young, easily distracted nurses. It took a conscious force of will not to lay a hand on Derek. He caught the movement as soon as he realized what he was doing, and he took a deliberate step in the opposite direction.

He was startled when Derek closed the distance between them anyway. Speaking directly into Stiles' ear, Derek whispered, “Come on.”

Stiles shuddered despite himself then flicked a glance back at Amelia and asked, “Sure you don't want to stay behind?”

Derek flashed him one of his devastating smiles that was all teeth. It went straight to Stiles’ dick,
as did the husky way that Derek said, not hesitating for even a second, "I'm sure."

Derek pressed a warm hand into the small of Stiles’ back and ushered him forward. The touch was hot, even through the layers he was wearing, and Stiles couldn’t help but wonder, fleetingly, if it should have been intimidating being so close to Derek. Especially considering that Stiles now knew first-hand the way Derek’s teeth could lengthen into deadly fangs.

He wasn’t, though. Maybe he was crazy, but he just couldn’t find it in himself to be frightened. Jealous? Sure. Turned on? Absolutely. But not scared.

It was actually kind of a revelation, the way that, if anything, Derek’s touch made him feel safe.

It was so easy to just give in and let Derek lead him toward his dad’s room. He looked back at the nurse, who was looking back and forth between them, her over-plucked eyebrows furrowed in disappointment. He grinned and waved.

They made their way like that to his dad’s private room. Derek stepped away from him to rap on the door frame, but Stiles didn’t wait for any sort of reply before shouldering past him into the room.

His dad was sitting on the side of the bed wearing a pair of loose fitting sweatpants cut off at the knee, and an old Sheriff’s Station t-shirt that did little to hide the bulk of the bandages still wound around his torso. He looked up at them and smiled wanly.

“Hey, kiddo. Hale.”

“Sir.”

“So looks like you’re a free man,” Stiles cut in, going to his dad’s side. He looped his arm through his dad’s, helping him to stand up. His left leg was wrapped up at the thigh, the bandages peeking out from beneath the sweats, and Stiles tried to take the brunt of his weight on that side.

“Let’s get you home, old man.”

“About time.”

True to the nurse’s words, a wheelchair was waiting in the corner and Derek dutifully wheeled it around and settled it in front of them.

“Derek, nice of you to come by to help Stiles out with his sick old man,” his dad said, grunting painfully as he lowered himself into the chair.

"Derek came to bring you a card," Stiles blurted, because it was important that he was clear about that-- to his dad and also himself. Letting himself hope for more from Derek felt like a bad idea. It was obvious that Derek was just trying to do the right thing by his boss.

“Right,” Derek agreed, frowning a little and holding out the card in question.

The sheriff took it, not hesitating to pull it out of the envelope. He snorted, and then started outright laughing when he read the inside of it aloud, “‘Sorry about your injury, and that you haven’t thought of a more badass story for it.’” He winced as his laughter started to pull at his stitches. “I wonder if I could get away with actually telling the truth? Not like anyone would believe me.”

He folded the card and slid it back into its envelope. “Tell everyone at the station thanks for me,
Derek.”
“I will.”

“Now, if I don’t see the inside of my own damn house in the next thirty minutes, there’s going to be hell to pay. Get me home, Stiles.”

“Cry me a river, old man,” Stiles teased. He walked around his dad’s wheelchair and there was a little bit of a scuffle as Stiles attempted to take control of the chair away from Derek.

Derek conceded to him and stepped back, holding his hands up in surrender. “I guess I’ll just…”

“Yeah,” Stiles interrupted him.

The sheriff half turned around in the wheelchair, looking back and forth between them before exaggeratedly rolling his eyes. He mumbled something to himself that Stiles couldn’t make out, although the words “obnoxious” and “stubborn”, possibly also “idiots”, might have been in there somewhere.

“How about you pop by for dinner tomorrow night, Derek? As a thank you for saving my life.”

"I--" Derek looked at him and Stiles shrugged, but that was mostly because he knew how useless it was to argue with his dad when he got that look in his eyes. "That's really not necessary.”

"Stiles will cook something special. Won't you, Stiles?"

Stiles pressed his lips tight, but he nodded. "You should come." He cleared his throat, ignoring his dad's snort. "Over. Come over. For dinner. Yup. It'll be… fun.”

"I imagine it will be,” his dad muttered to no one in particular.

Stiles bent close to whisper, "I'm going to wheel you down the stairs if you aren’t careful." He stood, smiling broadly at a shell-shocked Derek. "Around six work for you?"

Stiles spent the next afternoon cooking.

His dad, on the other hand, lay propped up on the couch in the living room, laughing at him as he ran around. He was terrified that he'd screw something up. That Derek would judge him. Or wouldn’t like what he made. Or…

Oh God, this was why he didn’t cook for people besides his dad.

"Dad, you know you're making it very difficult for me to be glad you're alive."

"Uh huh. If you say so,” his dad said, sounding amused. “Oh, and Stiles? Be sure to change your shirt. That one's got tomato sauce on the collar.”

"You shouldn’t be laughing that hard. You'll rip out your stitches!” Stiles yelled as he tore up the stairs to find something clean.

Stiles stared into his closet. "Shit, Derek's hot as the sun and all I have in my childhood closet is plaid."

He sniffed the green button up he'd once been told brought out his eyes; it smelled like it'd been hanging in his closet for three years. But it was that or smelling like dinner, so he started to strip.
The doorbell rang just as he started back down the stairs, and his dad hollered, "Stiles! Your boyfriend's here. Get the door!"

"He can probably hear you, you know," Stiles yelled back. Face hot, he opened the door to Derek fighting a grin.

"Friggin' werewolves," Stiles muttered.

"I don't think supernatural hearing is necessary. Your windows are all open."

"Shit." Stiles huffed. He recollected himself, plastering on a grin. "Welcome to Chez Stilinski."

"Thank you," Derek said, formally. He was dressed... not at all like he stolen his clothes from his childhood closet. His dress shirt was a stunning wine colour, perfectly fitted to hug his broad shoulders. The top two buttons were undone, softening the look and taking him from overdressed to just the right level of being both respectful and relaxed.

The peak of chest hair that was revealed from the opened buttons was just the right touch to drag Stiles’ brain right down into the gutter.

Derek thrust a bottle of whiskey forward, and his voice was a little hoarse when he said, "For your dad."

Stiles took the bottle, cradling it carefully to his chest as he motioned Derek inside. "Don't mind the mess." Stiles tried not to let himself feel embarrassed as he kicked an empty bag from the pharmacy out of the middle of the hall as he led Derek through the house.

"It's fine."

"It's been a rough couple of days," Stiles explained, feeling his frazzled nerves come back in full force.

"Stiles," Derek’s hand brushed the small of Stiles' back as they entered the living room. “It's fine, really."

The touch inexplicably calmed him, and Stiles felt some of the tension bleed out of his shoulders. They approached Stiles' dad, who was watching them with interest. More specifically, he was eyeing the bottle of whiskey that Stiles was holding.

“Derek brought you a present. Although, no touching until after you’re off all your pain meds. Sorry.” Stiles waggled the bottle, and then motioned toward the kitchen. “I’ll just put this up here. For later.”

His dad frowned, but looked resigned. Stiles just barely heard his, “Thanks anyway, Derek,” as he set the whiskey down on the kitchen island.

He did manage to return in time to more clearly make out Derek’s response of, “No problem. It was nice of you have me over, sir.”

Stiles stopped at the sight of Derek shaking his dad’s hand, and he stayed back by the door, not wanting to interrupt them.

"It’s good to finally see you outside of work,” his dad said.

"Pretty sure I haven’t had time to see much of anyone outside of work since I got into town."
Stiles had to fight the knee jerk thought that that wasn’t true, his mind immediately going to that night in the bar. But the more he thought about it, he realized that Derek probably hadn’t had the opportunity to do much in town except for work. At least as far as Stiles knew or could tell. He hadn’t heard anything about Derek having any friends, besides Parrish. And that night aside, Stiles was also startled to realize that this was only the second time he’d ever seen Derek in something other than a uniform.

“Son,” his dad said, speaking to Derek. “Let an old man give you some advice. Work is all well and good, but don’t forget that there are other important things in life, too. You’re a hard worker, and don’t get me wrong, I appreciate that. But I get the feeling that you do it because you feel like you owe it to… Hell, I don’t even know. You’re a good man, Hale, but you don’t owe anyone anything. You deserve to be happy.”

The change in Derek’s demeanor caused a lump to rise in Stiles’ throat, and he had to fight not to go to him. He didn’t, but only because this was obviously a moment between Derek and his dad, and Stiles could respect that.

His dad’s face softened into a look that Stiles was more accustomed to seeing directed at him. Surprisingly, he didn’t begrudge Derek that affection from his dad.

He backed slowly out of the room and returned to the kitchen to finish cooking.

"You made this?" Derek asked, pulling in his chair and waiting with a nervous politeness while Stiles helped his dad to the table.

"Yes?" Stiles said, turning it into a question, and raised a forkful of Manicotti to his mouth. When Derek continued to look skeptical, Stiles shoveled a massive bite into his mouth, as if to prove it was safe.

Derek looked like he couldn’t decide if he was fascinated or horrified, his eyebrows migrating a solid inch up his forehead.

His dad cleared his throat, taking a much more appropriately sized first bite. "Stiles had to learn to cook early if he wanted me to eat anything that didn't come from a paper bag or cardboard box.”

Derek nodded and took a tentative bite, then closed his eyes as he savoured his first taste. He nodded appreciatively. "It's really good"

"Thanks." Stiles flashed Derek a proud smile. "I can't bake a cake worth a shit, but I can make an orgasmic Spinach Manicotti." His grin morphed into a smirk as Derek choked on the next mouthful.

Stiles’ dad slapped his face into his palm. "Kid, you’re a menace."

Probably out of fear of what else might come out of Stiles' mouth, his dad steered the conversation for the rest of the dinner. He asked Derek about Laura and their life in New York. Stiles was surprised to realize that Derek had majored in English Literature, of all things, before he’d decided that he couldn’t do much of anything with that degree and started to look into law enforcement.

It seemed to make things easier that they all knew the truth about the fire and the supernatural. Derek was the most animated that Stiles had ever seen him.

It was nice.
Domestic, even.

Derek was deferential to his dad, but the dinner conversation wasn't stifled by it. Stiles interjected here and there, but mostly found himself listening to the two men talk about things he couldn't relate to. On the one hand, he appreciated the mutual respect that was obvious in every word. On the other, Stiles felt left out. He didn’t have that foundation with Derek, and if anything, the conversation flowing around him just drove home how little he actually knew Derek Hale.

It was humbling. And it stung.

When the plates were empty, Stiles dutifully got up, stacking them so that he could take them to the sink. He couldn't deny that the chance to distance himself a little from Derek was also appealing, even if the sink was only a few feet away from the table.

When he turned back around he was surprised to find his dad had gotten up from the table unaided. He was, in fact, halfway across the kitchen, heading back toward the living room.

Stiles lurched toward him, but was brought up by his dad holding up a hand to halt him.

“No, no. I'm fine. I'm pretty sure I can make it to the couch without a nursemaid,” he said, sounding equally fond and exasperated. And okay, Stiles might have overdone his mother hen routine since his dad got home from the hospital, but he couldn't help it.

His dad’s expression grew serious, and he looked between Stiles and Derek. "Now, I'll have the game on nice and loud. I don't want you two to leave this damn kitchen until you've talked. Properly."

“Dad, no, you don't have to...” But his dad ignored him, limping slowly into the living room without a backwards glance.

Stiles stood there, hesitating between going back to the dishes, which had the added benefit of giving him something to do with his hands, or sitting back down at the table.

Derek was equally hesitant, sitting stiffly on the edge of his chair and looking a little like he might bolt out the door the second he thought he could get away with it.

Stiles sighed and flopped back into his chair. He looked at Derek from beneath his lashes, waiting for Derek to speak first. Or for inspiration to strike. Or something. The air seemed to sizzle between them, full of possibilities that felt just out of reach-- at least it was an improvement over the rift that had existed between them only days before.

“I don’t know what to say,” Derek admitted. “I want…”

“What do you want, Derek?” Stiles leaned forward. He knew his words sounded taunting and sarcastic, and he shook his head in frustration at himself. That wasn’t what he meant at all, but he’d gotten so used to the antagonism and the tension, the almost, but not quite moments between them, that it was making him crazy. His head was a mess.

“I want you,” Derek admitted. His expression was anything but closed off in that moment, everything plain to see. It felt like an act of bravery. Or the last gasp of a dying man, determined that, if he was going to go out, he was going to do it with a bang. “You make me crazy. You’re all I can think about.”
“What about my dad?” Stiles blurted, before he could think about it.

“I don’t-- your dad?” Derek’s brows were furrowed, and he looked a little confused.

Stiles gestured around them, to the whiskey bottle still sitting on the kitchen island where Stiles had deposited it. He motioned toward the living room, from which Stiles could just make out the distinct but muffled sounds of a baseball game. “All this was for my dad, Derek. Not for me...”

Derek let out a sharp laugh, cutting off Stiles’ words. And then he rose from his chair, drawn to Stiles with all the force and inevitability of a magnet.

While Stiles was technically sitting at the table, he wasn’t pulled up to it. He was facing more into the kitchen, and his chair was far enough away from the table that when Derek stalked toward him, he had plenty of room to stand between Stiles’ splayed legs and the table.

Derek boxed him in, leaning over him in a way that might have been menacing, except for the way that his eyes were soft and adoring, his movements plenty slow enough for Stiles to escape if he'd wanted to.

Stiles still yelped, a startled sound that was mostly covered up by the scrape of his chair as it slid a couple of inches backwards over linoleum.

“Derek,” he rasped.

“I respect your dad, Stiles. But…” Derek leaned forward, his face hovering a bare inch over Stiles’ throat. Stiles tilted his head to the side without thinking about it, trembling and wanting Derek to close that last little space. Equally fearing what would happen if he did. “God. Didn’t you hear what he said to me? There’s more to life than work.”

Derek pulled back abruptly, stumbling away and turning his back on Stiles. He ran a hand through his hair, mussing the soft black strands of it in a way that Stiles couldn’t help but find irresistibly attractive.

“Saving Sean? Your dad. Helping people in general? It felt-- it feels good,” Derek said, turning away to not look at him. “But all of that… the thing is, you are the one who made me feel like maybe I could do something more with my life than be a victim. It wasn’t my job. Not your dad. You.”

Stiles got up from his chair. His knees felt a little weak, but he somehow made it to Derek. He placed a hand on Derek’s shoulder, feeling the warm muscles beneath his hand flex as Derek obviously struggled with himself. He finally turned back around then, and Stiles swallowed at how close they were to each other. At how he didn’t care.

At how even that small distance felt like too much.

“But it was also your dad who just told me that I have a right to be happy. If that wasn’t permission to...” Derek reached out, his hand hovering in the space between them. “I don’t know what is.”

Stiles leaned forward, bumping his cheek into Derek’s raised hand, nuzzling into the palm, before stepping away. It almost hurt to do, but Stiles knew how easy it would be to lose himself if Derek was touching him.

“You're a werewolf.”

Derek froze, and immediately started to pull away, stopping only when Stiles reached out to
physically restrain him. They both knew that Derek could still pull away if he really wanted to, but he let himself be restrained by no more than the curl of Stiles’ fingers around his wrist.

“I don’t mean that in a bad way. Just that, it would have always been this secret between us. A part of you that— tell me the truth, would have you have ever told me about it?”

“I don’t know,” Derek admitted like it hurt to get the words out.

“Yeah, see. That’s a problem. I feel like I learned more about you tonight than I have in the entire time I’ve known you. I mean, I knew you were from New York, and I knew you loved your sister, but that was *it*, Derek.

Derek shook his head, not willing to take all the blame. "What about you using magic to make perfect coffees for your customers?"

“So maybe,” Stiles said thoughtfully, “Maybe it was good that things happened like they did. Now we can both go into this with eyes wide open.”

“Yeah,” Derek agreed.

“My point, though, is that… Maybe we should try taking things slow this time?”

Derek’s smile was relieved and almost blinding. “Does that mean you’re willing to try again?”

“If you are?”

Hesitating, Derek asked, “Does slow mean that I can’t kiss you, then?”

“If I let you kiss me now, you might think I’m easy.”

“Time out!” A third voice interrupted from the doorway. Stiles groaned, and leaned forward, resting his forehead on Derek’s chest, gently knocking it against the sturdy wall of muscle a couple of times.

“Dad, really?” His words were muffled into the the soft fabric of Derek’s shirt. He turned his face to the side to see his dad trying to make a ‘T’ with his hands while holding an empty glass.  

“What? I was just… Time to take my meds. But then I’ll...” He filled his glass with water and grabbed his packet of pills, then he slunk, at least as much as his leg allowed, back out of the kitchen. But not before flashing a very *unsuitable* wink and thumbs up at them.

“Sorry,” Stiles said, looking up at Derek. He paused, gulping when he took in how Derek was looking at him. Soft and fond. “Okay. I lied, I’m totally okay with you thinking I’m easy.”

That startled a laugh out of Derek, who swooped in like he was afraid of Stiles changing his mind. Which he did.

Stiles pulled back, arching his body away from Derek at the last second. “But first, you have to promise me no more totally undeserved tickets.”

Derek rolled his eyes, his lips quirking into a wicked smile. “Don’t pretend that didn’t turn you on.” And then, before Stiles could protest any more, he wrapped a warm hand around the back of Stiles’ head, tugging him back into Derek’s orbit. The kiss was sweet, chaste, a bare press of lips that caused Stiles’ heart to stutter in his chest.
It was perfect.

Stiles’ lips were still tingling when he dragged Derek to the front door by their intertwined hands. He felt like he was high-- from the kiss, from the promise of a date the next evening.

“See you tomorrow?” Derek asked, pulling Stiles back in for one last kiss right there on the threshold. The door was open and the night air was cool and welcome against Stiles’ skin.

“Yeah,” Stiles agreed breathlessly. He shoved Derek away, laughing. “Now get out of here, mutt.”

“Dog jokes? Really, Stiles?”

“Me and my dog jokes, it's a package deal.”

Derek groaned, and made a show of considering the situation. He shook his head, at last. “Worth it,” he decided, and then louder, he called out to the living room. “Have a good evening, Sheriff.”

“Night, son,” his dad called back. Derek waved, and backed up, like he couldn’t quite stand the thought of turning his back on Stiles. Like he wanted to memorize everything about him. It made Stiles flush at the speculation, at the promise, in his eyes.

Just as Stiles finally made the decision to close the door, his dad piped up one more time. “And welcome to the family.”
Stiles yawned and groaned, batting uselessly at his alarm for a couple of seconds before he finally managed to knock it off his nightstand, successfully turning it off by default. Also probably breaking it in the process.

He groaned again.

The night before was costing him; his entire body ached.

With significant effort, he convinced himself to roll out of his warm, soft bed. He looked back at the rumpled nest he’d just left. His lips quirked. Some of his drowsiness evaporated as he appreciated the scene.

He had never really considered himself to be one of those people who were constantly taking and posting pictures of their cats. But wow, his cat was really freakin’ adorable.

He swiped his phone from his nightstand, sparing a grateful thought that it hadn’t gone the way of his alarm clock, and snapped a quick picture.

He smiled softly to himself at the result.

Gimpy, seemingly realizing he was the subject of Stiles’ scrutiny, opened one eye, gave him an unimpressed look, and then he made a content little noise and he curled more comfortably against his makeshift pillow.

Stiles shook his head and tiptoed to the bathroom to get ready for work.

“Seriously, Laura?”

“Rise and shine, Derek! What’s uuuup?” She paused. “Wait! Don’t answer that. I just realized that you are probably still in bed and I probably really don’t want to know.”

Derek rolled his eyes and shifted to his side, bringing one arm up to block out the light that was just starting to stream in through the bedroom window.

There was a disgruntled noise from his bedmate at the movement, but Derek resolutely ignored it as he forced himself to get up. It was only a few minutes before his alarm went off anyway.

That didn’t mean he had to be happy with the literal wake up call. “Is there a reason you had to call and wake me up, Laura?” Behind him, a sleepy cat settled in the warm spot he’d just left.

“Just wanted to call and check on you. Also, our computers are down right now and I’m bored.”

“So, you figured you’d call and harass me at the crack of dawn?”

“It’s not like you were at work yet. You don’t get to bitch.”

“No, you’re right, I was just sleeping.”
“Psha, whatever, you’ll get over it. At least I know that the only thing you’re sharing a bed with is that ugly rescue you call a cat.”

“I thought you were all about rescuing hopeless cases,” Derek snarked at her. “Speaking of, how’s Sean?” He prepared himself for her enthusiasm; Laura had developed something of a soft spot for their baby wendigo. Asking about him always got an animated response from her.

It had the added benefit of distracting her from asking about his life.

“Good! We’re trying to taper him off the tea that Stiles has been sending us. Working more on control. He’s really trying though, Derek. Hardly hopeless! I think he might just be one of our biggest successes. Boss is talking about having me put his picture up on the website and everything!”

“You guys have a website?”

Laura made that little huff of sound that she always made when she thought he was being particularly stupid. “It’s not like we live in this century or anything. Of course we do.”

“Right, well. Glad he’s doing well. I’ll make sure to let the sheriff know. I’m sure he’ll be pleased to hear it.”

Laura hummed.

They talked for a few more minutes after that, before Derek finally managed to convince her that he really had to hang up or else he’d be late for work.

“Fine, I get it. Go arrest all the bad guys. You can call me later.”

Derek’s sarcastic, ‘Maybe’ trailed off when he realized that he was talking to dead air.

Stiles hummed to himself, dancing a little as he worked, carefully scraping the last of the cookies off of the baking sheet. They were still warm, and the rich smell of chocolately awesomeness filled the kitchen.

It was a far cry from his days of burning everything. Actually, he hadn’t burned anything at all, not for weeks. Stiles couldn’t help the little private smile as he thought about why that was.

He’d found his muse, apparently.

He looked up when Erica reached over and snagged one of the cookies off the decorative plate that they would set out on the counter in order to sell them.

“Hey!” Stiles slapped at the air with his spatula, trying to ward her off.

Erica stuck her tongue out at him and hopped up on the prep table, munching happily on her cookie. “If someone had told me a year ago that you’d manage to actually bake something, much less something good enough that we could sell it, I’d have called them crazy.”

“Your faith in me is flattering, as always.”

Erica shrugged, and licked the last of the chocolate off her fingers.
“First, I'm going to have to re-sterilize my prep table. Second, shouldn’t you be out there watching the counter?”

“We'll hear the chime on the door if someone comes in.” There was an unusual tension to her voice, and Stiles watched her nails nervously drumming the stainless steel top. "That new rookie will be here any…” His eyes widened, and he crowed out a laugh when she blushed. "Oh!"

“Don’t start!” She warned.

Just then, the chime that indicated a new customer entering the shop reached their ears. Erica tensed, her eyes pleading.

“Oh my God. Fine, I’ll go deal with our handsome new rookie. But don’t think this is the end of this,” Stiles warned. “Payback’s a bitch.”

“You wouldn’t!”

“I don’t need to. Jordan already invited Deputy Boyd out for drinks tonight. And Vernon asked if you'd be there.”

“But--”

Stiles shook his head, and the leaned forward to kiss her on the cheek. “If he can’t see how awesome you are, I’ll have my dad fire him.”

“You’d do that?”

Stiles snorted. “Nope. But I’m pretty sure it’s not gonna be necessary anyway. He’s into you. I can tell.”

The sound of someone clearing their throat drew Stiles away from her and out into the main shop. He figured he owed her this much after forcing his cute cat pic on her this morning, and if she wanted to hide, he’d let her. For now.

The empty shop smelled like coffee, chocolate chip cookies and exotic herbs.

It smelled like Stiles.

Derek paused just inside the door and breathed deeply, steadying himself and fighting the way his fangs itched behind his gums. He hadn’t been responsible for the morning coffee run since Boyd had been hired, and it felt weird to be here now.

Derek checked the time on his phone, and realized he was going to be late. He cleared his throat loudly.

Finally, the door to the back swung open, blurring a cloud of flour and a chocolate-scented Stiles. The familiar forest green Henley that Stiles was wearing did striking things to his eyes, and Derek couldn’t help but notice that the apron he was wearing over it did little to hide the way the shirt was just this side of too large.

There was a dusting of flour right in the crook of his neck, where it met his shoulder, and it highlighted the edges of what looked to be a fresh love bite. Derek had to force himself not to stare at it.

Stiles paused, staring at him in surprise. “You’re not Boyd.”
“Not Boyd,” Derek confirmed, raising an unimpressed eyebrow.

Stiles blushed. “Right. Well, I’ll just…” Stiles hooked a finger over his shoulder, indicating Rowena. He did take a second to kick the door to the kitchen open though, and yell back at Erica. “It’s safe, it’s just Derek.”

She said something back that Derek chose to ignore, and continued to not make an appearance, leaving Stiles to manage the work by himself. Not that he seemed to mind.

It only took Stiles a few minutes to get the station’s order together by himself, his movements quick and competent. “So how’d you get saddled with the coffee run, this morning?”

Derek shrugged. ”We got a lead on the missing persons case and your dad wanted Boyd on it right away. He called this morning and asked if I’d fill in here.” It had only been about five minutes after hanging up with Laura that he’d called, in fact. So it was just as well he’d already been up and moving.

“Ah,” Stiles said, loading the last of the orders and getting everything rung up.

“Thanks,” Derek said.

“No problem.” Stiles smiled tentatively at him. “Want me to get the door for you?”

“That’d be great.” It was all Derek could do not to shiver when he slid past Stiles, the heat and scent of him overwhelming.

Stiles’, 'Have a good day, deputy,' didn’t help either, the words sounding a whole lot like something else entirely, something that made Derek’s chest warm.

“You too,” he murmured back, and then it was all he could do to focus on not spilling his precious cargo as he walked the couple of blocks to the station.

He was just setting the box down in the break room when his phone chimed with an incoming text message.

He thumbed his lock screen and stared at the picture. He realized absently that he was smiling so wide that it hurt. He probably looked like a besotted fool, but he honestly didn’t care.

The picture was of him, fast asleep. His face looked soft and relaxed in the early pre-dawn light. The blankets were slung low over his naked hips, making the picture something intimate and private.

The best part, though, was the cat curled adorably on his chest. Gimpy had finally decided that Derek wasn’t actually a threat after all, and more than that, was his favorite pillow. It was a problem. One that Derek was more than happy to have. The creature was ugly as fuck. And he’d wormed his way into Derek’s heart just about as thoroughly as Stiles had.

His phone chimed again as he was looking at the picture. This time there were words.

'Sorry about the shirt btw. Forgot to do laundry. Had to borrow one of yours.'

Derek thought of the way the dark green color made Stiles' eyes glow golden. He texted back, his thumbs flying over the screen as he glanced over his shoulder to make sure no one was watching him use his phone. 'you can make it up to me later.'
John yawned loudly as he made his way into the break room. Because coffee.

He stopped in the doorway though, when he noticed Derek standing there smiling like a loon.

Derek startled when he noticed him, his face flaming. He rushed to turn his phone off and put it back in his pocket.

“Hale,” John said, fighting a smile when Derek stood there looking like the cat that had caught the canary. John decided that he didn’t want to know what had gotten Derek so flustered, and he waved a dismissive hand at him, chuckling when Derek fled the break room with little more than a grateful nod and a muttered, “Morning, sir.”

John stared after him. He shook his head, stifled another yawn, and then beelined to the box of heavenly smelling coffee, sorting through it for the one with his name on it. Or something close to it. One never knew, when it came to Stiles.

He found another order first. He pulled the cup out, staring at it, and then he rolled his eyes, setting the cup down on the counter before diving back in.

He finally found his own order, and then both cups in hand, headed back out the door.

He nonchalantly set the cup on the edge of Derek’s desk as he walked past, not bothering to look back and see the other man’s reaction.

He didn’t need to, honestly.

The fact that this time the ‘I love you’ was written didn’t really matter. It was no different from the time he’d accidentally witnessed Stiles kissing the words into Derek’s mouth after a date. Or the time he was pretty sure Derek had only said them to shut Stiles up mid argument-- not that that made the words any less true.

“Kids these days,” John lamented, taking a first sip and humming contentedly at the taste of a perfect cup of coffee.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you so much to our readers. We didn't get a chance to reply to each and every comment, but every one of them was appreciated. You helped us more than you can possibly know as we worked through posting this fic. <3

And a final thank you to venis who tirelessly beta read our edited and re-edited chapters every step of the way.

End Notes

You can find Maggie on tumblr at marguerite26 and jsea on Twitter at @jsea215
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!